Chapter 1

Virtue and Practical Reasoning

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

I. Introduction: How Should One Live?

"How should one live?" This question is central to neo-Aristotelian writers such as Bernard Williams, John McDowell, and others.

If any assertion should be uncontroversial, it is this: some people are not living how they should; some of the members of our race are fools. (I leave it to the reader to supply illustrations.) If there are ways one *definitely should not live*, then there is at least a minimally necessary way or set of ways one *should* live. Even if it is difficult to answer the question of how one should live, we should not be fully skeptical that there is an answer (or a set of answers).

As a matter of fact, everyone is living in a particular way. I shall assume throughout that most people learn to live in a particular way from their family of origin, and that most people attempt to live more or less to satisfy their desires and inclinations. Even so, asking "how should one live" implies that one is at an age of reflection, where one realizes somehow that there is more than one way of life, and that perhaps there is a better way than one's own. A normal human life includes such realizations. Perhaps a crisis makes one realize that *something is wrong*. Perhaps a new opportunity invites one to consider that *some other way might be better*. Everyone who is conscious, rational, and practically reasonable is pursuing some ends as worthwhile, and avoiding some ends as worthless or dangerous. The question "how should one live?" therefore assumes a division – or at least a distinction – between the way one *is in fact* living and the way *one might live*.

What kind of answer will satisfy the "how to live?" question. It calls for a *practical* answer. Recall Jay Wallace's general definition: "Practical reason is the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do."[1] If a child asks "How do I unscrew the jar?", he or she is asking for an instruction, a plan, a guide. A plan for living is useless if it is a purely theoretical assertion ("three and three makes six"). Likewise, a practical answer should not be impossible to enact ("live in such a way as to do no harm"), nor vague ("help the world"), nor incomprehensible ("live, love, laugh"). Instead, a good answer – or a set of good answers – will invoke *practical reasons to live this way rather than that.* There must be some general conception of a good life and its opposite which becomes for us a reason to live the way we do. How do people come to a judgment of what bad lives are, and what the good lives are (or what one of the good lives is)? The answer can only be through practically reasoning.

My account of human nature and human virtue has thus far depended quite a bit on

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

intuitive notions about the nature of practical reasoning. Without being more clear on the very notion of practical reason, one cannot understand any of what the neo-Aristotelians are up to. According to neo-Aristotelians such as MacIntyre, McDowell, and Foot, there can be no adequate theory of ethics without a theory of practical rationality. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to provide at least an outline of such an account.

If successful, I shall be lending support to age-old view that practical wisdom is a special virtue in that it is the one clearly non-optional virtue. Everyone has an obligation to become practically wise, regardless of circumstances, social roles, aptitudes, cultures, and so on. In virtue of being practical, rational primate, one must become practically wise. Practical wisdom, in turn, enables the acquisition of other virtues. According to the argument of the last chapter, virtues are traits that enable one to live a distinctly human life, and that partly constitute that life. Hence, this chapter also makes good on the assertion that the concepts of human nature, natural teleology, and moral virtue cannot be disentangled. Human nature is to be practical reasoning animals, human virtue is excellent practical reasoning, and the telos or end of humans is minimally to become practically wise. On my view, the practically wise person has what Wallace calls a "map of the normative landscape"$; that is, the intention and knowledge needed to pursue the truly worthwhile and avoid the truly worthless.

The challenges to thinking that successful practical reasoning is essential to virtue are threefold.

Reason, Practice and Motivation: The first challenge comes from non-cognitivism (especially expressivism), which is motivated in turn by metaphysical naturalism.[2] Is practical reasoning really "rational"? And if so, is it really *practical*? It seems to be either one or the other. In other words, the worry is that practical reasons by themselves can't motivate us

2. A related challenge that also is motivated by naturalistic concerns is an objection to normative realism about practical reasons. I postpone that objection until chapter 6.

to act (without complementary psychological attitudes such as desires), while motivations to act cannot be rationally evaluated as true or false.

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

Verdictive, Overriding Reasons: A third challenge is a familiar distinction between "moral reasons" on the one hand and "prudential reasons" on the other, where moral reasons are overriding, other-regarding reasons. If practical reasoning is a process of identifying or inventing what is advisable or ill-advised (but not ultimately binding), then how does this process relate to an appropriate sensitivity to what is morally permissible or impermissible (which is ultimately binding)?

Section 2 breaks ground on this complicated topic by exploring part of John McDowell's essay *Virtue and Reason*. I provide a qualified defense of McDowell's thesis that moral virtue is a form of practical knowledge that includes an initial, perceptual sensitivity to what practical responses a situation requires.

Section 3 highlights an ambiguity in McDowell's account that confuses the genus (practical reasons in general) with the species (one type of practical reasons, namely "moral" reasons), and hence confuses virtue in general with practical wisdom in particular. I attempt to remedy McDowell's account by getting clear on what practical reasoning is.

Section 4 reprises the argument that human beings are practical reasoning animals by placing our distinctive activity in context of the general inclination of all living things to their own life and health. In this light, practical reasoning is necessarily substantive reasoning about ends, rather than a merely instrumental one about means, because in order to have any reasons at all one must have a first principle of practical reason, namely, a general

evaluative conception of what is to be pursued and hence how to live. By this definition, practical reasons can and do motivate (by themselves). Hence, practical reasoning is both practical and reasonable by definition.

Section 5 gives a bit of historical context on the familiar frame that distinguishes moral from non-moral reasons and defends the older Greek frame. Although no one has copyright on these terms, I contrast the concept of 'practical reasoning' with two other concepts: theoretical or demonstrative reasoning and moral reasoning. Practical reasoning includes *any* evaluation of reasons to φ or not to φ. Prior to Mill such used to be called 'moral reasoning'. By contrast, many think of 'moral reasons' as only those that pertain to the needs and rights of others; I name these 'second-personal' practical reasons to distinguish them from 'first-' and 'third-personal' practical reasons.

Section 6 returns to the challenges listed above and meets them. I also respond to the objection that this neo-Aristotelian account of practical reason defines away immorality. My response is that this account places vice and immorality in clearer relief as practical mistakes arising from evaluative mistakes.

II. McDowell on Virtue as Practical Knowledge

John McDowell's *Virtue and Reason* argues, among other things, that virtue is a particular kind of practical knowledge. Practical reasoning is both a rational process and also an initial, perceptual sensitivity that makes visible to us practical reasons. Even though he allows that practical reasons are ultimately intersubjective features of our social world, he argues that they are no more and no less objective than theoretical reasons. In this section, I trace his discussion in some detail, including his statements of various objections and responses to them.

What kind of knowledge is virtue, according to McDowell? "Virtue-knowledge" is

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

To see why it makes sense to conceive of virtue as practical knowledge, take a platitudinous value such as kindness. Suppose kindness is really a virtue. What does it mean to predicate kindness of someone? It doesn't or shouldn't mean that they simply acted kindly once or twice. It doesn't mean that a person acted kindly on accident or by pure luck. Instead, to justify the ascription of *the virtue of kindness* would seem to require that a person "has a reliable sensitivity to a certain sort of requirement which situations impose on behavior" and such "deliverances of a reliable sensitivity are cases of knowledge."[3] McDowell is gesturing toward three or four plausible criteria for the ascription of a virtue: reliability, sensitivity, practical knowledge, and intentional behavior. *Reliability* means the kind person must be *regularly* or *habitually* disposed to kind thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; *sensitivity* means that the kind person demonstrates a perceptual sensitivity to the fact that a friend is in need, a child is sad, an elderly parent is lonely; *practical knowledge* means the kind person knows what to do in such situations; and *intentional behavior* means that the person correctly feels the imposition to avoid cruel and indifferent behavior and to act on what the situation requires.

The kind of knowledge where one is sensitivity to reasons for behavior is at least necessary for virtue. But is it sufficient? McDowell offers two answers. The first answer is that the virtuous person's behavior is exhaustively explained by their virtue. When the kind person sees that a situation requires kindness, "requirement imposed by the situation" must

3. John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 332.

"exhaust his reason for acting as he does."[4] An interest in some mercenary reward would disqualify the action as a example of kindness. The kind person's behavior in particular is explained by just the fact that it is kind. By this reasoning, the virtuous person's behavior *in general* is explained by just the fact that it is virtuous. The kind person's behavior arises from a response to the salient facts he is sensitive to; the virtuous person's behavior, then, arises from a general sensitivity to what situations require. He concludes:

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

One clarification that will bring McDowell to some grief is this: the question of what to do is not usually simply a question of what is kind. Rather, the question of what to do is often a question of what is advisable all things considered. There are many reasons for action, and sometimes there is no single, obviously overriding, reason. McDowell concedes the point. He illustrates it with the example of a parent who is overly indulgent to child out of kindness. Certainly, the parent is sensitive to what kindness requires but not *sensitive enough* to fairness or to considerations of the child's health, and so on. Hence, the virtuous person is sensitive to a whole range of reasons, some of which might be competing or conflicting. The "single complex sensitivity" that constitutes "a moral outlook" seems to require a meta-cognitive capacity to reflect upon the various requirements imposed by a situation, to rank and order them, and act accordingly. This seems right to me, but McDowell does not mind calling this "single complex sensitivity" by the name of "virtue" even when it includes considerations that do not seem intuitively moral at all, such as prudential considerations. I

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

shall try to explain below why he makes this subtle mistake. In brief, my alternative is that the single complex sensitivity he is describing is practical wisdom as a whole.

For now, McDowell brings up two objections to his own account thus far. Both of these objections are liable to be leveled by expressivist or non-cognitivist critics.

A view familiarly attributed to Hume says that practical reasons cannot motivate, at least not by themselves.[6] If this were so, moral reasons could not satisfy the "practical requirement." Moral reasons could not be actionable.

Expressivists are among the chief contemporary proponents of this view. Indeed, the very motivation for expressivism, in large part, is the need to satisfy the *practical* dimension of practical reason (at the cost of the "rational" part). Jay Wallace explains:

> Expressivism in this form suggests a naturalistic interpretation of practical reason, one that may seem appropriate to the enlightened commitments of the modern scientific world view. It is naturalistic metaphysically, insofar as it makes no commitment to the objective existence in the world of such allegedly questionable entities as values, norms, or reasons for action.[7]

On this familiar view, "cognition and volition are distinct." Practical reasoners do not simply enjoy a "single complex sensitivity" to what situations require; they also need the presence of a conative mental state (such as a desire, interest, or attraction) as well.[8] The cognitive state provides the judgment of the object as desirable, while the conative state provides the movement toward the object. If the conative or volitional or motivational aspect of one's practice is distinct from the cognitive or intellectual or rational aspect, then how can

6. He says: "Reason is the discovery of truth and falsehood."

7. Wallace, "Practical Reason."

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

there even a unitive activity such as practical reasoning? The very notion of practical reason seems to be a paradox.

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

II.1. Is Practical Reasoning Practical*?*

The objection regarding the practicality requirement for virtue-knowledge from the expressivist or non-cognitivist is this: one is aware that one's friend is in trouble and that the friend is able to be comforted (the cognitive bit) and a desire (or motivation or inclination or settled passion) for helping one's friends (the non-cognitive bit). The expressivist would say that surely these two *together* – and neither in isolation – explains the behavior. For suppose that two persons in the same situation are equipped with identical perceptual capacities and so sensitive to the same range of reasons for action, but only one of them does the right thing. If such a supposed situation were to obtain, it would disconfirm McDowell's conclusion.

McDowell's criticism of expressivism is this: in order to even notice the salient facts (that one's friend is in trouble) one must already be sensitive to a particular range of requirements for action. The difference between the vicious and virtuous person lies not just in their desires and reactions to what they notice about the world but *in the noticing itself*.[9] The morally calloused does not notice the fact that his or her actions are causing others pain. Better, the morally calloused person does not notice it *as a morally salient* fact.

This response from McDowell is not conclusive, but it is a good start. It highlights, but does not alleviate, the deep disagreement between the Humean and the Aristotelian

9. Margaret Olivia Little, "Seeing and Caring: The Role of Affect in Feminist Moral Epistemology," *Hypatia* 10, no. 3 (1995): 117–37.

camps. It is true that if two people are identically sensitive to a morally salient fact but act differently that virtue cannot simply be that sensitivity. But one person's *modus ponens* is another's *modus tollens.* So if virtue is to be identified with a single complex sensitivity, then a supposed situation in which two persons perceive a situation and its practical requirements identically but act differently cannot obtain.[10] Is there anyway to bridge the divide without begging the question in either direction? McDowell suggests we look to Aristotle.

Aristotle allowed that "appreciation of what [a virtuous person] observes is clouded, or unfocused, by the impact of a desire to do otherwise."[11] The break between the sensitivity to reasons (which is virtue) and a resultant wrong action occurs in the case of interference from psychological factors such as desires and a "distortion in one's appreciation" of the relevant reasons.[12]

This Aristotelian reply is plausible but also not conclusive. McDowell discusses one further move from Donald Davidson. Davidson argues that a person might fail to perform the resultant right action *even without such interfering factors.* McDowell concedes. But Davidson's move changes the subject slightly, from virtue to continence. For Aristotle, continence (or self-control) is not a virtue. Continence is is comparatively better than incontinence but not as good as virtue. If I can only do the right thing by gritting my teeth and bearing it, well, I am still on the way to virtue.

The continent person is able to perform the right action because he recognizes it as right, *despite* countervailing pressures (from desires, say) to do the wrong action. Since a fully developed virtue by definition includes having the proper motivation as well, continence is only needed in the absence of a fully developed virtue. Put differently, the virtuous person is not just one who "balances" reasons to φ against countervailing reasons to π. The virtuous person is the one for whom simply identifying a reason ("in this situation, courage

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

requires that I run into danger") silences countervailing reasons. The virtuous persons sees the danger (and feels rightly apprehensive) but also sees that courage in the face of this danger is required; the latter perception, according to McDowell, "silences" other pressures.[13] The merely continent person has to "weigh" reasons; the virtuous person fluently *acts* on the best reason.

So the response to Davidson's move is to suggest that when a continent person sees what is to be done but fails to do it (even absent interfering factors), the failure can be explained as a lack of virtue – as a lack of a fully developed sensitivity to what is required. The virtuous person, unlike the continent person, would not have to stop and "weigh". The virtuous person sees what is required and acts.

II.2. Is Practical Reasoning Rational*?*

The second objection above challenged the rational credentials of virtue-knowledge. Pretty clearly, the paradigmatic case of knowledge is theoretical knowledge, i.e., *knowledge that p*. Such knowledge is categorical and propositional, and codifiable into logical systems of necessary relations. McDowell's critic then poses the following argument: knowledge is codifiable. Virtue is a kind of knowledge. Therefore, virtue-knowledge is codifiable. However, virtue-knowledge is practical knowledge or 'knowing-what-to-do', which is not codifiable. Therefore, virtue must not be knowledge.

The error in this objection, McDowell thinks, is not so much a problem with his moral theory but a "deep-rooted prejudice" that rationality is a rule-following procedure. If rationality is a rule-following procedure, then it follows that *either* practical rationality and morality are likewise rule-following procedures *or* that practical rationality and morality is not, ultimately, sufficiently *rational*. Some philosophers (often followers of Hume but not necessarily Hume himself) think that morality is a not rational domain but a domain of sen-

13. Ibid., 335.

timents, desires, commitments, approvals, and so on. Other philosophers (often followers of Kant) think that morality is a rational domain and hence must be a matter of identifying first principles and "applying" them to particular situations. But what they share in common is a belief that "rationality must be explicable in terms of being guided by a formulable universal principle."[14] This common belief McDowell wishes to refute.

McDowell's discussion here (drawing on Wittgenstein and others) is hard to follow. The point seems to be that even apparently obvious cases where the rational thing to do is to follow an objective rule turn out to be cases of a much messier process in which there is no such objective rule by appeal to which we can explain rational thoughts or behaviors. For example, take the objective rule of extending a series of numbers two at a time. Suppose Bob instructs Charlie to "add 2" to a number and continue applying the rule indefinitely. We tend to be confident Charlie will "churn out the appropriate behavior with the sort of reliability which a physical mechanism, say a piece of clockwork, might have." We tend to expect that Charlie will produce "2, 4, 6, 8," etc. McDowell thinks this confidence is based on postulating a "psychological mechanism, underlying his behavior, by an inference analogous to that whereby one might hypothesize a physical structure underlying the observable motions of some inanimate object."[15] The "ground and nature of our confidence" that we will reliably apply rules is not but a common form of life.

The term 'form of life' is a term of art. It is drawn from Wittgenstein (and quoted with approval from Stanley Cavell). The term seems to refer to that difficult-to-define process of acculturation or formation. For example, how do we learn reliably to use words in our native language? And why is it so much harder to attain fluency in a second language, even if we are immersed in it? Likewise, there is no clear mechanistic process that explains

14. ibid., 337. MacIntyre, similarly, denies the assumption that normative ethical rules can be derived from universal ethical principles the way we "apply" universal logical truths to particular logical conclusions via a middle term. Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist* 67, no. 4 (1984): 498–513.

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

how a child learns to make exclamations – such as a pained "ow!" or an excited "ooh!". There is no clear mechanistic process by which we learn when to laugh at jokes or when to cry in pity. Instead of a mechanistic process, McDowell suggests that we children learn such Our shared rationality, McDowell suggests, is not grounded in "external" objective rules but in a shared form of life or what he calls a "congruence of subjectivities."[16]

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

Hence, virtue-knowledge may not be codifiable, but it is still a form of knowledge. A related query is what, if anything, guarantees that the moral person's behavior is intelligibly the same from case to case. If moral knowledge were rational, then it would be consistent from case to case and situation to situation; but if, as McDowell has been arguing, both deductive reasoning and practical reasoning are not rule-following mechanisms, then how do we explain the virtuous person's reliably correct behavior?

His answer invokes Aristotle's notion of a practical syllogism. The 'practical syllogism' takes the following shape:

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

16. Ibid., 339.

3. Therefore, Z would be good to do, desirable, worthwhile, etc.

On the strictly deductive logical model, the role of the major premise is to provide rock solid universal ethical principles from which to derive particular moral duties. McDowell resists this model. On the strictly non-cognitivist model, there are no universal principles but only universal psychological states, such as consistent desires, plans, values, or norms. McDowell also resists this. Instead, the role of the major premise is to articulate a "certain conception of how to live… [namely] the *virtuous person's conception* of the sort of life a human being should lead."[17]

What kind of life should a human being lead? The answer "cannot be definitively written down."[18] Furthermore, "Any attempt to capture it in words will recapitulate the character of the teaching whereby it might be instilled: generalizations will be approximate at best…"[19] If the kind of conception of a good life that the virtuous person has is approximate and non-codifiable, it becomes hard to see why we are bothering with formal syllogistic reasoning at this point. McDowell's response is that understanding virtue-knowledge within a the practical syllogism *does* a good job of providing a plausible explanation of moral motivation (reasons one might act in some way) and moral behavior (reasons one acted that way). To paraphrase McDowell: "Explanations of judgments about what to do are explanations of actions."[20] I can explain your behavior by understanding that you were concerned for your friend's welfare and reached out to help. Likewise, you can explain your decision to help by assuring me that you are concerned for your friend's welfare. For McDowell, the general structure of the practical syllogism is useful. He says "the rationality of virtue… is not demonstrable from an external standpoint."[21]

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17. Ibid., 343. Emphasis added.
18. Ibid., 343.
19. Ibid., 343.
20. Ibid., 342. Verbatim, he says: "The explanations, so far treated as explanations of judgments about what to do, are equally explanations of actions."
21. Ibid., 346.

It is clear upon reflection that this account contains some circularity, for the virtuous person's conception of how to live is itself conditioned by what he called earlier 'the moral outlook.' That conception of how to live, in turn, conditions what particular saliences are noticed (what minor premises) and generates practical conclusions about what is to be done. The upshot of the combination of non-codifiability with a practical syllogistic form is that the virtuous person takes for a rule of life some conception of how to live but that this conception is part of what it means to be a virtuous person – and thus ensues the vertigo.

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

III. A Criticism of McDowell

While I find McDowell's view of virtue and reason illuminating, it leaves something to be desired. My complaint has to do with the relationship between narrowly moral reasons and broader practical reasons – or again between moral reasoning and practical reasoning.

Suppose I have a friend who can pretty well diagnose a car engine by listening to the way it whines or hums or clicks, where all I hear is noise. By McDowell's lights, my friend is sensitive to a range of requirements for action and knows what to do – e.g., oil change, new timing belt, and so on – and so is "virtuous". It strains common sense to call any and all such sensitivities "virtues." Relatedly, he admits that one might need to rank, order, and weigh three different kinds of reasons (kindness, fairness, appropriateness) or ten or fifteen before one resolved what to do. He seems to switch from talking about moral reasons to talking about *any* practical reason without any mention of the switch.

Unfortunately, McDowell falls prey to a habitual way of framing moral discussions that is, I believe, mistaken.

A very familiar way of framing discussions about practical reason is to treat as fundamental a distinction between prudential reasoning and moral reasoning. Prudential reasoning, on this frame, is about what is good and advantageous for oneself. For example, one has good reason to save for retirement, to pursue friends, to avoid driving dangerous roads in the snow, to avoid becoming an alcoholic, and so on. Moral reasoning, on this frame, is about what is good and advantageous for others. For example, there is "good reason" to respect everyone else's autonomy, their property, and to provide for one's children or elderly relatives and to avoid hurting a friend. One side are other-regarding virtues,[22] altruism,[23], benevolence, and conscience.[24] On the other side are self-regarding virtues, egoism, selfishness, and self-love. And ne'er the twain shall meet.

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

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

24. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism," in *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, "Eudaimonia and Practical Rationality," in *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.

This distinction between prudence and morality runs through moral psychology and moral motivation as well. For example, on this frame one is naturally inclined to pursue one's own interests and yet morally constrained to do one's duty to others.

Yet "inclination" is a slippery word. Oddly enough, even writers who accept the familiar frame might be diametrically opposed as to whether one's inclinations, emotions, and sentiments are ultimately selfish and hence whether morality is ultimately rational. Hume associates morality with emotions and prudence with rationality. For Hume, it is "rational" for me to bilk you out of your cash, but my sentiments of guilt and brotherly love prevent me from doing pursuing my self-interest in that way. For Kant, on the other hand, my emotions might incline toward a quick and easy cheat, but the cold, hard rationality of the moral law prevents me from pursuing my self-interest in that way.

Where they agree is that emotion is not rational. Hursthouse explains this aspect of Kant's moral theory:

> And there is indeed much in Kant to suggest that, although he shares with Aristotle the view that we have not just one, but two principles of movement, in other respects his philosophical psychology is Humean. He seems committed to the view that our emotions or inclinations are no part of our rationality. They come from the non-rational, animal side of our nature; if they happen to prompt us to act in accordance with the judgements of reason about what ought to be done we are lucky; if they incline us against them we find life difficult, but their prompting us in the right direction is no mark or indication of their rationality. The emotions are not rational in any way.[25]

Both Kant and Hume in this way contrast with the neo-Aristotelian view according to which emotions can be *made rational* by being brought into harmony with rational practice and successful practical reasoning. Taking responsibility to form and shape one's sentiments is therefore part of the struggle to become virtuous.

The familiar way of framing the distinction between moral and practical reasons also gives rise to two distinct ways of approaching ethics. Is being a moral person the business

25. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 109.

of resisting one's emotional inclinations in favor of what's "rational" or is it the business of following one's emotional inclinations *against* what is "rational"?

A classic article from Edmund Pincoff explains the two different views of ethics: "Quandary ethics" views morality as solving moral dilemmas while "Character ethics" views morality as resolving how to live. Quandary ethics is focused on the short-term resolution of immediate moral problems, either by dissolving moral perplexity or giving some (hopefully rational) basis for a particular decision or course of action. His examples are philosophers such as Hare, Toulon, and Brandt. These think that:

> The business of ethics is to clarify and solve "problems", i.e. situations in which it is difficult to know what one should do; that the ultimate beneficiary of ethical analysis is the person who, in one of these situations, seeks rational ground for the decision he must make; that ethics is therefore primarily concerned to find such grounds, often conceived of as moral rules and the principles from which they can be derived; and that meta-ethics consists in the analysis of the terms, claims, and arguments which come into play in moral disputation, deliberation, and justification in problematic contexts.[26]

By contrast, character ethics (of which I take neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics to be a token) is focused on the long-term goal of living well by executing worthwhile goals in every day life. Aristotle is an example of a Character Ethicist. Aristotle:

> …thought of ethics as a branch of politics, which in turn he thought of as a very wide-ranging subject having to do generally with the planning of human life so that it could be lived as well as possible. Moral problems are given 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.[27]

Kant and Hume disagree about the rationality of morality. They agree on the distinction between moral and prudential reasons where prudential reasons are "practical" but not moral. Hence, they are both what Pincoffs would classify as "Quandary ethicists." They both

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

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

present morality as a kind of crisis strategy. One is free to pursue one's own inclinations and prudent self-interest for as long as one commits no wrong. When life presents no moral dilemmas, moral reasoning is idle. One *must* do one's duty, but beyond that, one may live in any number of ways that accord with one's inclinations: get a good job, save for retirement, eat healthy foods, exercise, make friends, and so on.

Is McDowell a "Quandary" or "character" ethicist? It might seem that he is a character ethicist, however things are not so clear. McDowell's view represents a mixture (indeed, a confusion) of the two types of ethics. Like the character ethicist, he emphasizes the "how should I live?" question and invokes practical knowledge as an important part of the answer. However, like the Quandary ethicist, he represents moral reasons as a special, perhaps overriding, kind of reason pertaining to the rights, obligations, or duties of one individual in relation to others. Even in asking the "how do I live?" question, a Quandary ethicist is likely assuming that the answer will include a set of moral reasons weighed against or in opposition to non-moral reasons (such as prudential reasons). McDowell remains unclear on whether moral reasons are *one type* of practical reason, or whether any practical reason count as a "moral" reason (broadly construed).[28]

IV. Practical Reason as Pursuing the Good

The alternative I would like to defend rejects this familiar frame. What is needed is a fresh re-thinking of the relation between prudential and moral reasoning that shows why not only narrowly moral reasoning but also the broader sort of practical reasoning is *ethically* praiseworthy. Gladly, this re-thinking will reinforce what we have argued above about the natural normativity in the human life form and all organic life. In short, practical reasoning is the ac-

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

tivity that defines human life form. It follows that successful practical reasoning is practical wisdom while unsuccessful practical reasoning is practical folly.

This section builds on the work of Philippa Foot and on Jennifer Frey's recent discussions of Anscombe and Aquinas. On the Aristotelian-Thomistic account, practical reasoning is an end-oriented activity that aims at the perceived good of one's form of life. As Frey stated in the epigraph above, "There could be no reasons unless a rational animal has a general conception of its own good, and thus a general sense of how to live."

The first step in developing my alternative is to step back from this distinction and ask an even more fundamental question: Why do we act at all? Why do we live human lives? Begin with the observation, reminiscent of chapter 2, that all organisms act toward ends, albeit without reflection. Frey summarizes Aquinas in this way:

> All living things are a self-sustaining system of powers that functions to bring the living thing into being and to sustain its being. The movement of any part of a living thing, at any particular moment, is necessarily explained by reference to the movement of the whole thing towards a single end: the coming to be, maintenance, or reproduction of that very form of life.[29]

As I argued above, all living things exhibit teleological movement. They grow into maturity, which is the exemplification of their form of life. This form of life is what Aquinas calls a thing's "nature": wolf hunts in packs by nature, trees extend roots into the ground by nature, reptiles warm themselves in the sun by nature, and so on.

While normativity is a feature of all living beings, human beings are also aware of it. Humans grow, reproduce, and enjoy conscious experiences like other animals and also *know* that they do so. Obviously plants and animals do not "naturally incline" toward their good by reflecting or choosing it. Frey points out:

> Aquinas would agree with us that it is a category mistake to say that a sunflower wants to grow towards the light, if by this we mean that the flower

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

> somehow registers a positive feeling or has an inner impression towards the light, which "causes" it to move toward the light. The plant does not apprehend or desire anything; thus Aquinas is very careful to say that it does not have a power of appetite. In fact, Aquinas is at pains to note that a plant has no window onto the world at all—it just has conditions in which it characteristically comes into being, maintains, and reproduces itself.[30]

To quote John Haldane, "things are specified by their power."[31] The sunflower has no conscious sense with which to incline toward sunlight. When it comes to higher organisms, insects and mammals and so on, organisms have "appetite". They move consciously sense and move toward certain objects and avoid others: The antelope pursues healthy grass and flees a lion. The animal can only experience what is good or bad for it as a particular object.

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

> Rational animals, like any animal, have a natural inclination towards their good as a whole, and like lower animals this power is actualized through their apprehension of things in the world. But Aquinas argues that a rational animal relates to the world through the application of universal concepts, and thus it is inclined to pursue or avoid things under an intellectual, universal apprehension of them. Thus, Aquinas says that the will is inclined towards its objects under the formality of the "universal good," rather than the particular good.[32]

Human beings are specified by their "power" or capacity to engage in cognitive and deliberative activities. While animals can not only sense but *perceive*, humans have the capacity of

30. Ibid., 69–70.

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

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

"intellection," the power of abstracting formal properties from what is perceived. An animal can *sense* an informed, organized object; an animal can be affected by the object. But the human animal can *acquire information* from the organized object. Animals may perceive something *as* dangerous or *as* desirable. Human beings perceive *that* a the dangerous thing is a predator or the desirable thing *is food*.[33]

The extra ability to perceive under universal categories brings with it the human capacity for taking up natural inclinations or aversions in a deliberative act. Natural inclinations may be underwritten or overridden. Confronted with a bit of healthy food on someone else's plat, I may choose not to eat it, for I recognize it as *not mine*. Confronted with a lion in a zoo, I may choose not to flee, for I recognize it as *not dangerous*.

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

> Consequently, we can say that rational animals have an understanding of different levels of ends, and at least a vague sense of how they are supposed

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

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

> to hang together as a whole. This conception of how it all hangs together is what Aquinas calls the ultimate end – a rational animal's general, conceptual understanding of how to live or go on. Aquinas thinks that any sane, mature adult will necessarily have cobbled together some such conception. Aquinas calls this conception "the universal good", and he argues that it is the will's proper object. Everything that is willed is willed under this rational aspect of good, as to be pursued because *in accord with my general conception of the good.* In fact, Aquinas thinks there could be no reasons unless a rational animal has a general conception of its own good, and thus a general sense of how to live.[35]

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

> No human action is intelligible without attributing to the agent herself some conception of this end, no matter how inarticulate, unsystematic, or unreflective it might be. Aquinas takes it for granted that in coming to be a human being—i.e., being raised in a community of other human beings, coming into the possession of concepts, a language, and coming to have a world—one comes into some such conception, and thus comes to act voluntarily.[36]

Every practical rational primate of sufficient age and maturity has some conception of their own human good which is, if you like, the ultimate practical reason answering the question of how to live. (That is not to deny that the answer arises in part due to the normal process of socialization. Rather, that our conception of how to live would arise that way is what we would predict for rational primates who speak and live in society.)

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35. Ibid., 78–79, italics in original.
36. Ibid., 87.

IV.1. The First Principle of Practical Reason

Where does the process of rational action begin? We can again compare practical reasoning with demonstrative or theoretical reasoning. Aquinas points out that the first thing rational beings apprehend is simply "existence" or "being" – infants perceive that some things are there and others not there. They eventually come to perceive objects *as* objects, as individual objects, and to name and categorize them with language acquired in a social setting. Likewise, the *practical rational* animal first apprehends simply "good" or "desirable" — infants perceive that some things are to be pursued and others avoided. Hence, to be *theoretically* rational is to judge a proposition p as true or false, as best one can, according to the rational assessment of the reasons for affirming or denying p. Similarly, to be *practically* rationally is to judge a practical reason φ as good or bad, in accord with the rational assessment of the reasons for pursuing or avoiding φ.

Aquinas puts the point this way:

> …as "being" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, so "good" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. Consequently the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of good, viz. that "good is that which all things seek after." Hence this is the first precept of practical reason, that "good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided."[37]

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

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

IV.2. Secondary, Basic Goods

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

> Practical reason is the movement of thought towards, rather than away from, material particulars…. practical reasoning is a movement from general knowledge of what is good and how to live, towards the production of the kind of life that is essentially characterized by such knowledge. When it is done well, what is understood is the same as what is produced: human form or human life.[38]

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

> For practical reason, the starting points are the most primitive human goods that the will is naturally inclined to seek: life, knowledge, family, friendship, play, political community, and so on. These are the ends that all human beings want for their own sake, as intrinsically valuable to them. And they want these things in a rational way—viz., because they have a conceptual apprehension that they are constitutive of their general good.[39]

Taken thus broadly, practical reasoning is not only the process of evaluating events or objects as desirable or undesirable; it includes related activities such as considering future actions to be done, (b) reflecting on past actions already done. What all these have in common is the attempt to identify (or create) reasons to φ or not to φ. Practical reason is the process of identifying or coming up with practical reasons.

Narrowly, we engage in such practical reasoning about very specific circumstances ("should I stay or should I go?"). More generally, we engage in practical reasoning about quite general matters ("how should one live?"). The answer or answers to the "how to live?"

38. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 2.
39. Ibid., 88.

question(s) will be a *practical* answer or set of answers, that is both an item of knowledge and also a plan or guide to living in the way specified by that knowledge.

IV.3. Summary

To sum up, all organisms incline toward the good of their life form, including those basic goods that enable the full actualization thereof. Various organisms express this inclination in various ways. For lower organisms, consciousness plays no part in this process; for higher organisms, conscious does play a part. For humans, the essential difference is a sensitivity to the space of reasons, both evidential and practical. 'Practical reasoning' is a good name for the whole complex process of perceiving certain salient facts as reasons to pursue or avoid some course of action, and comparing and ranking competing reasons in light of an overall conception of a good human life, and acting accordingly.

V. A Bit of Historical Context

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

> Many if not most moral philosophers in modern times see their subject as having to do exclusively with relations between individuals or between an individual and society, and so with such things as obligations, duties, and charitable acts… 'moral' and 'prudential' considerations [are] contrasted in a way that was alien to Plato or Aristotle.[40]

At some point in the history of western moral philosophy, the topic of the "moral" began to separate off from the broader topic of the practical. Foot cites Mill as an early proponent of the distinction:

40. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 68.

> 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.'[41]

Mill distinguishes folly from immorality by treating folly as a failure to provide goods for oneself. He treats imprudence as "bad" but not *morally bad.* In my alternative frame, imprudence is a vice that inhibits one's ability to live a human life.

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

> 'Moral' is the etymological descendant of 'moralis'. But 'moralis', like its Greek predecessor *ethikos* – Cicero invented 'moralis' to translate the Greek word in the *De Fato* – means 'pertaining to character' where a man's character is nothing other than his set dispositions to behave systematically in one way rather than another, to lead on particular kind of life… The early uses of 'moral' did not contrast with " 'prudential' or 'self interested' " nor with " 'legal or 'religious'… The word to which it is closest in meaning is perhaps most simply 'practical'."[42]

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

Relatedly, Martha Nussbaum points out, a Quandary ethicist might ask "how do specifically moral ends and commitments figure among the ends that [a moral agent] pursues?" But this is the wrong question. She says:

> 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

41. Ibid., 68.
42. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 38.

> rephrase it: for example, What role does concern for others for their own sake play in here scheme of ends? What role does political justice play in her scheme of ends? And so forth."[43]

I don't intend to suggest that there is something automatically laudable about choosing the Platonic/Aristotelian emphasis. My contention is that the modern emphasis on "relations between individuals or between an individual and society" simply fails to capture much of what is interesting about the attempt to answer the "how should one live?" question.

My alternative is this: there is only one kind of reason for action: practical reasons. And though there are distinctions between various kinds of practical reasons, the proper distinction is not between "moral" and "non-moral" or "prudential" ones. Certainly considerations about myself are conceptually distinct from considerations about my family, my friend, my society, or my species.

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

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

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

comes from "exhibiting the logic of their usage."[44] The significance of moral judgments is that "they enable us to solve problems of appraisal and of action." Solving problems of evaluation (we might say) and action is their place in "a pattern of language and action…" He continues:

> Above all they arise out of the way in which we see the world and the way in which our language allows us to see the world. We cannot sufficiently emphasize the direction given to our appraisals by the language which happens to be available for our descriptions. It is as we see the facts that we judge the world.[45]

What MacIntyre would have us see here is that evaluative judgments are not *simply* useful in moral dilemmas or quandaries. Rather, evaluative judgments appear at the earliest stages of childhood development in a pattern of usage that is inextricable from the human activities of reasoning, acting, and appraising. They occur 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.

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

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44. Mark C. Murphy, "MacIntyre's Political Philosophy," 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*.

45. Ibid.

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

The point about this tangled relationship between practical reasons and moral reasons is not merely of historical or etymological interest (though of course, the narrow sense of the word 'moral' in discourse today is clear enough). The point is that qualities such as benevolence and generosity we tend to call human "moral goodness" are of a type with a *broader category of goodness*. Foot explains: "I want to show that judgments usually considered to be the special subject of moral philosophy should really be seen as belonging to a wider class of evaluations of conduct with which they share a common conceptual structure."[46]

VI. Meeting Challenges

To crown this neo-Aristotelian account of practical reason, it will be instructive to make explicit how my account meets the challenges I listed at the beginning of this chapter.

VI.1. Challenge: Reason, Practice, and Motivation

There is a large and complex body of literature on moral motivation, especially the debate between internalism and externalism. While I cannot adequately engage all the relevant literature, I would like to briefly situate my neo-Aristotelian account within that debate.

46. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.

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

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

That said, what motivational externalism gets right, that there are reasons "out there" that *would* motivate one if one knew about them. There might be reasons to φ that I am not aware of and (hence) am not motivated by. For example, perhaps it is true that one ought to save for retirement, but I may fail to do so because I am unaware of that reason or am ignoring it in my attention to other reasons.

Seen in this light, it is obvious that on my neo-Aristotelian account practical reasons can and do motivate us. Seen in this light, practical reasons *are the only thing that motivate*. Practical reasons are the *primary* meaning of the term 'motive.' Other psychological states such as hungers, thirsts, loves, fears, *move* me to action the same way that such states

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

move non-rational organisms. For rational animals, only reasons *motivate* me to act, since motivation is (I argue) a fundamentally rational state. Aquinas distinguishes between the "actions of a human" and "human actions." The action of a human is any motion, such as mumbling in your sleep, scratching an itch, or idly tapping a foot. But a human action is by definition an action in pursuit of a goal which is perceived as a good. A human being without any practical reasons would not do immoral deeds; he or she would not do anything at all. Like Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener, the person who does not engage in practical reasoning or identify any practical reasons would simply waste away and die.[48]

My contention is that our default view of practical reasoning creatures ought to be that practical reason is both rational and practical, a kind of knowledge that is, absent any other psychological state, motivating. The process is by definition *practical*. Practical reasoning is not something one does *before* resolving what to do, as one picks up an item in a store *before* purchasing it. Practical reasoning is the name we give to the process of *resolving what to do*, as checking out from the store is the process of purchasing it. If there is no gap between the conclusion of a deliberation and a decision, then practical reasoning is, to co-opt Gibbard's unforgettable phrasing, "thinking how to live."[49]

Furthermore, this process is by definition a form of *reasoning*. Practical reasoning is thus like theoretical reasoning in at least one important respect: it is normative. Theoretical reasoning is a process by which I aim to determine *what to believe* – to answer the question "What should I believe?" When I assess evidence for and against some proposition P, I am looking for *reasons* to believe P is true or false. The successful conclusion of a rational argument is the judgment that P or not-P. (Or I may not have enough evidence to judge either way, in which case I may withhold judgment.) Similarly, when I consider a scientific hypothesis, I suppose that P and then conduct an experiment that will reveal reasons that

48. Herman Melville, *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (Best Classic Books, 1966).
49. Allan Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

confirm or disconfirm the supposition. To fail to believe P upon coming to know good evidence for it, or to believe P in spite of good evidence against it, is to make an intellectual error. If Q entails P and I already know and affirm that Q, then I *ought* to affirm that P. Similarly, if some reason to π entails a reason to φ, and I already know and am committed to π, then I ought to φ.

So far as we know, there are no purely theoretical reasoners. We can imagine angels, Artificial Intelligences, and intelligent aliens who might think without acting; but so far as we know, to be a reasoner at all is to be responsive to Sellars' "space of reasons", including both practical and theoretical reasons. This consideration is part of the reason why, in chapter 3, I insisted that practical reasoning, and *not* abstract theoretical reasoning, defines human nature. If this is right, then the burden of proof lies with those who would artificially divide and separate the *knowing* and the *practicing*.

VI.2. Challenge: Substantive Reasoning

The alternative to the "substantive" view of practical reason is the "procedural" or instrumental account of practical reason.[50] The procedural or instrumental view sees practical reasoning as a value-neutral process of adjudicating the means to one's chosen ends, whatever those may be. I may criticize Smith for being "irrational" – that is, for not using the necessary means to his or her own ends – but I may not criticize Smith's ends. The substantive view makes some *ends themselves* "rational" or "irrational." Some philosophers object to the substantive conception as problematically building controversial ends into the definition of "reasonable". For an example, if I defined practical reasoning as the process by which one adjudicates the means to *one's own health*, then any sort of action that makes me unhealthy (e.g., eating some delicious but less-than-healthy food) would be ipso facto

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

irrational. What is needed, the advocate of the procedural view points out, is a broader conception.

Two responses are appropriate at this juncture: first, the argument so far is that practical reasoning as a procedure *must necessarily have a certain intelligible structure*. The advocate of the procedural view, no less than the advocate of the substantive view, needs a sufficiently general starting point for procedural reasoning to even get off the ground. Frey's candidate for that starting point is the maximally general conception that "good is to be done and evil avoided", or that "one must pursue the human good." Secondly, I have not yet argued, in great detail, what the substantive good of practical reasoning is other than a conception of how to live given that one is a practical, rational primate. This substantive good is general enough to accommodate a variety of controversial views about what, in particular, one ought to do or not do.

Philippa Foot offers two considerations as further evidence that practical reasoning is better conceived as substantive. The first is that the substantive conception is needed to show how both prudential (self-regarding) and moral (other-regarding) reasons can be rational. Thus, Foot says:

> This now seems to me to be the correct way of meeting the challenge that I myself issued in 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' and at that time despaired of meeting: namely, to show the rationality of acting, even against desire and self-interest, on a demand of morality. The argument depends on the change of direction that Quinn suggested: seeing goodness as setting a necessary condition of practical rationality and therefore as at least a part-determinant of the thing itself. Nor is this a quite unfamiliar way of arguing. Many of us are willing to reject a 'present desire' theory of reasons for action because we think that someone who knowingly puts his future health at risk for a trivial pleasure is behaving foolishly, and therefore not well. Seeing his will as defective, we therefore say that he is doing what he has reason not to do. Being unable to fit the supposed 'reason' into some preconceived present-desire-based theory of reasons for action, we do not query whether it really is a foolish way to behave, but rather hang on to the evaluation and shape our theory of reasons accordingly. And it is exactly a generalization of this presumption about the direction of the argument on

> which I am now insisting. For what, we may ask, is so special about prudence that it alone among the virtues should be reasonably thought to relate to practical rationality in such a way?[51]

Foot is arguing here that goodness is a "necessary condition of practical rationality." Rational action is action in pursuit of some end. And "some end" is something pursued as desirable or something to be avoided as undesirable. But pursuing something *as desirable or undesirable* is already a substantive evaluative judgment. Therefore, any rational action necessarily includes a substantive evaluative judgment.

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

Reasoning about ends may be a difficult and messy business. But we do it. It is an empirical fact that we reason – indeed, disagree and debate – about ultimate ends. Suppose Betty says to her friend, "I'm concerned about you. You haven't returned my calls. I heard you lost your job and your spouse is gone, and you're not eating. 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 is what I am *aiming* for." Betty would rightly wonder "what is wrong such that you have taken as your aims such unhealthy and ridiculous goals?"

As we saw above, some charge that if reasoning about ends is not a mathematically-precise procedure, then it must not really be rational. Jay Wallace rebuts the charge in this way:

> 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

51. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 63.

> 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.[52]

Warren Quinn, likewise argues that we reason about goods:

> Practical thought, like any other thought, requires a subject matter. And for human beings the subject matter that distinguishes thought as practical is, in the first instance, human ends and action insofar as they are good or bad in themselves […] practical thought deploys a master set of non-instrumental evaluative notions: that of a good or bad human act, a good or bad human life, a good or bad human agent, and a good or bad human action. Practical reason is, on this view, the faculty that applies these fundamental evaluative concepts.[53]

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

Practical reasoning about ultimate ends is intrinsically fuzzier than deductive or mathematical calculation. Any attempt to configure the process by subjecting to a set of ready-made rules or criteria will make it easier to understand only at the cost of falsifying it. McDowell Wiggins suggests that there are psychological motives behind the attempt to reduce the process of practical reasoning to something mathematical and formal:

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

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

> I entertain the unfriendly suspicion that those who feel they *must* seek more than [the Aristotelian view of practical reason] provides want a scientific theory of rationality not so much for a passion for science, even where there can be no science, but because they hope and desire, by some conceptual alchemy, to turn such a theory into a regulative or normative discipline, or into a system of rules by which to spare themselves some of the agony of thinking and all the torment of feeling and understanding that is actually involved in reasoned deliberation.[54]

Wiggins point, I think, is that practical reasoning is necessarily less precise than deductive reasoning. If indeed it cannot be made to be more clear, then to try to make it clear is futile.

VI.3. Challenge: Verdictive, Overriding Reasoning

Practical reasoning is not a value-neutral procedure. It is inextricably bound up in the moral life.

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

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

The safest way to think about practical reasons of various sorts is to distinguish them from theoretical or evidential reasons, reasons to affirm or deny that p rather than reasons

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

to φ or not to φ. From there, it is best to take a general view: practical can be self-regarding or other-regarding, verdictive or non-verdictive.

Rather than labeling overriding reasons as "moral" ones, my suggestion is that the final or verdictive ought belongs only to the ought that is the conclusion of the total process of practical reasoning.

Any *reason to φ* is a practical reason that can feature in an overall account of *what to do, all things considered*. The practically wise person and the virtuous person is the one who does what should be done, all things considered. While it often happens that one's individual practical reasons conflict, nevertheless, a set of practical reasons can constitute the *overriding* practical reason: *the thing to do*, all things considered.

VI.4. Challenge: Practical Reasoning Can't Be Immoral?

Some might object that this view of practical reason as a process that is oriented by definition at the apparent good defines away the possibility of immorality. Does "aiming at the good" exculpate an agent's apparently immoral motives or ends? Not at all. Yet the objection requires an important clarification. First, if the immoral person *acts at all* then, according to the argument, he or she must be pursuing some apparent good by definition. To be practical rational necessarily means to pursue something *as good*, as desirable. Secondly, if the immoral person acts wrongly, then he or she has misjudged the good. On the neo-Aristotelian view I am developing, immoral acts are rational mistakes. Just as an epistemic agent might hold a false belief p without affirming the false *as false*, a practical agent might pursue a bad thing without pursuing it *as bad*. Rather, the immoral person fails in their practical reasoning to correctly rank and order specific goods. The imprudent person, for example, judges that it would be better to eat, drink, and be merry today rather than plan to avoid future ills. The cruel person judges that it would be better to cause suffering than to be kind.

To be a practical, rational animal is to have the capacity for *rational action*. Rational action is not simply motion or pursuit of some good – even insects and fungi do that. Rational action is the inclination to pursue or avoid in accordance with one's judgments about what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable. Practical reasoning is a very broad term to encompass a range of activities by which we form a plan for how to live – including processes by which we identify, assess, collate, and rank various practical reasons in favor of and against possible actions or ways of life.

The upshot of these reflections is this: If a person does anything at all, then that person is engaging in practical reasoning. The "final verdict" and the verdictive ought is simply what Foot calls the thing to do "all things considered."[55] Apparent counterexamples that one might furnish to disprove the point actually serve, with sufficient clarification, to reinforce it. For example, someone might say, 'It's ridiculous to think that I always pursue the good, because I sometimes do wrong.' Sometimes we do the wrong thing. The proper response is that we perceive the bad as the good. Someone might say, "But sometimes I perceive the bad *as bad* and pursue it anyway." The response is that we sometimes take a bad or dismotivating reason into an overall reason to do something, all things considered.

A foolish person – the habitually, incorrigibly foolish person responsible for his or her own folly – is, ipso facto, a bad practical rational primate. He or she is failing to do *the thing to do*. By contrast, the acquisition of virtue is an ongoing process of increasing in practical wisdom.

Jack Weinstein explains the relation between practical reasoning and morality in this way:

> The term practical rationality is derived from Aristotle's *phronesis*. It is to be distinguished from *sophia*, a more technical form of reasoning. Practical rationality leads to more approximate conclusions; it takes context and relative

55. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 57.

facts into account, and it usually leads to moral or political conclusions.[56]

Phronesis guides one in "answering" questions (or providing a range of strategies) to solve problems of action and appraisal.

VI.5. Conclusion

This chapter has argued in more detail for a conception of practical reason as the set of capacities that defines human beings as practical reasoning animals. My thesis has been that successful practical reasoning is an essential part of virtue. The virtuous person knows what to do. Hence, virtue is a kind of knowledge, namely *practical knowledge* (a "disposition to act well"). When practical reasoning is well-functioning, it constitutes part of the natural excellence of creatures like us.

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

I gave a bit of historical perspective on the term "moral" that shows how the older sense of the term included considerations beyond simply "other-regarding" reasons. Instead, 'practical reasoning' is an acceptable description of *any* evaluative reasoning that tells in favor of or against an action. I also argued that practical reasons are intrinsically capable of motivating. Nevertheless, there are many practical reasons calling for action, and they sometimes conflict. So success in identifying how to live and what to do requires a complex process of adjudicating between all the available goods known to one, sorting them,

56. Jack Russell Weinstein, *On MacIntyre* (Wadsworth, 2003), 60–61.

ranking them with care and wisdom, and forming them into a complete life plan. Success is defined as practical knowledge of what to do; failure is defined as practical error — or perhaps ignorance — of what to do. I argued that the procedural view of practical reasoning is itself committed to certain substantive normative judgments, such as that one ought to do whatever will bring about one's chosen ends; but more to the point, I argued that the substantive view of practical reasoning is more plausible: we reason about apparent goods and bads and act accordingly.

The first principle of practical reason, that good is to be done and pursued while evil is to be avoided, is known by all functioning human adults. And some more particular practical reasons are obvious enough to be known by all or almost all. My account leaves room for the commonsense insight that our potential to become successful practical reasoners is greatly helped by education. While there is much more to be said to fully defend this account against reasonable objections, I believe I have provided the outlines of a theory of practical rationality that can potentially do these two kinds of work.

A good answer to the question "how should one live?" will be not just a proposition but a plan. Even more exactly, the virtuous person does not simply *have a good plan* but enacts a good life plan. The answer to the "how should one live?" question is not just a "philosophy" but a *life*.

One more potentially fatal objection remains. The Irrelevance Objection accepts (or entertains the hypothesis that) there are natural human norms, but argues that they are irrelevant to what we should do and how we should live because, as practical reasoners, we can pick and choose which natural norms to follow. Clearly, this objection arises from an emphasis on the importance of practical reasoning. Even if one cannot be a good human being without exercising fully the potential for practical reasoning, I must still show the genuinely *natural* position of reasoning withing naturalism. The mere capacity to reflect on our natural inclinations is a "natural power" of human nature. We are practical primates

by definition. Or rather, since no infants have this capacity, we have the potential to become such with time.