THE VIRTUE TRIANGLE: PRACTICAL REASON AND NATURE IN RECENT NEO-ARISTOTELIAN ETHICS

- Nature, Virtue, and Reason: On the Foundations of Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics

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DISSERTATION

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By

Keith Buhler

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. David Bradshaw, Professor of Philosophy

Lexington Kentucky

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ABSTRACT: Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics has offered a plausible meta-normative account of human nature and human virtue where virtues are 'natural goodness' for creatures like us. However, disagreement remains as to whether virtue is 'natural' in light of our unique rational capacities or simply in light of our biological nature. For example, Philippa Foot emphasizes the objective, biological aspects of human nature while John McDowell emphasizes the intersubjective, rational aspects. Julia Annas explains that the conversation has run aground of this difficult matter because it reflects a broader perennial question about the relationship between normativity and nature, or between ethics and science.

My dissertation attempts to resolve this internecine dispute and thus render more plausible a normative virtue theory based on neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism. To this end, I systematically analyze a set of related concepts (nature, virtue, practical reason, and teleology) and defend the role of a naturalized teleology in normative ethics.

In brief, my thesis is that human beings *ought to become* practically wise because human beings are 'practical, rational animals'. Practical wisdom (among the other virtues) defines our human life form *and* is the natural telos to be pursued. I first argue that the natural organic or biological world includes natural normative facts about what is healthy, unhealthy, desirable, undesirable for organisms. Then, I apply the notion of natural norms to human organisms to uncover natural *human* norms. These human norms include normative facts about virtue and vice. I defend a conception of virtue according to which virtuous traits are rational practices and emotions, and practical reasoning is the process of identifying the good.

Hence, my thesis sits at the intersection of both normative virtue ethics and metaethics: it is normative in that it commends a life spent acquiring character and epistemic virtues even in the face of (inevitable) death and (the possibility of) human extinction; it also analyzes normative terms and concepts such as 'ought' and 'naturally good' and 'human being' to find a brute natural normativity consonant with scientific naturalism. On this view of

virtue, the definitive criterion by which to judge human beings is our success or failure in acquiring virtues such as moderation and tolerance, and our overall success in the pursuit of the good life for humans.

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

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By

Keith Buhler

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Dr. David Bradshaw

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Dr. Anita Superson

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Dr. Dan Breazeale

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Dr. Mark Kightlinger

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(Date)

For Lindsay Elizabeth. ”Oh, who shall understand but you; yea, who shall understand?”

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γένοι᾽ οἷος ἐσσὶ μαθών.

—Pindar, *Pythian* 2, line 72.

Chapter 1

Nature and Ethics

> For about a hundred years we have so concentrated on one of the virtues—"kindness" or mercy—that most of us do not feel anything except kindness to be really good or anything but cruelty to be really bad. Such lopsided ethical developments are not uncommon, and other ages too have had their pet virtues and curious insensibilities.
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> —C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* 43.

In Aristotle's day, there was no assumed divide between nature and normativity. Where modern thought is so often characterized by fundamental dualisms (mind/matter, nature/normativity, self/other, science/ethics), the worldview of Aristotle and even Plato could account for distinction without division and union without confusion. John McDowell cites this "anti-dualism" or original unity as one of the benefits of studying Greek thought. He does not quite go in for the particulars of Greek anti-dualism, because he thinks certain aspects of Aristotle's worldview are outmoded by modern science, but he thinks that studying such a holistic worldview will have a therapeutic effect on our dualistic tendencies.

Nowhere is the modern addiction to dualisms more clear than in science and ethics. Ethics is, if nothing else, the domain of the normative. The good and bad, the desirable and

despicable, the worthy and unworthy are "fraught with ought." Nature, on the other hand, is the domain of the descriptive. And, for many thinkers, never the twain shall meet.

The dualism between nature and normativity has consequences that are not merely unfortunate but I think disastrous. It forces us to decide between affirming a real but "non-natural" normativity or natural but ultimately unreal normativity – it forces us to embrace *either* that the natural world described by sciences *or* the moral world described by common sense and (realist) philosophical ethics. This is a damnable dilemma.

Let me state the issue in a bit more detail. Compare two stories that two philosophers might tell, and how they relate (or fail to relate) to the other story. First, a virtue ethicist is likely to tell the kind of story that indicates the kind of person I *ought* to become or avoid becoming, and the kinds of things *I ought* to pursue (like friendship) or avoid (like ignorance and intolerance). A virtue ethicist is likely to commend certain traits of mind and character as constituting a truly human and truly worthwhile life. Such traits might include wisdom, courage, and patience. Oddly enough, the longer one listens to a virtue ethicist, the less one thinks such traits are *natural*. High ethical aspirations come to sound far-off, perhaps almost other-worldly. Even if we go in for the high calling of becoming virtuous, we wonder what morality has to do with human nature.

Secondly, a scientific naturalist is goingg to tell a story in which that ambiguous word "nature" just means *everything that is the case* – or perhaps, everything that is the case and that can be studied using the whole suite of methods belonging various scientific disciplines such as physics, chemistry, evolutionary biology, and so on. A scientific naturalist prizes observation, empirical hypotheses, and empirical testing above all else. Hence, the scientific naturalist's attitude toward "human things" is likely to be ambivalent. Sociology, psychology, religion, mythology, literature, anthropology, and history all fall under a kind of vaguely-felt suspicion. When compared to the cold, hard clarity of mathematical nature, humans are embarrassingly warm, soft, and fuzzy. People's behavior can be quanti-

fied and recorded but people themselves are either too complex or too crazy to be captured in a scientific account quite as neatly as Red Giant stars or oceanic phytoplankton. At best, psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists can offer interpretations based on extensive observation of human subjects.

There is an assumed divide between humans and the rest of nature. Are humans natural? If not, then what are we? If so, then why is it so especially tricky to understand ourselves.

The ethical naturalist enters the conversation at this juncture with a fascinating suggestion: perhaps human beings are animals of a peculiar sort. Human beings are distinguished by their powers of reasoning but remain fundamentally continuous with the rest of the items on the cosmic inventory list. Hence, even though the normative domain is human it need not be *exclusively* human.

Is it possible to be an ethical naturalist? Is it possible to break down the prejudicial divide between non-natural norms and non-ethical nature? Many neo-Aristotelian writers answer a definitive *'Yes'*. It is possible to be an ethical naturalist; it is possible to develop a plausible account that includes both our best scientific understanding of what *humanity is* along with our best ethical understanding of what *human beings can and ought to become*. This dissertation moves toward that goal.

I. My View

This dissertation argues that human virtues are excellences of practical reasoning and rational practice that enable and partly constitute the realization of one's human telos.

Essentially, I argue that there are three points on the "virtue triangle" that are all necessary for developing a coherent and comprehensive ethical naturalism.

The three concepts that cannot be disentangled are these: human nature, human

excellence, and natural teleology. The unifying concept at the root of these three is the concept of practical reason. Human nature is to be a practical reasoning primate. Human excellence is practically reasoning *well*, thus acquiring practical wisdom. And our natural telos is to become wise and to live the kind of life the wise person lives, in the face of the temptation of pleasing but ultimately destructive vice, and in the face of the inevitable death that comes along with being an animal living on earth.

My thesis is that human beings *are* practical rational primates and hence *ought* to become fully mature such animals by acquiring the virtues and especially practical wisdom.

II. Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 argues that nature is normative. If some normative facts are natural facts, then it might be that some "facts" of human nature are fundamentally normative facts.

Chapter 3 argues that human nature is normative. Indeed, some fundamentally normative facts about humans – or human norms – obtain in each member of the species. Hence, it is plausible to suppose that the person who fulfills such norms is both naturally human and ethically admirable.

Chapter 4 argues that virtues are those qualities of human beings that enable and partly constitute our species-specific flourishing. Virtues are *what human beings are like* in virtue of their life form, and enable human beings to *become what they are*.

Chapter 5 argues that practical reasoning is the process of identifying what is good for humans, and identifying how to live. Successful practical reasoning, hence, is necessary for becoming virtuous.

Chapter 6 argues that the foregoing account is naturalistic by defeating a widely accepted, but un-scientific, picture of nature according to which normativity is excluded by definition.

Chapter 2

Organic Normativity

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

I. Introduction

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

The major alternatives to naturalistic normative realism are (a) non-naturalistic normative realism and (b) naturalistic normative anti-realism or reductionism. Although these major alternatives are quite different, they share one assumption in common: both accept the common belief that nature is purely descriptive.[1] If all natural facts are purely descrip-

1. The a picture of nature as a manifold of purely descriptive and non-normative facts, entities, properties, and laws is what McDowell calls "bald nature." A better term would be "Laplacian nature," since the notion that the cosmos is coldly factual, bald of

tive facts, then it follows necessarily that norms are either not real or not natural. If norms are not natural, we seem to be committed to a distinct, "non-natural" normative realm above and beyond the world described by science. If, on the other hand, norms are not ultimately real features of the natural world, then they must be reducible to non-normative facts (such as causation events) or else scientists, philosophers, and regular folk simply "project" normativity onto nature.

My conclusion is that there are real, natural, irreducible norms. My argument unfolds in three sections. Section II distinguishes the two kinds of is-ought gap that philosophers have taken to render ethical naturalism impossible. It explains how some notion of natural normativity makes ethical naturalism at least possible.

Section III begins with a summary of Philippa Foot and Michael Thomspon's case for natural norms of two types: formal and functional norms. This section also includes a novel case for what I call "organic normativity", on the basis of generic propositions, that organisms have a real life form and a natural teleological process.

Section IV considers and rebuts anti-realist or reductionist interpretations of these natural phenomena. Admittedly, these phenomena can be acknowledged by both the realist and anti-realist. The anti-realist would want to offer a roundabout explanation of them, while the realist accepts the straightforward explanation.

My eventual endgame (to be explored in later chapters) is to show how human ethical norms are a special kind of instance of natural norms. Ethical naturalism has a variety of expressions. The is-ought gap is widely agreed to be *the* problem for all of them. If nature is purely descriptive, then the 'is-ought gap' arises necessarily. How could natural facts

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values, and disenchanted from any supernatural esoterica, aligns more closely with Pierre-Simon Laplace's mathematical picture of nature. Laplace pictured nature as a set of cold, abstract, and necessary relations. Realism about natural normativity is incompatible with the Laplacian picture. But his picture is, I would dare to say, unscientific. At the very least, it is not *the only* scientific picture. Regardless, Laplacian nature emphatically does not include natural norms.

about human welfare, or laws, or consequences, entail any ethical oughts? Thankfully, if natural norms exist, then they undercut the is-ought gap. Natural norms do not "bridge" the gap; rather, they show that the putative "gap" is spurious due to a faulty assumption that nature is purely descriptive.

If there are some natural norms governing organisms, then there might be natural *human* norms governing humans. The neo-Aristotelian might be able to explain ethical norms as extensions of, or tokens of, natural norms, which are both binding on human beings as practical rational animals and not merely invented by human individuals or human cultures. These norms would be natural without being crassly biological; they would be both biological and practical.

The controversy over normativity is an old one and is not likely to be settled here. My goal, instead, is to present a case that is plausible to the undecided, and that is sensitive to the concerns of normative anti-realists (who are zealous defenders of scientific realism) and the concerns of normative non-naturalists (who are zealous defenders of moral realism).

II. The Is-Ought Gap Challenge

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

For example, consider a few pretty uncontroversial normative propositions: '*you ought to be wise*' or *'It is good to be tolerant of people with different views'* or *'It is bad to bring a gun to school and start shooting people'*. Supposing these are true, *why* are they

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

true? The non-naturalist has a good explanation (they pick out fundamental, non-natural, moral facts) and the naturalist anti-realist also has a good explanation (express the speaker's individual and cultural norms). The ethical naturalist's explanation is a bit trickier. He or she must show how such statements relate to the *natural* facts. The most straightforward path would be to argue that "you ought to be wise" is a normative truth derivable from some other fact that is natural. In general, ethical naturalism states that some ethical facts are grounded in natural facts or are identifiable with natural facts.

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

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

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

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with

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

> no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is however, of the last consequence.“[4]

The point is that when it comes to human evaluations, ‘is’ statements may be interesting but they seem useless for practical purposes. So the first premise of the is-ought challenge sets out a criterion for ethical naturalism: the normative propositions that features as conclusions of ethical arguments must be derived from descriptive premises. The second premise seems to render hopeless the thought that we can evaluate things on the basis of what they are. Is neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism a non-starter?

The is-ought gap is fatal to *some* forms of ethical naturalism. Namely, those that assume the bald picture of nature as purely descriptive. There is, however a second path.

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

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

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

> …we might equally have been thinking in terms of, say, strength and weakness or health and disease, or again about an individual plant or animal being or not being as it should be, or ought to be, in this respect or that. Let us call the conceptual patterns found there, patterns of natural normativity.[5]

4. *A Treatise of Human Nature* book III, part I, section I.
5. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 38.

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

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

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

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

Everything depends on whether or not nature consists of merely non-normative facts. I will grant that nature consists of merely *natural* facts. That nature consists of no non-natural facts is, of course, a tautology. I grant the tautology. I do not grant, without argument, that all such facts are descriptive and not normative; that would be to allow my opponent to beg the question. My opponent might likewise complain that if he or she allows me to

stipulate that there *are* natural norms, this stipulation would beg the question in my favor. The only thing for it is for me to *argue* from agreed upon premises that there are such things as natural norms. Having done so, it is fair of me to request an argument to the contrary. If the critic merely insists on reaffirming that all nature is non-normative, that would be mere question-begging.

So our first task is to supply an adequate defense of the existence of natural norms. Even if such a notion can be defended philosophically and scientifically, we should remember that all that logically follows is that ethical naturalism is possibly true. What we need, beyond mere possibility, is to defend in general natural normativity and then to apply patterns of natural normativity and how these form binding ethical normative structures.

III. The Case for Natural, Organic Norms

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

Nature is full of kinds; sunflowers are not oxygen; stars are not organisms; lead is not gold; water is not soil; and so on. Kind concepts allow us to both distinguish x from y and to gather together all the x's. Zebras and horses are both Equidae; lead and gold are both elements; ice and the sea and steam are all water. Thinking in kind categories is intuitive and natural.[6] Thinking in categories is probably a constitutive feature of thought.

6. Susan A Gelman and Lawrence A Hirschfeld, "How Biological Is Essentialism," *Folkbiology* 9 (1999): 403–46; Stefan Linquist et al., "Exploring the Folkbiological Con-

Nature is also full of end-directed activity. Each thing does its own thing: sunflowers grow toward the sun, wolves hunt deer and deer flee wolves; hearts pump blood and eyes see; the sun warms the planet; phytoplankton oxygenates the atmosphere. Such processes are non-intentional end-directed processes. Non-intentional processes are sometimes called 'teleonomic.'[7] Teleonomic phenomena do not have a *director* but they do have a *direction.*

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

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

What are we to make of kinds and their teleonomic behaviors? The explanations may be either realist, reductionist, or anti-realist. Realist explanations argue that kinds and their ends are what they seem to be: fundamental facts of nature. Reductionist or anti-realist

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ception of Human Nature," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B: Biological Sciences* 366, no. 1563 (2011): 444–53.

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

explanations argue that kinds and their ends are not what they seem. The nihilist argues that kinds and ends don't exist, there are only concrete particulars and only mechanical processes. The reductionist argues that *some* kinds exist, but they do not correspond to our initial scientific categorization; and *some* end-directed teleonomic processes are real but it is reducible to non-end-directed processes. Before discussing these options in full, let's explore the neo-Aristotelian treatment of natural normativity in more detail.

III.1. Foot's Case for Natural Normativity

Philippa Foot argues that human virtues are instances of a broader class of natural properties: 'natural goodness.'[8] Foot is well aware that her offering is likely to offend the ears of some listeners. Her defense is the thought (drawn from Wittgenstein) that crude beginnings are often a necessary first step on the way to something refined. To earn an audience for her argument, her first chapter (which she call a "fresh start") clears away some shaky assumptions inherited from Hume and Moore. Many modern ethicists treat human valuations as unprecedented, almost miraculous, new appearance in the cosmos. Instead, we should expand the scope of our inquiry to examine the status of humans as natural entities.

Moore assumed that, in philosophical ethics, 'good' is the ultimate predicate under review. This is one of the "shaky assumptions" Foot wishes to clear. She argues that statements like "pleasure is good" are not good paradigms for philosophical reflection. Evaluation of human creatures and evaluation of plants and animals follow *the same logical pattern*. In such evaluations, good is good *for*. Contrast 'good' with other predicates like 'red' or 'beautiful.' In a statement such as 'the house is beautiful', the predicate 'beautiful' doesn't need a complement. The house is *beautiful* – full stop. But 'good' has a different logical function. 'Good' is more like 'useful.' The phrase 'The house is useful' *does* need

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

a complement. When we say 'the house is useful' we must specify what it is useful for – *for a mom of six, or useful for an artist,* or what have you. Likewise, 'good' always means *good for someone* or *for something.* In reference to organisms and other natural objects, 'good' always needs a complement.[9] If this crude beginning is anywhere near to correct, we can distance ourselves from Moore's starting point and build on another starting point: the life-form of human beings.

In this Foot agrees with Thompson's groundbreaking work.[10] Thompson argues that the concept of "life" is not, as it may seem to some, a property of some beings where *being* is the fundamental concept; rather "life" is a fundamental concept.[11] He says, "Vital description of individual organisms is itself the primitive expression of a conception of things in terms of 'life-form' or 'species', and if we want to understand these categories in philosophy we must bring them back to that form of description."[12] When we observe and examine living things we rightly employ some shared categories and our conclusions rightly share a logical structure.

What is that common structure? Thompson reviews and refutes a variety of crude definitions of life such as that anything that is alive reproduces, grows, metabolizes, etc. Such properties may be co-extensive with the property of being alive, but they are wildly insufficient for the task of *defining* life because such properties depend on a prior under-

9. One might say that some things – God or people or platonic forms – are *good full stop*. I will concede that God, say, would not have a complement like this. But is any creature good simpliciter? Even so, calling God *good full stop* is a way of indicating that he is good *for everyone and everything*. He is the unqualifiedly desirable, or rather, he is desirable *to anything capable of desiring*. The Psalmist says "let everything that has breath praise the Lord." Presumably, objects without breath are relieved of the obligation, even if their authorship and grounding is in him.

10. Michael Thompson, "The Representation of Life," in *Virtues and Reasons*, ed. Lawrence Hursthouse Rosalind and Warren Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 247–96. Thompson works out the arguments of this article more fully in his 2008 monograph.

11. Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Harvard University Press, 2008), chapter 1.

12. Ibid., 57.

standing of life. Thompson's alternative is that life is a fundamental concept. We recognize things as alive before we learn about their shared traits; indeed, we can only ascribe a set of traits *living things* share if we are already in possession (absent that set of traits) of a concept of living things under which we gather a sample.

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

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

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

A much more natural starting point is that to assume that such terms are used relative to natural kinds – and especially life-forms and their activities or functions. The natural

13. Ibid., 27.

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

By contrast, McDowell and those who would draw a sharp contrast between "moral" and "non-moral" uses of the term must give long and sophisticated explanations for why it makes sense to describe a healthy plant and a moral person both as "doing well." The plant is not just doing well *for my garden* but doing well as itself. It is doing what such plants are supposed to live. The human being is not just living well *for a westerner* or *for a Californian* but doing well as what human beings are supposed to live. Rosalind Hursthouse articulates Foot's insight in this way:

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

14. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 39.
15. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 195.

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

III.2. A Novel Case

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

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

17. While scientific realism is not uncontroversial per se, my intended audience are committed scientific realists or sympathetic to realism. McDowell, as a sort of idealist, will dispute even my modest scientific realism, as we shall see in chapter 6.

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

III.3. The Special Logic of Generics

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

My postulate is this: **some generics about human beings are true.** If this is true then, I shall suggest, we have good hope of cutting up nature at the joints. When combined with a moderate scientific realism, generic truths from sciences such as biology, physics,

18. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

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

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

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

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

and anthropology (and perhaps others) support a modest natural normativity which will be further articulated (in a later chapter) to indicate which traits are virtues or vices for human beings.

III.4. Generics are Neither Universal nor Particular

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

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

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

23. Bailey, "Animalism," 869.

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

McDowell thinks that such exceptions are a "logical weakness" in deriving ethical conclusions from generics about human beings. He cites the example from Anscombe (and Aristotle) that "humans have 32 teeth", saying "there is a truth we can state in those terms, but from that truth, together with the fact that I am a human being, it does not follow that I have 32 teeth. (In fact it is false)."[26] McDowell accepts that generics are generally true. His objection to their application seems to be that the relation between a normative expectation and reality fails to reach deductive certainty. If this is his objection, it rather misses the point. Aristotelian-categoricals are not half-hearted universal judgments; they are not universes with widely-acknowledge counterexamples. They are judgments of a logically different kind. Far from being a logical weakness, generics are what enable us to capture truths about natural kinds that help explain statistical variation and inconsistency.

Prasada says that, "Much of our conceptual knowledge consists of generic knowledge — knowledge about kinds of things and their properties."[27] We can approach generics through a "formal, quantificational" semantics or through "principled connections." Prin-

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

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

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

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

cipled connections support formal explanations, normative expectations, and a statistical expectation of prevalence. In other words, we explain that the dog has four legs *because* it is a dog (formal explanation); we expect that Fido should have four legs *unless something is wrong* (normative expectations); and we expect that if we counted up a population of dogs, *most* dogs would in fact turn out to have four legs (statistical expectation).

Generic truths, once discovered, set a normative expectation by which we evaluate individual members on how well or badly they exemplify their life form.[28] The normative expectation cannot, it seems, be reduced to statistical correlations. Rather, statistical correlations can be a sign of (or can be an illusion of) a principled connection.

There is much to be learned about the linguistic features of generics, but none of the unexplored frontiers render generics useless for applications in neo-Aristotelian ethics. A few examples of what needs to be learned include the correlation between statistical prevalence and normative identity; many generic truths describe what is statistically prevalent but not all. What is the difference? Is one reducible to the other? Furthermore, Leslie distinguishes between indefinite generics such as "tigers are striped" which admits of the specification "that tiger over there is striped" and definite generics such as "domestic cats are common" which does not admit of specification, "that domestic cat is common." What is the difference here? Finally, indefinite generics are trickier: "Ducks lay eggs" is a true generic while "ducks are female" is false one, even though only female ducks lay eggs. And "mosquitoes carry the West Nile virus" is true even though less than one percent of mosquitoes carry the virus while "books are paperbacks" is false even though more than eighty percent of books are paper backs.[29] How do we sort through these correlations between generic connection and statistical prevalence?

28. Ibid., 3.
29. Leslie, "Generics."

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

Generic truths are acquired via a normal scientific means of empirical observation, rational reflection, and discussion. This familiar process is certainly revisable. For example, an ethologist who discovers a wolf hunting along may have a normative expectation that the wolf is not healthy. But she cannot know certainly in advance that this is so. She must test the hypothesis. A few reasonable interpretations are available: perhaps the lone wolf is unhealthy; perhaps the initial generic that 'wolves hunt in packs' was false; or perhaps this wolf is actually a new species of wolf. As it happens, in the case of wolves, no known species of wolf hunts alone so there is very strong reason to conclude that a lone wolf is rabid. But the point more generally is that generics are acquired and modified by a familiar, if complicated, process of scientific reasoning. Michael Thompson points out that: there is a "general and thoroughgoing reciprocal mutual interdependence of vital description of the individual and natural historical judgment about the form or kind."[30] Put differently, Micah Lott says:

> At each stage of an empirical investigation, our observations are mediated by our current understanding of the life form whose members we are observing. At the same time, our observations of those individual members will in turn improve our understanding of the life form itself, which then makes possible even more accurate and extensive future observations.[31]

Again, the fact that generic truths are revisable is not a weakness but a strength of the case I am building. It may be, for all we know, that penguins can fly (in the air), that some

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

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

species of penguin can fly, or that all penguins are really just defective birds. But the most reasonable belief thus far is the generic truth that penguins don't fly. A penguin is not a defective flyer but an excellent swimmer. These truths hold of penguins *as a kind* – a biologist or zoologist who discovered the first flying penguin would become (justifiably) famous because we would all be (justifiably) surprised. The surprise would not originate merely from something out of the ordinary — new and extraordinary creatures, both living and extinct, are discovered every year. The surprise would originate from the upending of a firmly established scientific fact.

III.5. Generics are Teleological

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

To see this second kind of natural normativity, begin with the concept of a function. Eyes perform the function (in an organism) of seeing, hemlock trees perform the function (in an ecosystem) of shading rivers, and so on. Thompson, for example, cites the scientific observation that "flowers have blossoms of such-and-such type in order that such-and-such insects should be attracted and spread their pollen about."[32]

While some philosophers of science have thought that teleological normativity could be explained in terms of function, I would suggest that the reverse is rather true: the structure of a function is teleological. There are many senses of the term 'function', but the kind

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

of biological functions under review are teleological, or least teleonomic, in that it is an arrangement of parts toward a particular purpose or end.

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

> By "teleology," I have in mind such words and concepts as "purpose," "end," "goal," "function," "control," and "regulation," as well as the real-world biological phenomena to which these words and concepts refer. This means that the word "teleology" should always be construed here in its internal or "immanent" sense—purposiveness existing in living beings themselves—and never in its external or "transcendent" sense of an overarching cosmic principle.[33]

Ernst Mayr (following Colin Pittendridgh) calls a process "teleonomic" if it is not a process of intentional purposes.[34] He says, "I have therefore refrained from using anthropomorphic language, Particularly the terms of purpose and intention, when explaining teleonomic phenomena in animals and plants."[35]

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

> All objects of the physical world are endowed with the capacity to change their state, and these changes strictly obey natural laws. They are end-directed only in a passive, automatic way, regulated by external forces or conditions… All teleomatic processes come to an end when the potential is used

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

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

35. Ibid., 123.

> up (as in the cooling of a heated piece of iron) or when the process is stopped by encountering an external impediment (as when a falling object hits the ground). The law of gravity and the second law of thermodynamics are among the natural laws which most frequently govern teleomatic processes.[36]

For my purposes, however, even teleonomic programs would count as instances of natural normativity insofar as the development of an organism at one time is incomplete but will be complete in future. As Waddington puts it, "the end state of the process is determined by its properties at the beginning."[37] Normative, in my sense, is not the antonym of "descriptive"; normative is the antonym of descriptive *at present*. "The egg is not a chicken" is true at present. But "chickens start their life as eggs" is also generically true. Hence "the egg is a chicken" is a kind of teleological judgment about what it may, under proper conditions, become. As Chris Toner says, "natural-historical judgments readily admit of combination into teleological judgments."[38]

Taken broadly, then, the first point is to realize that talk about functions and ends is just as scientific as talk about life-forms, species, and natural health or disease. Mayr quickly rebuts many of the common objections (I should rather say prejudices) against teleonomic processes. For instance, teleological statements and explanations, he says, do not "imply the endorsement of unverifiable theological or metaphysical doctrines in science."[39] Rather, as Mark Perlman says:

> Many objects in the world have functions. Some of the objects with functions are organs or parts of living organisms… Hearts are for pumping blood. Eyes are for seeing. Countless works in biology explain the "Form, Function, and Evolution of …" everything from bee dances to elephant tusks to pandas' 'thumbs.' Many scientific explanations, in areas as diverse as psy-

36. Ibid., 125.

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

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

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

> chology, sociology, economics, medical research, and neuroscience, rest on appeals to the function and/or malfunction of things or systems.[40]

Mayr's highly suggestive alternative to conscious purposes is natural "programs." A program is "coded or prearranged information" that regulates an organism's behavior or development up to a pre-defined end-point.[41] Mayr's examples include the development of bones, organs, and shapes that come with physiological maturity, migration. Programs are "the result of natural selection." However, they contain information: "not only blueprints of the goal but also the instructions of how to use the information of the blue print."[42] The concept of a program, he assures us, is similar to concepts deployed by geneticists and computer programmers. The point is that the telos is not some mysterious spirit hovering above the organism, beckoning it to reach its full potential but coded into the organism from the beginning.

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

Generic propositions usefully capture the functional or teleological properties of natural organisms. As Chris Toner says, "natural-historical judgments readily admit of combination into teleological judgments."[43] This kind of combination of generic truths is very familiar. No sooner have I learned the formal facts about a penguin (that it is a bird, that it can swim, that it has a countershaded white belly and dark back etc.) do I learn that *penguins are countershaded in order to avoid predators from above and below.*[44] Since

40. Mark Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," *The Monist* 87, no. 1 (2004): 1–4.

41. Mayr, "The Idea of Teleology," 127–8.

42. Ibid., 128.

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

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

an individual penguin may fail to be countershaded in the way that expresses its form, it would be defective. This defect is not a judgment made by scientists and "imposed" as it were, from the outside, on the penguin. It is rather a normative fact about the penguin. As Hursthouse says, "Wolves hunt in packs; a 'free-rider' wolf that doesn't join in the hunt fails to act well and is thereby defective."[45]

There is one objection that is easy to forestall. Someone might point out that genetic drift results in species evolving every which way, including the emergence of adaptive, maladaptive, and adaptation-neutral traits. This is true, so far as it goes, but not really an objection. Two replies are, I think, sufficient. First, it is an inextricable part of the scientific process to reason out which traits are instances of natural goodness and which are not. Just because one hundred percent of organisms eventually die doesn't mean that death is naturally good for them. Just because a high statistical number of organisms have a particular feature – a stripe or a scale or what have you – doesn't necessarily mean that the feature is a formal one of the species. Rather, one must keep an eye open to larger samples, possible counterexamples, and one must keep one's generics tentative until they are very well grounded. Similarly, part of the scientific process is reasoning out which traits are *adaptive*. Even the way the objection is phrased assumes that some traits are adaptive – that is adaptive *survival and reproduction.* Allowing even this minimal sense of normativity concedes my point that the normativity is discovered by the scientist rather than purely ascribed by him or her. A second response is that the generics under discussion are not about species-qua-fluid-across-millennia but about species-qua-fixed or apparently fixed within a given period. The fluidity of species over time, like a slow-motion film with thousands of frames, requires countless generations. For all we can observe of most species in the course of a human lifetime (say) or even since the birth of modern science in the 16th century, the species-at-present are fixed enough.

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

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

IV. Three Paths Forward

I have made a case for normative realism that identifies some normative properties (such as formal and teleological properties of organisms) as respectable natural properties. I call this normativity 'organic normativity' and the resulting naturalism 'organic naturalism.' This label distinguishes organic naturalism from an "enchanted" view of nature wherein even rocks, chemicals, and stars instantiate normative properties.[46]

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

46. The proponent of a view of nature in which all material objects instantiate normative properties would reject the label "enchanted". "Enchantment", of course, presumes that an object has no intrinsic evaluative properties but receives them, like a spell, from the evaluator. We cannot settle the issue by presumption. Nevertheless, I am attempting to articulate the issue in terms sympathetic to my reader who is willing to consider the possibility that normative properties are intrinsic to living organisms.

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

IV.1. Reject

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

For example, we would have to deny that animals, plants, insects, all living things (and even ecosystems) exhibit end-directed or teleonomic behavior: eyes see, hemlock trees offer shade to fish, stomachs digest, deer leap to avoid predators. This denial is almost incredible. If all generics are false (or only conventionally true) then it is in some important sense false that 'wolves hunt in packs' and false even that 'penguins are birds.' It is false not only that "eyes see" but even that "humans are primates." Such denials are, I think, absurdities.[47] Even when Kant denies natural teleology – the biological theory that the form of an organism causes the parts to grow and relate to each other in a particular way – he admits we *cannot help thinking so*.[48] To categorically reject *all truths* about natural kinds and natural functions, I contend, is untenable. And some generics are, it seems, necessarily normative propositions.

If we accept the truth of at least some generics, then Perlman's surprise is well

47. That is not to say that the denial is not worth considering. It might well be true. My point in calling the denial 'absurd' is to say that if it is true, an absurdity is true. If it is true, then the truth is absurd. And reality itself might well be absurd. I don't believe it is, but there have been many philosophers who have thought so. To pursue the matter is beyond my scope.

48. Philippe Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose: From Comparative Anatomy to the 'Adventure of Reason'," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 37, no. 4 (2006): 649–74.

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

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

IV.2. Reduce

The third path, and the most plausible rival to realism, is to develop a reductionist account of apparently natural norms. This path accepts the appearance of such things as natural kinds, natural teleology, natural functions, etc., but *reduces* these phenomena to less spooky (read: more mechanistic) phenomena consistent with a conception of bald nature. For this section, I ignore natural kinds and focus simply on teleological normativity. So we can call reductionism of such natural norms "teleological reductionism" or "teleoreduction", following James Barham.[50] Arguing for or against teleoreductionism has become a cottage

49. Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology. 6.

50. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology. chapter 3. My discussion will closely follow this chapter; however, Barham's discussion is far too rich to be condensed into the space available here.

industry.[51]

I do not think that teleological reductionism is as plausible as teleological realism; nor that it is very plausible in its own right. Nevertheless, the arguments for teleoreductionism are sophisticated, and some proponents hold out hope for even better arguments to come. More to the point, some of its proponents affirm reductionism because of an operating background belief that, globally, reductive physicalism is a victorious view, despite ongoing local skirmishes. My objections to teleological reductionism amount to the accusation of a non-sequitur. But I do not think these objections are likely to overturn someone's background beliefs. Since I agree pretty well with Barham's analysis, I will summarize his view of the dialectic:

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

This seems right to me. I am content to defend the claim that naturalistic teleological realism (and more broadly normative realism) is a live option even for the non-reductive scientific naturalist. Hence, the remainder of this chapter will examine some reasons for preferring realism to reductionism when considering normative realism in isolation, even if these reasons are not enough to overcome someone's background commitment to the contrary.

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

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

52. Ibid., 110.

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

The two primary candidates for teleoreduction are causal-role reductions and natural selection reductions.

IV.3. Causal-Role Reduction

Causal-role or causal-contribution explanations (endorsed by Donald Davidson, Robert Cummins and others) reduce teleological relations such as "in order to" and "for" and "to the end of" to bare cause-effect relations. For example, the function of the heart is defined in reference to its role in the oxygenation of a vertebrate's blood.

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

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

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

53. Ibid., 109.
54. ibid., 111.
55. Robert Cummins, "Functional Analysis," *The Journal of Philosophy* 72, no. 20 (1975): 741.

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

It does no good to assert that part A has a causal role within organism B *after one has already presupposed an irreducibly functional analysis*. The teleoreductionist is obliged rather to show how one can distinguish teleological and non-teleological part-whole relations in absence of or prior to such presuppositions. The teleological realist also affirms that hearts, say, play a causal role in the vertebrate's body. The teleological realist's point is that the heart is a part of the body with an irreducibly functional part – it pumps *in order to* circulate blood. It is *the blood pump* of the body. The teleological realist is free to identify the function of a particular body part, and then to characterize the part-whole relation in irreducibly functional terms; the teleological reductionist cannot do likewise. Relatedly, we should note that the notion of a "role" seems to be teleological. The proposition that 'the heart plays a role within the organism's circulatory system' seems, on the face, synonymous with the proposition that 'the heart *has a function* within the circulatory system.'

IV.4. Natural Selection Reduction

The other alternative (or perhaps supplement) to the causal-role answer is by appealing to the historical genesis of the organ in question. natural selection stories (endorsed by Ruth Millikan and others) provide a causal-history explanation of a present day teleonomic function. Similarly, purely mechanistic natural selection pressures may result in the construction of

a genetic "program" or action that has some adaptive or useful outcome without consisting of teleological process.

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

The question is whether natural selection is even the right kind of explanation for, say, the pumping of the heart. Natural selection is not really a *selection* at all in the sense that *no one* is doing the selecting. Instead, natural selection is a scientific description of the process by which present day populations were preserved while others died out. So much is clear in outline, but the details matter. Specifically, natural selection explains heritable traits that (i) varied in the past and which (ii) played a role in the reproductive rates of the population.[56] It does not (and is not even supposed to) explain the bare existence of an initial organism or population of organisms. Rather, the initial organism or population is taken for granted, along with its complete set of reproductive and other traits. Natural selection comes in to show how the organism varies, passes on heritable traits, and gives

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

rise to new phenotypes. Thus Barham says:

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

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

When we are wondering how or why it is that the heart seems to have a definite function (to circulate blood) that is discernible from other side-effects (to make heartsounds), the question is about organismic behavior in general. Chemicals and compounds do not grow and develop and perform characteristic activities in the structured way that organisms do. My answer is that such normativity is a fundamental natural feature of organic life, a kind of brute natural law discovered a posteriori by the scientific method. The natural selection reductionist's answer is that the teleonomic function of hearts emerged out of a long history of phenotypic variation. My question is: so what? Mechanistic forces that are taking place between a population and its environment (droughts, famines) or within a population's genetics (genetic drift, normal reproduction) are compatible with a parallel teleological forces. Indeed, Barham suggests that the burgeoning field of evolutionary developmental biology might be able to supply some of the connections between these two kinds of process. He calls "phenotypic accommodation" the distinct process of "inherent compensatory or adaptive capacity of organisms" – or simply homeostasis.[58] The scientific hypothesis some are investigating[59] seems to be that these two processes are separately necessary but only jointly sufficient causes to explain the presence of a trait (like pumping hearts) in a population.

57. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology., 125.
58. Ibid., 131.
59. James A Shapiro, "Revisiting the Central Dogma in the 21st Century," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1178, no. 1 (2009): 6–28.

Another proponent of natural selection reduction strategies is Ruth Millikan.[60] Millikan's famous concept of "proper function" essentially references an object's empirical history. She says that "definition of 'proper function' looks to history rather than merely to present properties or dispositions to determine function."[61] A function is a "recursive" concept, since the function of a present day organ is defined in reference to ancestor's functions; and "non-historical analyses" fail in important ways. Barham's summary of Millikan's historical view is this: "a present trait's being a function to be equivalent to its having been naturally selected due to the fitness advantage conferred on an organism by the physical effects of the ancestral trait of the same type from which the present trait-token is descended."[62]

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

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

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60. Ruth Garrett Millikan, *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories: New Foundations for Realism* (MIT press, 1984).

61. Ruth Garrett Millikan, "In Defense of Proper Functions," *Philosophy of Science*, 1989, 289.

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

> Take any object, then, that has a proper function or functions, a purpose or purposes, and consider a double of it, molecule for molecule exactly the same. Now suppose that this double has just come into being through a cosmic accident resulting in the sudden spontaneous convergence of molecules which, until a moment ago, had been scattered about in random motion. Such a double has no proper functions because its history is not right. It is not a reproduction of anything, nor has it been produced by anything having proper functions.[63]

Millikan bolsters her case by offering an account of just what kind of definition she aims to provide and defending her view against wild hypothetical counterexamples. Nevertheless, it still seems to me that the concept of a function employed when we use terms and phrases such as 'function' and 'purpose' and 'in order to' is different from the concept of that function having been produced in such-and-such a way. These concepts come apart in several ways: Useless vestigial organs have an empirical history but no present day functional capacity; spandrels have a present-day functional capacity with no direct, primary selection history; the language capacities in say, the right hemisphere of the brain brain *can* be taken over by the left hemisphere in the case of injury or lobotomy, presumably because the brain is (present-day) adaptable and not because the brain function redundancy was selected for in every individual case. These counterexamples demonstrate *at least* that function and history conceptually can come apart.

What is the alternative? In Barham's view, functions are "essentially modal, not historical, concepts"[64]. He quotes Fodor's vivid statement that: "my heart's function has less to do with its evolutionary origins than with the current truth of such counterfactuals as that if it were to stop pumping my blood, I'd be dead."[65] If we made contact with extraterrestrials whose blood-like liquid was circulated by a pump-like organ, how could we

63. Millikan, "In Defense of Proper Functions," 292.
64. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology., 139.
65. Jerry A Fodor, *The Mind Doesn't Work That Way: The Scope and Limits of Computational Psychology* (MIT press, 2001), 86-7; cited in Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology., 138.

discern whether it was a heart? We could query about the historical genesis of the organ on that planet, but we would first rightly query: *what would happen if that organ stopped pumping?* If the Alpha Centaurians, too, would die without the beating of that organ, we would justifiably call the organ a 'heart' even though it had a very different history.

Barham cautions against "imagining that 'selection history' could confer normative value on a biological function in the same way that pedigree confers value on a horse, or provenance on a painting."[66] "History" is not a special power but is simply the set of physical interactions over time. The question about which set of physical interactions over time produced X might be (and I think is) intimately related to questions about the function of X; the point is that they are two different questions. Michael Thompson, too, insists that judgments about natural teleology are made true from the form of life under question, not from "hypotheses about the past."[67] This seems right to me. It does not matter for present purposes *how* the function came to be, just whether or not it really *is* at present. Barham is right to point out that the problem with Aristotle's views of biology (say, believing that the seat of perception was not in the brain) was not that he lacked knowledge of evolution, but that he lacked an adequate knowledge of physiology.

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

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66. Ibid., 140.

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

In closing, I would like to offer a bit of reassurance to those who might be anxious about the prospect of accepting naturalistic normative realism whole clothe. My reassurance boils down to the fact that appeal to natural normativity is a live *scientific* belief.

Teleological realism in biology fell into disfavor with Francis Bacon's superstitious belief that the search for final causes corrupted science.[^24] The proper reply to Bacon is that the teleological nihilism hypothesis has been tried and found wanting. Modern science is no less teleological than it was in the 16th century; perhaps even more so. Arnhart persuasively argues that teleology is an irreplaceable assumption in medicine.[68] Zammito clarifies its ongoing relevance in biology, since organisms seem to be intrinsically purposeful.[69] Fitzpatrick says that, "While neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory does soundly reject any appeal to teleology in the process of evolution itself, there is a large literature in contemporary philosophy of biology defending the legitimacy of employing teleological concepts in connection with adaptations."[70] Darwin himself might have been a teleologist.[71] Whether Darwin's theory of natural selection *undermines* and debunks or *underwrites* and justifies the teleological view at least debatable. Thomas Nagel took a lot of heat for his recent philosophical defense of scientific, Darwinian, natural teleology.[72] However, Michael Chorost does not accuse Nagel of obscurantism but chastises him for *failing to cite the science*. He says:

68. Larry Arnhart, "Aristotle's Biopolitics: A Defense of Biological Teleology Against Biological Nihilism," *Politics and the Life Sciences* 6, no. 2 (1988): pp. 173–229.

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

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

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

72. Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

> Natural teleology is unorthodox, but it has a long and honorable history. For example, in 1953 the evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley argued that it's in the nature of nature to get more advanced over time. "If we take a snapshot view, improvement eludes us," he wrote. "But as soon as we introduce time, we see trends of improvement…"[73]

While natural teleological realism is still controversial, it is not a controversy between science and philosophy but a controversy *within science*.

IV.5. Coming to Terms with Teleology

The goal of this chapter was to argue that there are such things as natural norms. Realism about natural normativity does not *bridge* the much vaunted is-ought gap but rather undercuts it. The is-ought gap might simply turn out to derive from an obsolete view of science. Hence, it is at least possible that ethical naturalism can derive normative human 'oughts' from natural normative facts.

In my broader argument, natural norms serve as counterexamples to the common belief that all natural facts are descriptive (non-normative) facts. Despite their disagreement about normativity and morality, the naturalistic normative anti-realist and the non-naturalistic normative grant this common belief that all natural facts are non-normative facts. This gives rise to the is-ought gap arises as a matter of logical necessity. However, there is good reason to push back on this common belief. Instances of natural normativity include familiar scientific facts about organisms, such as that they have a life form and display natural teleological properties. The three possible responses to such putative natural norms are to accept them (as I have recommended), reject them, or reduce them. Going in for global normative anti-realism would require adopting scientific anti-realism as well, which is a formidable philosophical view I have not even attempted to consider here. Scientific realists tend to choose a reductive strategy, but I have given reasons to think reduction

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

has not yet been accomplished and is not likely to. In the mean time, it seems clear that naturalistic normative realism is not only the view commended by best philosophical reflection but also, interestingly, the view assumed in normal scientific inquiry.

Chapter 3

Practical Primates

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

I. Introduction

The last chapter defended the very possibility of ethical naturalism; this chapter must defend its plausibility. We first had to consider the notion of natural normativity in general; this chapter extends that notion to a particular species of natural norms, namely, human norms.

The strategy for identifying natural human norms is fairly simple: uncover generic propositions about human beings that are both scientifically true *and* normatively or ethically significant. For example, we need Aristotelian Categoricals or generics that answer questions like these: what is a human being? All else depends on the life form of our species. Also, what kinds of activities does "the human" being do? What kind of life does it live? What is its natural end, if it has one – or what are they? The answers would be both descrip-

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

Section 2 the observation that human beings are natural organisms. That is, humans are primates who enjoy the properties common to the entire tree of life, including natural norms such as pursuing life and survival and reproduction. Nevertheless, humans also enjoy other, more peculiar, properties relating to our speaking, innovating, deliberating, and so on.

Section 3 supplements the notion of being a primate with the notion of being 'practically rational.' What cluster of activities constitute the activity of 'practical reasoning'? I argue that there are at least four: speaking, rational practicing, social living, and innovating. Hence, the human being is a primate (animal) who engages in such practices: a practical primate. This conception of human nature is seamlessly both normative and descriptive. Human beings find themselves in a nexus of normativity that is both "natural" (i.e., automatic, default, not created by us) and normative (i.e., binding, non-optional). This conception is also knowable both from "within" and "outside" the human point of view allows us to see what is unique about human beings, their capacities, and ends. If, even with these differences, humans fit the larger pattern of natural normativity defended in chapter 2, then evaluation of individual human beings is possible by comparison to the human life form.

Section 4 attempts to sympathetically articulate and respond to a few critical objections philosophers have had about the neo-Aristotelian project of grounding ethical evaluations in a normatively loaded conception of human nature. For example, some think that there are no such thing as a "nature", as I have deployed that concept; others think that there are natures but that there is no *human nature*; others think that human nature exists but it has no teleological boundaries; others think that human nature has *some* teleological

boundaries, but only reproduction and survival. Each of these receives an initial rebuttal, though a few of them will require further comment in chapter 6. I concede that human norms are only a beginning, however. Because humans are in control of their actions, the generic truths about "the human" seems to be variable. Perhaps human norms are irrelevant to how you or I or any individual *ought* to live. If so, more work is needed to justify even putatively universal natural human norms.

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

II. Animals of a Peculiar Sort

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

> The idea that any features and operations of humans could be evaluated in the same way as those of plants and animals may provoke instant opposition. For to say that this is possible is to imply that some at least of our judgements of goodness and badness in human beings are given truth or falsity by the conditions of human life. And even if it is allowed that certain evaluations of this kind are possible—-those vaguely thought of perhaps as 'merely biological'—-there is bound to be skepticism about the possibility that 'moral evaluation' could be like this.[1]

1. Foot, *Natural Goodness* 38.

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

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

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

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

My view is that human beings are animals of a peculiar sort where the peculiarities do not erase the commonalities. The traditional formula that humans are "rational animals" is close to correct. As such, both the *animal* part of that formula is essential and the *rational* part. To see why, let's first consider in a bit more detail what it means to be an animal, and why it matters. Then we will look at what it means to be the peculiar sort of animal we are.

2. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* 217.

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

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

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

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

3. As Michael Mautner explains, all living things (on earth at least) share common ancestors and even share genetic material: ."..phylogenetic trees indicate that all terrestrial life can be traced to a common ancestor. Organisms as different from us as yeasts share half; mice, over 90%, chimpanzees, over 95%, and different human individuals share over 99% of our genome. These scientific insights give a deeper meaning to the unity of all Life. Our complex molecular patterns are common to all organic gene/protein life and distinguish us from any other phenomena of nature." Michael N Mautner, "Life-Centered Ethics, and the Human Future in Space," *Bioethics* 23, no. 8 (2009): 433–40 434-5.

which is the condition of all other goods. In this way, mortality is a condition of ethical life; prima facie, one ought not behave in such a way as to make others die (or to put others at risk of dying) before their life cycle is complete.

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

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

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

Furthermore, a scientific account of humanity cannot leave out that humans have large brains relative to other primates, with a neocortex and prefrontal cortex that correlate with abstract thinking, problem solving, society, and culture. A scientific account cannot

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

leave out that humans don't just suffer physiological responses like fear and excitement or arousal, they willfully seek out such emotions for themselves through art and entertainment and willfully cause them in others. Presumably, even an alien anthropologist who knew nothing of human language or "what it is like to be a human" would be able to notice, upon examination, that a human's laugh or cry is different from a hyena's laugh or a crocodile's tears. Part of the alien anthropologist's examination would be to examine the body, brain, and hands of human beings. One of the first things we can imagine they would notice is that humans live in cultures and societies. They are not merely "social animals" like apes; they are language-users, communicating in signs and symbols. Their language is an extremely complex, open-ended system which is both recursive (able to nest propositions within propositions) and productive (able to create sentences by potentially limitless combinations of words). In virtue of language and their opposable thumbs, they are creative; they don't just live on the ground or under ground, but build houses and shelters, sometimes in new places, such as caves, trees, hills, mountains, etc. Also, they are self-reflective. They establish social relations upon biological grounds (some children growing up with natural parents) and upon normative grounds (some orphans growing up in orphanages created by philanthropists). Even before introducing the "human" point of view, we can describe "the human" form of life in some detail. My hope is that these generics are plausibly knowable from an "objective" or third-person point of view of scientific exploration, data gathering, inductive generalization. They seem to have at least *potential* ethical significance; even so, the most ethically significant fact about us is the peculiar differentia of our species: practical rationality.

II.1. Peculiarities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the Brain (WW Norton & Company, 1998).

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

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

The fourth feature is rational creation or innovation. Innovative creation is intrinsically related, I think, to speech, sociality, and rational practice. That is, one of the forms practical reasoning takes is that we *innovate* — we create and design and plan actions, new behaviors, new games, new languages, new activities, and so on. The structural features of our grammatical system allows us to create new propositions from a finite set of words, without which we could not tell stories or write philosophy papers. Furthermore, living within a social order, practical primates create living spaces, utensils, farming implements, and so on. We even create new social orders.

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

12. Lott, "Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form," 415. Original emphasis.

III. Objections

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Generics describe a life form well only when the sample includes exemplary instances of the species — not the young, immature, ill, injured, genetically defective, radiation poisoned, comatose, mentally ill, and so on. However, such are still recognizably members of the species. Humans are "bipedal" by nature even when someone (say, a war veteran) is no longer bipedal. Anencephalic babies who lack the subvenient brain structure necessary for rational consciousness are "rational" by nature even though they will never exemplify their potential for practical reasoning. Abnormal members of our species are recognizably *human* – they are not opossums or dandelions. Indeed, without well-grounded knowledge of the life form expressed in generic propositions, it would be impossible to describe any individual as abnormal, immature, ill or injured.

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

Researchers do not judge the characteristics of a newly discovered species of beetle by examining its young. They might, at first, mistake the initial specimen for a fully mature adult; but the correction would come from a further application of scientific methods. The capture of a larger beetle that appears to be *of the same kind* would suggest that the initial specimen was either a child or a runt. After collecting a sufficient sample of specimens (say,

a dozen or preferably more) the researchers would be in the position to make justifiable fundamentally normative judgments about *which of these individual beetles is exemplary of the species.*

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

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

III.1. No Organic Natures

There are a few other objections a reader might have at this juncture. The first objection is simply that we cannot identify "human nature" with any scientific accuracy because there is no human nature. This objection has three iterations.

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

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

> The concepts of unchanging essences and of complete discontinuities between every *eidos* (type) and all others make genuine evolutionary thinking impossible. I agree with those who claim that the essentialist philosophies of Aristotle and Plato are incompatible with evolutionary thinking.[15]

Arthur Ward is a recent critic who agrees with Mayr on this point. Ward argues that "naturalists should reject the idea of 'human nature,' and indeed should reject that any organism or its parts or operations has a nature, purpose, proper function, or the like."[16] I have already pointed out that rejecting all organic natures and purposes is not necessarily the only rational, scientific option; indeed, such a rejection seems to me to be motivated by philosophical materialism far more than it is motivated by any respect for actual biological science.

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

III.2. No Natural Teleology

A second sort of critic accepts natural kinds but denies that these kinds have teleological features. For example, Bernard Williams asserts that: "The first and hardest lesson of Darwinism, that there is no such teleology at all, and that there is no orchestral score provided

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

16. Arthur Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory" (PhD thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2013), 1.

from anywhere according to which human beings have a special part to play, still has to find its way into ethical thought."[17]

He says elsewhere:

> The idea of a naturalistic ethics was born of a deeply teleological outlook, and its best expression, in many ways, is still to be found in Aristotle's philosophy, a philosophy according to which there is inherent in each natural kind of thing an appropriate way for things of that kind to behave.[18]

This sort of critic thinks that there are natures or natural kinds and stable species with objective properties, but does accept the notion that functional or teleological properties feature in purely biological descriptions of organisms.

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

Strictly speaking, evolutionary theory is a set of theses explaining the current multiplicity and shape of terrestrial life. It says absolutely nothing about teleological causes or properties.[19] There is room, in other words, within evolutionary theory for discussions

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

18. Cf. Bernard Williams, "Evolution Ethics and the Representation Problem," in *Making Sense of Humanity: And Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 109.

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

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

There is another point to make. Williams despairs of finding human nature, including a human telos, because he thinks that modern biological science somehow demands such despair. Rosalind Hursthouse correctly points out that Williams' worry is not actually rooted in the progress of modern science. Williams himself admits that "many of course have come to that conclusion before… that human beings are to some degree a mess… for whom no form of life is likely to prove entirely satisfactory, either individually or socially."[21] If many have come to that (philosophical) conclusion before, without the benefit of modern science, why would we think modern science is definitive for this philosophical conclusion? If modern science provides additional warrant for rational despair that was unavailable to our ancestors, what exactly is that evidence? It is not enough to gesture. According to Hursthouse, Williams' worry is not an argument at all but an expression of moral nihilism. It may be a rational despair, but the rationality or irrationality cannot simply be read off the biological facts; it must be settled by philosophical argument. To amass scientific evidence for p and then to assert the philosophical conclusion that q is a non sequitur.

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in God was popular among biologists of a certain era, it does not follow that theological claims are strictly biological claims.

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

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

III.3. Only Biological Nature

A third iteration of the "no human nature" objection is that if there is such thing as "human nature", it is nothing more or less than our biological and physiological makeup. Tim Lewens argues that "the only biologically respectable notion of human nature that remains is an extremely permissive one that names the reliable dispositions of the human species as a whole. This conception offers no ethical guidance…"[22]

On Lewens' view, the only talk about our "nature" that would be scientific would be an indeterminate series of complicated stories about our genetics, evolutionary history, and neurophysiology, perhaps even including cultural, geographical, and ecological settings. The problem, as we have seen, is that an empirical "scientific" conception of human nature has nothing to do with *ethics*. All of the complicated stories we could tell – if they are genuinely scientific – would be purely *descriptive*.[23]

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

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

Williams objects that norms bestowed by the process of evolution would be those that lead us to survive and reproduce. Along similar lines, Fitzpatrick articulates a worry that evolution

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

23. This worry is developed in detail by Hursthouse (*On Virtue Ethics* Chapter 10) and Stephen Brown (*Moral Virtue and Nature* chapter 5) and Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory.. All three think that ethics is not ultimately scientific.

has bestowed upon us a very specific, ordered power but it is not the power to flourish but the power to reproduce. He says:

> If, however, natural functions and ends in living things are structured by special relations established through the process of evolution through natural selection, i.e., non-incidental relations between traits and a special subset of their effects that figured into the selection process, then natural teleology will not ultimately or generally be about the welfare or flourishing of organisms.[24]

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

A third proponent of this worry is Stephen R. Brown. Brown's defense of virtue ethics is ambivalent. He seems to *wish* he could make the account genuinely normative but concedes that it is, in the end, merely descriptive discipline.[25] Even virtue ethics, after being appropriately "naturalized", does not *commend* the virtues so much as *detail* the traits which happen to be adaptive for creatures like us to survive and propagate our genotype.[26] Brown thinks that human beings do have a characteristic form of life involving highly rarefied neurological and cognitive processes we do not observe in other animals; but, nevertheless, he thinks that biology reveals that species are the only natural kinds, and species aim to survive and reproduce.

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

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

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

26. Stephen Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue," *Ethica* 4 (2005): 7–22.

III.4. Responses

At least two comments are required to untangle this objection.

First, even granting that reproduction is the only natural end of non-human organisms, Lewens et. al., assume that human beings are *merely* animals. This can be queried. Above, I asked the innocuous question: 'Are human beings natural organisms?' There are really three possible ways one could answer the question: non-reductive naturalism, reductive naturalism, and non-naturalism. A non-naturalist or religious philosopher could concede that humans are *partly* natural but would argue that human beings are exceptional in some way – in virtue of being endowed by God with the *Imago Dei*, or enjoying unique cognitive faculties such as practical reasoning. The reductive naturalist would insist that "human beings are natural", meaning that humans are merely machines made of meat, "heaps of glorified clockwork."[27] Smuggled into this assertion is an assumed picture of nature – the Laplacian picture – as a heap of glorified clockwork where all its myriad variegated objects are just parts of the heap.

I have tried to argue above that even bacteria and plants give the lie to this picture. Furthermore, the irony is that if human beings were *merely* animals, and subject to *merely animal* natural norms such as instinctual survival and reproduction, we could not *know* ourselves as such. Yet the objection Lewens et. al. are posing depends on knowing ourselves as both animals and as self-aware practical reasoners.

Hence, my view can accommodate non-naturalism and non-reductive naturalism. The only position *incompatible* with mine is the crassly reductive one that asserts that human beings are not even practically rational. I can agree that human beings as a species are endowed by their history with a natural norm binding them to reproduce. I simply deny that *that is all*. The only way these authors can sneak in the view that *that is all* is by begging

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

the question in favor of a reductive view of humanity. My view, by contrast, is based on empirical observations: Humans are the only ones who engage in recursive, grammatical speaking, who associate in such complex societies, who plan their actions, and who innovate and create. Those observations are enough to render it plain, I think, that our natural telos is not likely to be restricted to only the animal nature we share with the rest of the living world.

So the first response to Lewens et. al. is that human norms do not just arise from our nature as primates but from our nature as *practical, rational* primates. All three objectors commit a subtle fallacy by presuming that the norms that apply to all organisms can only be those that apply to humans.

Secondly, Lewens et. al. assume that the only natural end of organismic life is reproduction. But this can be queried as well. Certainly, living things sustain their own health and life and animals propagate their genes; living things *sustain* their life form and *transmit* their life form. But which is for the sake of which? Do organisms live in order to reproduce or reproduce in order to live? I do not see how one can assume this to be true without further argumentation. Empirically, we observe *both* that each species propagates its genotype *and* that each species lives its own particular form of life aiming at the development of its own good. My view is that reproduction is *one* of the natural ends of organic life, but that each species has other natural goods, such as health, survival, and the living of a characteristic life. Reproduction is a minimal good without which the other goods (which may or may not have anything to do with reproduction) could never come to be.

Above, I defended two kinds of natural normativity: the mere existence of creatures bearing life forms as well as their teleological development into fully matured instantiations thereof. An embryonic mammal *is to become* a fully grown mammal. Hence, a human is a practical primate and a practical primate *is to become* a fully mature practical primate. In other words, one of the "norms" of practical rationality, we can venture, is that we *ought to*

be successfully practically rational. Practical rational activity and success is part of what it means to be a health human being living our characteristic sort of life.

Thirdly, I would try to accommodate the insights of Lewens et. al. by conceding that reproduction is *one* of our natural ends. However, we need not jump to the conclusion that it is the *only* natural end or the only fundamental natural end. "Human beings reproduce" is an instance of a broader natural generic truth we can articulate by saying: "organisms survive and reproduce." Human reproduction as a generic pattern is compatible with exceptions: The celibate, the pre-pubescent, the single, the infertile couple, the homosexual couple, and others do not themselves reproduce. Nevertheless it may be true that humans reproduce (like every other organism). That *any particular individual* does not reproduce is not an automatic sign of defect. It seems to me that if, *as a species*, we ceased to reproduce, something would have gone wrong.[28]

Saying this requires making distinction between the individual member of the species and the species itself. Is the human norm to become virtuous merely species-specific and not specific to the individual? This surfaces other issues we cannot fully delve into here. Suffice it to say that virtues that are required for the health of the community or species are distinct from individual virtues. What is required for *every* practical primate is that we become fully mature reasoners and hence practically wise.

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

III.5. Knowing from Inside

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

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

III.6. Our Nature is Unknown

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

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

which to fill in the depth and breadth of facts and information.

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

IV. Natural Norms, Human Norms

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

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

evaluate a particular human's life and actions by reference to its life form. So much applies to both humans and other organisms.

Things get really interesting – and much more tricky – when we consider humans as reasoners. I have used the term 'practical primate' to encompass all the ways in which human beings distinguish themselves by being scientists, moral agents, planners, creative writers, deliberators, speakers, political agents, and so on. As mammals, human beings pursue mammalian goods. As practical rational agents, human beings also pursue practical rational goods: wisdom, friendship, world travel, education, entertainment. These seem categorically different. Are they so different as to ruin the pattern of naturalistic evaluation? Michael Thompson thinks not:

> … will and practical reason are on the face of it just two more faculties or powers a living being may bear, on a level with the powers of sight and hearing and memory. The second crucial thought is that an individual instance of any of the latter powers — sight, hearing, memory — is intuitively to be judged as defective or sound, good or bad, well-working or ill-working, by reference to its bearer's life-form or kind or species.[29]

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

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

from our animal or biological nature. But I have argued that there is good reason to affirm a kind of prima facie natural normativity binding on human beings.

The new natural criteria by which to judge the human organism include reference to its practical life form. For example, consider generics such as these: "The human being acts upon reflection"; "the human being speaks a language"; "the human being lives in society", and so on. These natural human norms are well on the way to being genuinely ethical. Deviations from them represent genuinely *human* defects. Folk morality recognizes something wrong with the jolly fool who willfully acts before deliberating, or the blowhard who willfully speaks without restraint, or the paranoid hermit who willfully avoids all human society. Naturalistic evaluation explains *what exactly* is wrong. Such persons are not living up to their own human life form.

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

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

mature practical, rational primates. The conceptions of human nature (as practical reasoning animals) must be defined in relation to virtue (the excellences of rational practice and practical reason) and to human nature as it could be, our natural telos (to be excellent and mature practical, rational primates).

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

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

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

I grant that the notion that virtues are "the human" qualities is a reversal on the all-too-common mistake that "human" qualities are neutral with respect to moral praise or blame. The reason for this reversal is, as I tried to argue above, that all life forms discovered

by scientific investigation and articulated in generic propositions are inherently normative. Hence, the concept of human nature cannot and should not be value-neutral. Rather, as Micah Lott points out, the concept of human nature:

> …must embody a normatively significant understanding of human life and action. For any conception of human form is a natural-historical account of 'how the human lives.' As with 'the tiger' or 'the mayfly,' a natural-history of 'the human' provides an interpretation of the characteristic and non-defective life-cycle of the species.[30]

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

Human virtues would also be those qualities that enable one to perform characteristically rational activities such as speaking, socializing, thoughtful acting, and creating. By nature, we are inherently self-aware language-users who grow up and live in a language-community with a history and tradition, and who are curious to know what is true about ourselves and our world. We are also extravagantly innovative, creating myriad tools, forms of art, and other products for our use and enjoyment. We are inherently conscious and self-conscious beings who speak, interpret, and create in the context of a linguistic community such as a family, society, and culture. And as *practical* rational animals, we are inherently goal-oriented and self-determining beings who are to some degree able to acquire new traits or lose them, able to achieve our natural ends or fail to achieve them, able to become aware of the "givenness" of our biology and work with or against it, and are able to treat an entire biological life not only as an event but as a project. Although we are pushed about by our

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

biological instincts and by social pressures, we do not *simply* stumble around through life; at times we also act on *reasons*. That is, we deliberate about future actions, and reflect on past actions, and become puzzled about what is called for in the present. The success of our actions is not guaranteed, and the reasonableness of our justifications is not guaranteed. Rather, we muddle through on the best evidence we have.

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

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

V. Conclusion

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

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

so on.

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

Chapter 4

Virtue and Vice

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

I. Introduction: Virtue as the Human Norm

My thesis in this chapter a normative one: virtues for practical rational primates are excellent rational practices and practical reasoning – while irrational practices and practical irrationality are natural vices.

The previous chapter laid out the criteria a naturalistic account of virtue would have to satisfy. Just as excellent specimens of any natural organism reflect an inherent natural normativity, excellent human beings would reflect an inherent "human" normativity that arises from our nature as practical, rational primates. Human norms must be *animal* since we are primates but human norms cannot be *merely* animal since we are practical primates with a peculiar form of life. My goal here is to explain how the normative virtue theories of Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre partially satisfy these criteria.[1] I state and discuss each

1. I derive their views from a variety of sources. Foot's concept of virtue and practi-

writer's stance on virtue and reason to show how it is possible to evaluate the kind of life someone lives by comparing that with the normatively human. I then criticize their views and offer my own synthesis.

In section 2, I draw from Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre to show that virtues have (at least) eight properties in common: namely, they are almost always beneficial for their possessor; they are beneficial to all of the species (not just their possessor) and so break down the assumed divide between altruistic or other-regarding virtues and egoistic or self-regarding virtues; virtues constitute excellent human *functioning*; they are especially beneficial in that they are corrective of tempting vices; virtues are not just any positive traits such as those given by luck, nor are they necessarily even *acquired* at all – rather, virtues are *acquirable*; some virtues are excellences of "rational practicing"; others are excellences of practical reasoning about one's whole life; finally, virtues are excellences of "social reasoning" in that they enable the health and progress of societies and traditions.

In section 3, I shall compare and synthesize these accounts into a new and coherent account that satisfies the criteria of ethical naturalism already articulated. My aim is to endorse a single, unified view according to which virtues are excellences of rational practice and practical reasoning, while vices are constituted by irrational practices and defective practical reasoning.

In section 4, I address a few objections that challenge my account or that demand further clarification.

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

II. Virtue and Vice

Foot, MacIntyre, and McDowell each offer detailed accounts of virtue and its relation to reason and nature. For example, Philippa Foot argues that virtues are the acquirable, beneficial, corrective excellences of practical reason.[2] Alasdair MacIntyre argues that virtues are "acquired human qualities" that enable the virtuous person to succeed in individual practices, in life, and in traditions.[3] MacIntyre's robust concepts of virtue and practical reason overlap nicely with Foot's. John McDowell argues that virtue is a kind of perceptual sensitivity to what is required to live well.[4]

McDowell's theses are that: (1) "The point of engaging in ethical reflection… lies in the interest of the question 'How should one live?' " (2) Virtues are kinds of knowledge and *virtue* is a kind of knowledge; and (3) The question of how to live must be approached from "within" a moral outlook and approached "*via* the notion of a virtuous person."[5]

My goal in this section is to articulate a fairly comprehensive treatment of virtue, drawn what these three three writers agree on, but sensitive to what they disagree on. I first state eight points about virtue and the virtues that bring these ethical concepts into clear light.

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

3. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 191.

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

5. Ibid., 331.

II.1. Virtues Benefit Their Possessor; Vices Harm

The first point about virtue is that virtues are beneficial to their possessor. Hursthouse calls this "Plato's requirement" on the virtues. There is something counterintuitive about the notion that X is a virtue that could, in the end, ultimately harm its possessor. She says: "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."[6]

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

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

Virtues enable their possessor to achieve particular *goods.* This clause assumes that virtues are beneficial. For MacIntyre, a virtuous trait *cannot* be directed at achieving ills. Assuming that virtues cannot go bad will bring some trouble for MacIntyre's initial definition in *After Virtue*. As we saw with Foot, it seems quite possible that people who have particular virtues can be, overall, wicked. Can't the thief be courageous, the dictator magnanimous, the glutton affable? MacIntyre indexes virtues to the *goods* internal to practices,

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

but can't practices themselves be wicked? We might say this is this the problem of *when virtues go bad.*

There are two possible responses to this problem. The first response is to allow that virtues can go bad under certain conditions; and so individual virtues although *usually* or *typically* operating toward good ends *can* be corrupted in the absence of a higher-order executive virtue that coordinates virtues toward their proper ends and recognizes if and when a particular virtue has limits. That executive virtue is taken to be practical wisdom. An example of this second response is John McDowell's "Virtue and Reason." The problem of *virtues going bad* does not arise for McDowell, since he builds *practical wisdom* into his definition of virtue; virtues benefit their possessor since they enable one (by definition) to live a good life.

The second response is to stipulate that virtues are always good, such that if a particular action or trait turns out to be bad, then it must not be a virtuous action or trait. The danger of this response is that it seems like a No True Scotsman fallacy. Nevertheless, the beneficialness of virtue *does* seem to be part of the definition of 'virtue.' And to assume that *no traits* are always good would be to beg the question in favor of moral nihilism or relativism. Hence, it seems to me safe to insist on the minimal stipulation: almost all virtues almost always benefit their possessor. Any theory of virtue according to which virtues turn out to harm their possessor *overall* is simply ruled out by this hypothesis. This hedge allows me to concede the intuitive objection that some virtues (honesty) might be corruptible by the presence of overwhelming vices (such as cruelty) or that individual virtues (such as courage) may be *costly* and so cause their possessor pain or discomfort – many a just politician has passed up personal wealth by refusing bribes. However, this minimal stipulation leaves room for me to defend that some virtues (such as practical wisdom) are *always* operative to good ends and that all virtues, if they are truly virtues, are *typically* beneficial.

II.2. Beneficial to Humankind

Plato's requirement is that virtues benefit their possessor. I have allowed that they may cause their possessor to lose out on money, fame, or comfort. A natural follow-up question is whether virtues benefit others or only their possessor. Are virtuous persons beneficial to society or only to themselves? For some virtues, the answer is more clearly *both*. Virtues, by hypothesis, are beneficial to humans as a kind, not just this or that individual. Who is benefited more?

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

For virtues such as justice or charity, the answer might be less clear, but the lack of clarity does not damage the account. Foot says, "It is a reasonable opinion that on the whole a man is better off for being charitable and just, but this is not to say that circumstances may not arise in which he will have to sacrifice everything for charity or justice."[7] Even so, she finds the alleged paradox between what we might wish to call "selfish" and "altruistic" virtues overblown.

Certainly, sometimes life presents us with the opportunity to pursue only one of two contradicting or apparently irreconcilable goods; my own good *versus* your good. Sometimes, however, the cases in which virtuous deeds necessitate the loss of other goods are

7. Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

not so devastating as they might appear. It might be that, on occasion, it is better (say) for my family that I sacrifice my health in working hard to earn higher wages; while on other occasions it is better for my family that I sacrifice higher wages to keep myself healthy. Even when there is a clear, irresolvable tension between my good and the good of the group (as when, say, I must sacrifice my life), we can make sense of the demand of morality by appealing to what is necessary *for humans* in general. As Geach says: "Men need virtues as bees need stings. An individual bee may perish from stinging, all the same bees need stings; an individual man may perish by being brave or justice, but all the same, men need courage and justice."[8] Geach further points out that the clear contrast between my "inclinations" (e.g., to self preservation) is largely an artifact of philosophical thinking; many people are *inclined* both to preserve themselves *and* to obey the moral law.

If people *need* the virtues and even "altruistic" or other-regarding virtues benefit oneself, is it then egoistic or selfish to pursue virtue? Not at all. Some critics have hastily posed an objection to the effect that we only need virtue if we want to be happy. Virtues are formal necessities, like bees need stings. If this is right, then everyone has an obligation to develop virtuous traits such as being moderate, tolerant, and wise. The obligation to be wise, for example, arises not from a prior commitment to one's own happiness as opposed to a prior commitment to the happiness of others; it simply arises from one's finding oneself to be a human being subject to a particular form of practical life which, as it turns out, is perfected or realized by practical wisdom.

The pursuit of virtue, then, is not selfish in the pejorative sense of the word; it is not 'egoism' for the charge of egoism assumes that what is *good for me* is not *good for humans*. We need not assume this. It may be established, upon reflection, that sometimes what is good for me is bad for humanity in general but it may turn out that what is good for humanity in general is ipso facto good for me as a human. We have to look at cases.

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

Take an example: I would argue that various simple pleasures of life arising from cooking and eating good food, or strolling through natural beauty, chatting with an old friend, are on balance good parts of life. They are not *the* only goods. If they were the only goods, one might go in for those pleasures and those pleasures alone. One might construct one's whole life around them. But having moderation is a good as well. So a person who enjoys both the moderate pleasures of life and the moderation of pleasure and pain is both a better fellow and better person. As Foot argues: "Human beings do not get on well without them. Nobody can get on well if he lacks courage, and does not have some measure of temperance and wisdom, while communities where justice and charity are lacking are apt to be wretched places to live, as Russia was under the Stalinist terror."[9]

In this connection, we should recall the brief argument above that virtues are intrinsic goods. They are not just traits that *lead to good consequences* for organisms like us (that too). The recent revival of virtue consequentialism defines virtues as instrumental goods useful because they secure other, intrinsic goods.[10] Rather, virtues are themselves good for us. Alasdair MacIntyre is careful to distinguish between intrinsic and instrumental goods; he says that virtues "enable their possessor to achieve … goods" of practices, which might sound as if he means virtues are mere *instruments* to goods. but they are not *merely* instrumental. They are both instrumental (to the achievement of certain goods) and also *partly constitutive of those goods.* I end up agreeing with Hurka's later view that virtues have "recursive" value; they are both good as means to (other) intrinsically good ends, and also have some intrinsic goodness in themselves.[11]

To use a well-worn example, it seems pretty uncontroversial to believe that friendship is a good for practical, rational, social animals. Suppose that *having friends* is dependent, in part, on *being friendly*. By 'being friendly' I mean not just being affable but having

9. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 2–3.
10. Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford University Press, 2003).
11. Ibid., chap. 1.

the traits that make one a good friend: being a good listener, showing genuine concern for others, being happy when a friend's life is going well and being sad when they are suffering. Having such traits is not valuable *merely* because it will lead to the state of affairs "having friends." Rather, it is valuable because those traits make one a good human being. It so happens that, when two people have such traits, they will be good friends to each other. Good humans make good friends. And it is better, on balance, to have those traits whether or not friends are forthcoming. Fortune may place one in a lonely setting: military posts, solitary jobs, and so on. But as Judith Thomson says, a virtue is a trait such that, "whatever else is true of those among whom we live, it is better if they have it."[12] Likewise, Philippa Foot says: "let us say then, leaving unsolved problems behind us, that virtues are in general beneficial characteristics, and indeed ones that a human being needs to have, for his own sake and that of his fellows."[13]

While we cannot pretend to have settled the notorious tensions between altruism and egoism, we must move on in the pursuit of a definition of virtue.

II.3. Excellent Functioning

The third point about virtue is that virtues cause and partly constitute the excellent functioning of a human being. They are not static states but lived or enacted character traits.

But what do we mean by "excellent"? The concept of excellence is relative to an object's nature and function. The common example is that an excellent knife is one that *cuts well*. But more complex beings have more complex functions and therefore a more complex kind of excellence. An excellent guard dog is one that barks loudly, is hostile to strangers, but remains friendly to its owner, and so on.

Now, artifacts receive their function by design, and even natural entities (such as

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

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

dogs) have artificial functions insofar a they are trained by human users. It is tempting to assume that *all* functions are artificial objects of human invention. On this view, natural organisms (trees, dogs, humans) have no *inherent* function.

As I have argued, however, natural entities such as organisms have natural functions, namely to develop fully into what they are. We can empirically discover the telos of an organism by observing it and discerning between exemplary and non-exemplary members of the kind, remaining agnostic about its physical-mechanical or divine origin. That is, we can learn that an acorn is a *Quercus alba* (white oak) only by observing and reflecting upon its development from embryonic stages to maturity, and by observing the characteristic activities exhibited by mature, typical members of the species.

A natural inference to draw would be that human beings have a "function", howsoever complex, and that a detailed knowledge of this function is necessary for defining human excellence. I do not think it is necessary to know in great detail our function. We can hypothesize a quite general function in accord with the pattern above. The function of a practical rational animal is, at least, to become a fully mature practical rational animal.

Just as we cannot define a priori how tall redwoods grow or the lifespan of an red-toothed shrew, we should not expect that we could define, a priori, how wise a human specimen can become. Instead, we should preserve a healthy agnosticism that is open to new possibilities. Wisdom, like knowledge, is expansive; how many languages can one person learn? 10 – 25 – 100? How widespread can competence with the basics of quantum physics become? Similarly, how much practical wisdom can one person acquire in a lifetime? How much practical wisdom can a society accumulate in a hundred generations? It seems to me that these questions admit of no obvious, in principle limits.

That said, we have an easier time spotting weak and sickly specimens of a species. In plants, a well-trained botanist can diagnose *something wrong* with even an unfamiliar species via tell-tale signs such as spots, colors, and sickly shapes. Similarly, a competent

adult can diagnose *something wrong* with a hopelessly addicted drug-user whose habit is ruining his or her life, or with an incorrigible fool whose life is tragically cut short by his or her own recklessness.

What details can we expect to find? When we find fully mature rational animals, we are likely to observe that they do not just sit around "being human" all day; they perform "characteristic action" typical of the species, whatever that turns out to be. Aristotle famously concluded that the human function was discernible: the theoretical or speculative activity of the intellect was that characteristic action. I will only insist that we do not need to specify at the outset what activities are characteristic actions of practical rational animals; we can keep the notion indeterminate: our characteristic actions will involve practical reasoning and rational acting.

II.4. Corrective

The fourth point in our account of virtue is that virtues are corrective – that is, virtues become urgent in life at the same moment as common, tempting, human evils. As Foot says, each virtue stands "at a point at which there is some temptation to be resisted or deficiency of motivation to be made good."[14]

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

14. Ibid., 8.

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

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

Kant's error, according to Foot, is in failing to distinguish that which is "in accord" with virtue from that which is *virtuous* full stop. It may be, for example, that a novice tennis player makes an expert shot while remaining merely a novice. The hit is "in accord" with excellence but is not, in this case, an instance of excellence – only beginner's luck. In her self-love example, Foot points out that there is no virtue required to eat one's breakfast and avoid life-threatening danger, but there may sometimes be cases where self-love is a duty – even a difficult, painful duty. She says, "sometimes it is what is owed to others that should keep a man from destroying himself, and then he may act out of a sense of duty."[15] So the solution to the happy philanthropist problem is that if he really does have such a character as to be delighted helping others, he is morally praiseworthy *because he has worked to achieve that character*. As Foot says:

> For charity is, as we said, a virtue of attachment as well as action, and the sympathy that makes it easier to act with charity is part of the virtue. The

15. Ibid., 13.

> man who acts charitably out of a sense of duty is not to be undervalued, but it is the other who most shows virtue and therefore to the other that most moral worth is attributed.[16]

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

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

> Only a detail of Kant's presentation of the case of the dutiful philanthropist tells on the other side. For what he actually said was that this man felt no sympathy and took no pleasure in the good of others because 'his mind was clouded by some sorrow of his own', and this is the kind of circumstance that increases the virtue that is needed if a man is to act well.[17]

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

II.5. Two Objections Thus Far

Before stating the next part of my account of virtue, I must pause to address two objections to what we have said so far. The first worry is that defining virtue as "beneficial" or "positive" by definition is circular and therefore empty. Suppose we define "boldness" as *doing hard things* and "courage" as doing hard things when it is good. Boldness is, so to speak, value neutral. One can be bold in wrongdoing or bold in doing well. If courage is just boldness in doing good, then affirmation that 'courage (doing hard things when it is good) is good'

16. Ibid., 14.
17. Ibid., 14.

would appear to amount to the trivial revelation that 'good things are good.' And most (if not all) tautologies are trivial.

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

Instead, we must realize that some ethical propositions are synthetic, yet so widely believed and so widely affirmed that they appear to be tautologous. Some philosophers argue that this widespread, near universal belief is a sign that these propositions are self-evidently true. For instance, Russ Shafer-Landau says:

> It seems to me self-evident that, other things equal, it is wrong to take pleasure in another's pain, to taunt and threaten the vulnerable, to prosecute and punish those known to be innocent…[18]

We can furnish more examples: It is good to be kind; and cruelty is bad. Pleasure is a good. Wise people make good leaders. Pursue good and avoid evil. Another way of putting what is perhaps the same point is to call these propositions "quasi-analytic":

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

18. Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*, 4 (Oxford University Press, 2003), chap. 11.

> be altered only by pretty serious conceptual and theoretical "revolutions," whose directions are all but impossible to anticipate prior to the innovations or crises which precipitate them. The principle that torturing children is wicked and the fundamental laws of quantum mechanics are both candidates for quasi-analyticity.[19]

These ethical propositions do not seem to be tautologies. Call these non-tautologous but basic ethical propositions Platitudes. "It is polite to say please" is a Platitude. Some Platitudes are small, others great. For example, "treat others as you would wish to be treated" is a Great Platitude. The core principles of "common morality" that have achieved an astonishingly wide consensus in bioethical discussions are good examples of Great Platitudes.[20]

The Great Platitudes are basic, common, and hardly disputable. But that does not mean they are tautologous. Peter Geach argues that just because an ethical conclusion is virtually un-revisable doesn't mean it is content-less.[21] Great Platitudes are rather hard-won insights. It is only by reflection that it can be known that humans have a nature, a species-specific kind of flourishing, and that some character traits are conducive to the realization of our life form while others are conducive to its stultification.

A second worry that needs addressing is this: Can virtue enable the more efficient achievement of ignoble aims? On the one hand, examples are easy to furnish: a prude might display moderation; a thief might display courage. It seems commonsensical that whatever attributes we designate as 'courageous' can be found in agents pursuing bad ends. On the other hand, the Aristotelian line excludes such a possibility by definition. Jonathan Sanford's recent monograph, *Before Virtue*, argues that Aristotle's doctrine is "ethics insists

19. Richard Boyd, "Finite Beings, Finite Goods: The Semantics, Metaphysics and Ethics of Naturalist Consequentialism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 66, no. 3 (2003): 520.

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

21. Geach, *The Virtues*, Chapter 1.

it is impossible to exercise any virtue, with the exception of technical skill, wrongly."[22] Foot attempts to do justice to both these concerns. The analogy is to poisons or solvents:

> It is quite natural to say on occasion 'P does not act as a poison here' though P is a poison and it is P that is acting here. Similarly courage is not operating as a virtue when the murderer turns his courage, which is a virtue, to bad ends. Not surprisingly the resistance that some of us registered was not to the expression 'the courage of the murderer' or to the assertion that what he did 'took courage' but rather to the description of that action as an act of courage or a courageous act. It is not that the action could not be so described, but that the fact that courage does not here have its characteristic operation is a reason for finding the description strange.[23]

An agent's commission of an otherwise virtuous action may be a mistake *for that agent* at that time. This may seem ad hoc, but we must remember that Foot is attempting to make space for the "commonsense" observation that some good traits operate to bad ends *within* the philosophically rigorous definition of virtue as beneficial.

One objection Foot responds to is the worry some might have that she is saying *only* those who are completely virtuous are virtuous at all. She has two responses. The first response is that there is one virtue, at least, that always operates as a virtue, namely, wisdom. While it might make some sense to speak of "foolish courage" (recklessness) or "foolish moderation" (prudishness) it makes no sense to speak of "foolish wisdom." Knowledge may and does contribute to wicked actions, but wisdom (by definition) entails a proper application of knowledge. Since wisdom always operates as a virtue, we admire wisdom perhaps most of all. As we shall see in John McDowell's discussion of the virtuous person's perceptual capacities, it might be that when we admire a person's courage or moderation, we are often admiring the wisdom *in* the courage and the wisdom *in* the moderation.

A second response to the worry that one must be completely virtuous to be virtuous

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

23. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 16.

at all is that we do admire virtues when they all appear in a remarkably virtuous person and when only one or two appear in a partially virtuous person. Foot says:

> There are some people who do possess all these virtues and who are loved and admired by all the world, as Pope John XXIII was loved and admired. Yet the fact is that many of us look up to some people whose chaotic lives contain rather little of wisdom or temperance, rather than to some others who possess these virtues. And while it may be that this is just romantic nonsense I suspect that it is not.[24]

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

This objection is a formidable one. I do not think these brief comments are sufficient to fully quell the worry. However, as it will resurface in a later chapter, I will continue with the remaining points in my account of virtue.

II.6. Acquirable

The fifth attribute of virtues is that they are acquirable. *How* virtue is to be acquired is an age-old theme.[25] Even without stating *how* virtues are acquired, it is still essential to see that they must be *acquirable.*

There are two misunderstandings on this issue we must resolve. The first is to mistake *any* positive or beneficial trait as a moral virtue. Even supposing that a virtue is natural excellence for practical primates, are traits such as physical strength, keen eyesight, and a

24. Ibid., 17.

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

reliable memory virtues? Is a contractor who excels at hammering 16d nails into wooden frames to be admired for his *virtue*? Is the quarterback who can make accurate throws under pressure virtuous? Homer's list of virtues included such items. Homeric virtues included beauty, skill in war, and other socially valuable traits. As MacIntyre says, "The word *arete*, which later comes to be translated as 'virtue', is in the Homeric poems used for excellence of any kind; a fast runner displays the arete of his feet (*Iliad* 20. 411) and a son excels his father in every kind of arete-as athlete, as soldier and in mind (*Iliad* 15. 642)."[26] Even if we grant that such traits are goods-of-a-kind (and they seem open to dispute), they do not seem to us particularly *moral*.[27]

I think categorizing strength and good memory as virtues is a mistake, but it is an understandable mistake. Virtues are *in principle* acquirable, and hence distinct from traits that might be inborn, even if such traits are beneficial for practical primates.

One cause of this understandable mistake is an ambiguity in the term 'moral virtue.' Foot cautions about terminological misunderstanding: *ἀρετή* for the Greeks refers "also to arts, and even to excellences of the speculative intellect whose domain is theory rather than practice"[28]. We should like to distinguish beauty, raw talent, strength, and other excellences that are only under our control in that we can voluntarily lose or destroy them from virtues which are under our control, either partially or completely, in that we must attain them by sustained intentional effort. Furthermore, even their list of "moral virtues" (*arete ethikai* or *virtues morales*) do not correspond precisely to *our* "moral virtues." The traditional list of cardinal "moral virtues" (including courage, moderation, practical wisdom, and justice) includes positive traits we might classify as "self-regarding" (e.g., moderation) as well as "other-regarding" (e.g., justice), and includes practical wisdom (*phronesis/prudentia*)

26. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 122.

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

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

which, if we mentioned it at all, we would be inclined to classify as an intellectual virtue. Finally, not all of the items on a comprehensive list of positive qualities (e.g., unselfishness) obviously correspond to one of the classical virtues. So, we ought not to assume that the terms 'excellence' or even 'moral excellence' can be a short-cut for understanding the concept of virtue.

So how can we pick out moral excellence from other expressions of human excellence? At first glance, the answer seems to be something about practical reasoning. Foot thinks virtues are revealed not only by a person's abilities but by his or her *intentions.* What are intentions? She argues that the 'will' or practical reason must be understood in its broadest sense, "to cover what is wished for as well as what is sought."[29] Intentions are not the *only* thing we judge, for we do not judge a person to be virtuous even if they are a well-intentioned nincompoop who always harms when "helping". Neither do we only judge the result of a person's action, for we sometimes exculpate a failing performance in part because the person *meant well* – the exculpation might be called for when circumstances were not favorable, chances of success were low, etc.

Instead, a virtuous action is one that aims at the right thing in the right way, and flows out of a person's acquired character. Foot attempts to capture the point that we admire someone who not only does the right thing but who has conditioned himself to do the right thing fluently and almost instantly. She quotes from John Hersey's novel *A Single Pebble* in which the narrator relates watching a man save a boy from drowning:

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

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

Foot's comment is this:

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

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

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

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

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

II.7. Acquirable to Whom?

A second misunderstanding in defining virtues as acquirable pertains to the scope of possibility. The point of the above reflections was to argue that virtues are *in principle* acquirable by creatures like us. It is not necessarily the case that every person can acquire every virtue. For example, dump dwelling untouchables in India do not enjoy access to enough food to make immoderation a real danger and hence lack the conditions necessary for acquiring self-control with food and drink.

MacIntyre, for his part, also argues that virtues are *acquired* human qualities. (I would only modify this definition to "acquirable", because not everyone has all the virtues and some people never acquire some virtues.) He does argue, with Aristotle, that virtues are "natural" for humans. More exactly, Aristotle taught that virtue is *in accordance with* nature but not *by nature*. That is, virtues are not *natural* in the sense that natural attributes such as hair color are 'automatic' but they are natural in the sense that they are *proper* to human beings, they are formal features of practical, rational animals. Virtuous traits are a "normal" psychological outgrowth of cultivating excellence within particular human practices.

There is more to be said about this point. I shall return to it in an objection below. For now, I must complete the account of virtue.

II.8. Rational practice

My definition of virtue alluded to *rational practice* as well as *practical reasoning*. The remainder of the account focuses on the concept of "practice" and to practical reasoning. The sixth point about virtue is that virtues enable excellence in rational practices. To defend this claim, I will first summarize MacIntyre's notion of "practice." Not only is this term of art an interesting concept in its own right, it is crucial to MacIntyre's account in *After Virtue*.

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

> [1] a complex social activity that [2] enables participants to gain goods internal to the practice. [3] Participants achieve excellence in practices by gaining the internal goods. When participants achieve excellence, [4] the social understandings of excellence in the practice, of the goods of the practice, and of the possibility of achieving excellence in the practice are systematically extended.[32]

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

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

Secondary education in the U.S. is a practice with a history (or a set of histories) from the present time back to when for an American to complete high school (rather than to begin farm work by the age of 16) was the exception rather than the rule. It has standards, both legal standards and "best practices" passed from mentor to student teacher. It pretty obviously has standards of excellence according to which most educators are average, some poor, and some excellent. An educator who wants to join that profession will be enculturated with that history, taught those standards, and given a chance (usually by trial and error) to become a good teacher.

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

One other feature of MacIntyre's concept of practice deserves comment. He defined virtues with reference to goods *"internal to"* practices, and later refashions the contrast between 'internal' and 'external' goods into one between 'goods of excellence' and 'goods of effectiveness.'[33] What is the point of this distinction?

The "goods of excellence" of a practice are those that *necessarily* contribute to success within a given practice. In secondary education, success is defined by, say, graduation

33. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Macintyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight (University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 55.

rates, retention of information, high test scores, acceptance to good colleges, low drug use, and so on. The profession-specific virtues needed include understanding (to stay patient with struggling students), affability (to keep rapport), articulateness (to present material effectively), and so on. More general virtues needed include honesty, integrity, courage, faithfulness, and so on. Without these, *teaching* may be possible but *teaching well* is impossible.

By contrast, goods of effectiveness are those that might fit with the practice but are not *necessary* for achieving the end of that practice: high pay, an excellent teacher lounge, a short commute to work, and so on. Mere efficiency in attaining such external goods does not entail the presence of a virtue. In fact, the desire to pursue such goods *instead of* the goods of excellence is not a neutral desire — it is a *temptation.* Virtues are needed to overcome those temptations and to succeed according to the standards of the practice itself.[34]

II.9. Practical Reasoning Through Life

McDowell argued that *all* of virtue is by definition a kind of practical knowledge or disposition. I would suggest that this is a mistake. I agree that *some* virtues are excellences in practical reasoning but others are excellences in in rational practice. (I offer a full critique McDowell's conception of moral and practical reasoning in a later chapter.) Nevertheless, the two cannot be conceptually divided. Practical reasoning is not a simple process different from other kinds of reasoning or practice; it is the whole complex process by which we undertake to direct our own lives.

This is the seventh point about virtue: some virtues are excellences of practical reasoning that enable one to live a good life. The presence of a sufficient number of virtues

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

results in a good life. Hursthouse points out that we do not just admire those who survive, but those who exemplify a *human* form of life: "The human virtues make their possessor good qua human being, one who is as ordinarily well fitted as a human being can be in not merely physical respects to live well, to flourish – in a characteristically human way."[35]

I shall again turn to MacIntyre and *After Virtue*. MacIntyre's first stage defined virtue in relation to practices. His second stage goes further to include the whole of life.[36] He says that "without an overriding conception of the telos of a whole human life, conceived as a unity, our conception of certain individual virtues has to remain partial and incomplete."[37] MacIntyre undermines the notion that the virtues which enable success in practices can be sufficient for an account of virtue in general. He argues that we need to "envisage each human life as a whole, as a unity, whose character provides the virtues with an adequate telos."[38]

Envisaging human life in this way faces serious obstacles. Answering them requires a bit of arguing that might be labeled "philosophy of action."

The two kinds of obstacles MacIntyre cites are (a) social and (b) philosophical. The social obstacle is the fragmentation of modern life: "work is divided from leisure, private life from public, the corporate from the personal. So both childhood and old age have been wrenched away from the rest of human life and made over into distinct realms."[39] Just as the temporal segments of life are fragmented into bits (one thinks of the inherently patronizing talk of "senior citizens" compared from the older, inherently reverent talk of "elders"), so also the various projects and pursuits of life are partitioned, labeled, and cordoned off. On this fragmented view of life, the self's social roles are so many conventions masking the "true" underlying nature of the self. This presents a puzzle: how could virtues arise to the

35. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 208.
36. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 15.
37. Ibid., 202.
38. Ibid., 204.
39. Ibid., 204.

level of excellent dispositions for *humans as such*? They would have to be dispositions applicable in personal, private, business, spheres, in young and middle and old age, etc.

The philosophical obstacle is the tendency to atomize "complex actions… in terms of simple components."[40] MacIntyre's argument here is highly significant. He begins by analyzing the way we might answer a simple question such as: "what is he doing?"

> One and the same segment of human behavior may be correctly characterized in a number of different ways. To the question 'What is he doing?' the answers may with equal truth and appropriateness be 'Digging', 'Gardening', 'Taking exercise', 'Preparing for winter' or 'Pleasing his wife.'[41]

The first fact to notice is that each of these answers picks out different aspects of the agent's action: intentions, intended consequences, unintended consequences, etc. And, importantly, each of these answers places the simple atomic action within a narrative history: situated in an "annual cycle of domestic activity", in a hobby, in a marriage, and so on – each with its own history and "setting." The second fact to notice is that the answers to a similarly simple question "Why is he writing a sentence?" might be situated in different time horizons: immediately, he is writing to finish his book; but also he is contributing to a philosophical debate; but also he is trying to get tenure.[42] The upshot of these reflections is that individual actions abstracted from their context are only intelligible if they are "ordered both causally and temporally… the correct identification of the agent's beliefs will be an essential constituent of this task."[43] MacIntyre's astonishing conclusion from these innocuous premises is this: "there is no such thing as 'behavior', to be identified prior to and independently of intentions, beliefs and settings… Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions."[44] MacIntyre scholar Stanley Hauerwas argues that the central point in *After Virtue* is "the

40. Ibid., 204.
41. Ibid., 206.
42. Ibid., 207.
43. Ibid., 208.
44. Ibid., 208.

concept of an intelligible action is a more fundamental concept than that of an action."[45] This is such a significant insight because it shows how individual actions, like individual words, are intelligible in the context of larger discrete units of action, such as practices and projects. And, in some sense, the actions one performs within a practice find their intelligibility not only in practices but in the narrative of a whole human life. The same is true for verbal contributions to a conversation: Each word and sentence and speech within the conversation contributes to an unfolding narrative with a history and a telos, without which statements are random and unintelligible. MacIntyre continues:

> But if this is true of conversations, it is true also *mutatis mutandis* of battles, chess games, courtships, philosophy seminars, families at the dinner table, businessmen negotiating contracts- that is, of human transactions in general. For conversation, understood widely enough, is the form of human transactions in general. Conversational behavior is not a special sort or aspect of human behavior, even though the forms of language-using and of human life are such that the deeds of others speak for them as much as do their words. For that is possible only because they are the deeds of those who have words.[46]

Clearly these are weighty matters. MacIntyre's discussion of narrative is highly interesting but further elaboration can be left aside.[47] For we have arrived at a the supports needed for building the second stage of his account of virtue: the unity of many practices into a single whole. He says: "The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest."[48]

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

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45. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre," *First Things*, (2007). Web. The quotation is from citing MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 209.
46. Ibid., 211.
47. Cf. ibid., 216.
48. Ibid., 219.

> The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices. but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good. The catalog of the virtues will therefore include the virtues required to sustain the kind of households and the kind of political communities in which men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for philosophical enquiry about the character of the good.[49]

The virtuous person is sustained by his or her virtues on the quest toward the good. Vices not only render difficult or impossible the achievement of the good; vices can obscure one's assessment of what is good and what is evil. I can concede that the "quest" of a Stalin or a bin Ladin began with good intentions and was sustained by some virtues. Indeed, thoroughly vicious characters cause less damage because their evil remains petty. In that sense, the most horrifying evils could not come about without the assistance of auxiliary virtues: great courage, and so on.

II.10. Social Reasoning

Virtues are personal but not individualistic; virtues are inherently human and humanity is inherently social. This is just what we should expect if, as I argued in chapter 3, the practical rationality that characterizes the human primate is defined in part by sociality.

The eighth and final point about virtue is that virtues enable the health and progress of *societies*. MacIntyre captures the point about the sociality of virtues in a creative way. The third stage of his account situates what has come before in a broader social and historical context – namely, a 'tradition.' A tradition is, roughly, a "historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute

49. Ibid., 220.

that tradition."[50] Vices weigh down a whole tradition and virtues correct and potentially elevate it. MacIntyre says:

> Lack of justice, lack of truthfulness, lack of courage, lack of the relevant intellectual virtues – these corrupt traditions, just as they do those institutions and practices which derive their life from the traditions of which they are the contemporary embodiments.[51]

Virtues as related to practices are individual but not individualistic, since practices themselves are social activities. Virtues as related to the whole of life are cultural but not culturally relativistic, for every culture ought to provide for its members some minimal goods.

Insofar as practical rationality is the differentia of human nature, and insofar as virtues all depend for their effective operation on the coordinating management of practical reason, tradition will again become an essential concept. A tradition is not opposed to rational or critical reflection – rather a member of a tradition cannot reason without the resources of that tradition. We can put the matter obscurely by asserting that, for MacIntyre, rationality itself is tradition-constituted. I shall return to this beguiling concept in a later chapter.

III. Synthesis

The first stage of my account of virtue has been to endorse eight basic truths about virtue, and flag some issues to which we must return. Now, I must synthesize what has been said and respond to a few objections.

Thus far, a virtue have come to light as an excellent trait belonging to a fully mature and exemplary practical, rational primate. Such a person does not necessarily enjoy all the blessings of good fortune, but he or she does take up all that is given in one's fate and

50. Ibid., 222.
51. Ibid., 223.

put it to the best possible use. He or she avoids the common and tempting traps one faces along the way of a normal human life, taking up up all the intrinsic and natural urges of animality (hunger, thirst, the sexual drive, desires for shelter, comfort, and companionship) into practices that make sense. He or she works to acquire those traits that benefit human beings, both oneself and others, and that enable him or her to engage in such practices as make sense for human beings. He or she also satisfies the requirements of the community, as far as possible pro-actively cultivating virtues in others when appropriate but without undue interference in their own practical reasoning.

Virtuous people's lives are remarkable not for what they are given: any celebrity or cad might be born wealthy or physically attractive or talented. Virtuous people's lives are remarkable for what they do with what they are given.

Insofar as one cannot but sleep sometimes, the question of whether or not to sleep at all is not an ethical question. It is simply not in my control. Insofar as one can either stay or go, pursue or avoid, harm or help, such decisions are ethical decisions and the question of how to live is an ethical question. One must decide which larger, longer-term projects to pursue and which objects are worthwhile to obtain; and one must, along the way of these long-term pursuits, decide rather extemporaneously how to react to the vicissitudes of circumstance. Each of us must decide how to react to the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."[52]

While we may admire "winners" of the natural lottery for their extraordinary talent or beauty, we admire more the person who uses the attributes they were given well, who makes an investment of them that pays dividends. Compare, for example, the crowds cheering for Olympic runner Derek Redmond when he is winning the gold medal with the crowds cheering for Derek Redmond finishing last after his hamstring tore and his father helped him to cross the finish line. There have been many gold medal winning races that

52. *Hamlet* III.1

millions of people have witnessed and forgotten. But this race, when an otherwise naturally talented and well-trained athlete finished *last* that remains forever etched in the memory of millions more. It's not just the unbridled emotion Redmond displayed in that moment which so touches viewers; it's the obvious love from his father shown in supporting his son's commitment to finish the race, even dead last.

The same principle applies to the various aspects of being a practical, rational animal we can mention. Aristotle taught that "affability" was a virtue. Some of us might chuckle to imagine that naturally sanguine people are somehow *morally* better than their melancholic counterparts. Surely something so little under one's control is not a basis for evaluation?

Aristotle is not completely wrong that sociable traits (which can to some extent be cultivated) are beneficial. But we must remember that the "moral" virtues are not, for Aristotle, obedience to categorical imperatives or divine commands but simply ways of developing one's emotions into the likeness of a true human being. Consider two person's who willfully cultivate two quite different social attitudes: one is cold, unfeeling, humorless, or self-absorbed, while the other is warm-hearted, empathetic, cheerful, and outwardly-focused. Social interactions are an optional part of most human lives. Hence, insofar as such attitudes might but under one's control rather than the result of natural lottery, we do judge (and we do seem *rightly* to judge) that the second set of attitudes are more optimal. Not everyone needs to be entertaining or well-connected, but basic skills in relating well to other persons in family and social situations are generically good. Like Derek Redmond, someone who is naturally disposed to be solidarity, melancholic, cynical, bitter, or otherwise negative is all the more admirable when he or she becomes and remains affable against the odds.

IV. Objections

IV.1. Not Good Fortune

Above I stressed that virtues are acquirable. This is an important point for two reasons: first, not all virtues are *acquired* by all. And secondly, not all human goods are acquirable – some are inborn, automatic, or given.

This neat distinction served its purpose but it masks an important objection. To state the objection, first distinguish between the features of one's life and character that under the control of a normal, functional, adult human being, and those that are not. Call the set of features over which human beings are not in control their "fortune." One's fortune is simply given. Each human being is given a practical rational animal nature by fortune. But fortune consists of more than that. The life of a child includes (at least) one's genetic identity, one's time and place in history, one's culture and tradition, one's parents or guardians. If virtues are first inculcated in a child by tradition and only later acquired by an individual's own initiative, then it seems the dichotomy breaks down. It seems, in short, that the virtues one acquires or fails to acquire are part of fortune. If Jim and Jane grow up in very different cultures with very different kinds of parents and very different opportunities, it would each is given his or her virtues and vices "up front", with little to no chance for acquiring new virtues or shedding vices.

Furthermore, some of our attributes and actions may fail to be excellent without being our *fault*. So our account must allow us distinguish between various kinds of excellence. Consider the broadest set of things labeled 'good for humans.' All of the good things of human life enable the realization of a fully human life. But not all good things are subject to our control. The virtues are among those good things under our control – good dispositions we each choose to cultivate or fail to cultivate. Unlike other goods (say, wealth), virtues

become *what we are*.

A related worry might be that the account thus far does nothing to correct the suggestion that those who are natively intelligent are *morally* superior to those who are natively unintelligent; and it does nothing to correct the suggestion that those who are trained and educated in various excellences are morally superior to those who lack such good fortune. I think such corrections can be made, however; we are still remaining true to Anscombe's directive of avoiding the concepts of "moral fault" and "moral superiority" for now. And while even after such corrections, there may be natural differences between people's excellence and imperfection there is nothing about the *very facts* of the human life form that is elitist or unjustly hierarchical – nature produces people with a wide diversity of physical attributes (height, weight, size, color) and will continue to do so.

A partial answer is that the cardinal virtues are especially important because they are necessary for success in any worthwhile human endeavor. Jim and Jane do not need the same professional skills since they do not perform the same social function; but they both need the "moral skills" of relating to their friends and family, cultivating their talents, and striving self-actualization. Most people in the world will not write books or even read many books; however, every human being in the world has biological parents and hence has family. Every living human being belongs to a community; even orphans and street urchins live in a community. These traits are indeed acquirable and obligatory.

IV.2. Not Obligatory

A related worry is that acquiring virtues might be good but is not obligatory. They are not "perfect duties" in Kant's sense. Since clearly not all ethicists are virtue ethicists, it would seem a bit overreaching to assert that the pursuit of virtue is obligatory on every ethicist. Also, since not all people are westerners or neo-Aristotelians, it would seem cultural imperialism to assert that the pursuit of virtue is obligatory on everyone in the world. Nevertheless,

if it is possible to discover human virtues (like moderation and practical wisdom), then it is possible to discover virtues the acquisition of which is incumbent upon everyone regardless of their level of academic knowledge or the content of their metaphysical commitments.

Having said that, some might object that not everyone has equal opportunity to acquire even the cardinal virtues. For if moral education, virtuous parents and teachers, and proper social conditions (wherein vice will not be gratuitously rewarded or virtues gratuitously punished) are helpful then some people are better situated than others. This is not, strictly speaking, a problem with the account of virtue. It is a problem with life. Though every human being has equal responsibility to acquire them.

Since, for the first decade or two of life, we are not primarily responsible for our own traits, the first corollary is high importance of moral and intellectual education. In many respects, our individuality depends on fate and luck. But in some very key respects, the acquisition of virtues and vices with which we begin adult life depends upon our education.[53] The beginning of human life, like the beginning of any organic life, is the foundation for all that follows. When a mother drinks heavily or uses cocaine while pregnant, the child is going to suffer the negative consequences for the remainder of his life. When a child is abused – emotionally, verbally, physically, or sexually – by her parents, the psychological cost is meted out across the entire life and across generations. By the same token, when a mother eats healthily and takes her vitamins while pregnant, the child is going to reap the positive consequences for the remainder of his life. When a child is given love, approval, empowerment, discipline, by her parents, the psychological gains are meted out across the entire life and across generations. The original source of most people's life maxims are not their ethics professors, favorite novels, Holy Bibles, or therapists, but their parents or other guardians. This corollary might be obvious but we must never forget it. It is important to

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

the argument because we should never give into the temptation to think that the cultivation of virtue is simply a business for adults (least of all adult professional academics) to argue for and against. It is the business of societies and families to do or fail to do every day.

V. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that virtue is the excellence of rational practice and practical reasoning. Virtues benefit their possessor but not egoistically; they are good for humans as a kind. Vices, by contrast, are corruptions of life that are all too common. They are irrational traits and practices that do not make sense, since they harm oneself and others. They are negative or destructive traits to which one is tempted somewhere in the common course of human life. (Pleasures tempt us to immoderation; the urges to do favors for friends or to slight enemies tempt us to injustice; danger, difficulty, and other kinds of resistance tempt us to cowardice and *acedia*; laziness, arrogance, and culpable ignorance tempt us to practical foolishness, and so on.) By correcting for tempting vices and common errors, virtues enable individuals to actualize their life form and become excellent specimens of the human race.

Furthermore, virtues are distinguished from other forms of excellence in that they are acquirable. Acquiring them is a matter I did not discuss, but presumably it involves education. Insofar as virtue is a kind of practical knowledge — a disposition or sensitivity — it can be taught and learned. And finally, virtues enable societies to flourish (especially when it helps a society to successfully produce more virtuous, practical reasoners).

Several problems remain. The problems we flagged but which remain to be addressed are these: (1) What, if anything, is the human function (ergon)? (2) What is the relation between practical reasoning and rational practice? I said McDowell mistakes the relation between virtue qua knowledge and virtue qua rational organization of one's psychology – including emotions, bodily urges, physical situation, unthinking habits, and so

on? (3) Can virtue go bad? It seems that, without further guidance, otherwise virtuous traits might operate towards wicked ends, or co-exist with vices inside an (overall) miserable and vicious person. (4) Secondly, when we pay attention to the social context of humanity, we realize that certain virtues and vices can be given to one by "fortune."

The solution to several of these problems is to argue that excellent practical reasoning in community is the guide to the execution of virtuous activity. That is our next task.

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Chapter 5

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: Virtue and Reason

How should one live? If there is to be a good answer – or a set of good answers – to this question, then there must be *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.[1]

1. As a matter of fact, it is obvious that most of us come to some conception of a good life – initially at least – by observing exemplars whom we take to be successful people. I mean exemplars such as parents, mentors, historical figures, saints, or heroes. If one is to confirm that one's exemplars are actually living a good life, however, one must test the initially appealing exemplar against sound reason.

The theme of this chapter is practical reasoning. My account of human nature and human virtue has thus far depended quite a bit on intuitive notions about the nature of practical reasoning. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to make explicit the relation between practical reasoning and virtue ethics in the neo-Aristotelian conception thereof. In this chapter, I attempt to explain the inherent *normativity* of practical reasoning; in the next chapter, I attempt to explain the *naturalism* of practical reasoning.

There is a popular conception according to which 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. On my view, this conception is mistaken.

I suggested above that the picture of a "virtue triangle" is useful illustration for the notion that human nature and teleology cannot be disentangled from practical reasoning. Put succinctly, human nature is to be practical reasoners; virtue is excellent practical reasoning and rational practice; and the human telos is to become practically wise. To sum up again the relation of the whole, I have argued in chapter 2 that at least the biological parts of nature are normative. In chapter 3, I argued that human nature is normative – specifically, I defended the view that our life form is to be practical, rational animals. In that chapter, I briefly introduced the concept of practical reason to explain what behaviors and capacities distinguish our species from others, according to both the perspective of common sense and scientific reflection. In chapter 4, I argued that virtues are those qualities that constitute a human life, and so the person who has them is expressing the general form of life that is desirable for any and all human beings. The goal of acquiring virtues is to live a distinctively human life according to the normative conception of human nature as practical rational primates. Hence, in this chapter we must examine the precise nature of *practical reasoning* as it is operative in neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism.

The first step of my approach to treating the theme of practical reason is simply to ask: how should one live? The question is one of central importance for neo-Aristotelian

writers such as Bernard Williams, John McDowell, MacIntyre, Foot, and Hursthouse. The question is central for good reason; it calls for a *practical* and *ethical* answer that gives good reason to live a good life. The question also calls for an *informed* answer that is sensitive to the facts of human nature. Answering the question requires engaging in practical reasoning (the process) in order to furnish practical reasons (the products).

Hence, our task is to offer an account of practical reason that shows how the virtuous person asks and answers the question of how to live.

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

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

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

In section 5, I address three challenges. Does this view of practical reason beg the question against "procedural" accounts in favor of a "substantive" account? Does it define away the possibility of immorality? And does it of practical reason beg the question against

subjectivism in favor of realism about practical reasons? I answer that a substantive view of practical reasoning (the process) and realist or at least inter-subjectivist view about practical reasons is more plausible than both of these rivals both on independent grounds and also in light of the foregoing account.

II. The Problem of Practice and Reason

Consider the following apparent problem: If "practical reason" is really practical, then how is it rational? Or if it is rational, how is it really practical?

A view familiarly attributed to Hume says that practical reasons cannot motivate, at least not by themselves.[2] 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.[3]

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. 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

2. He says: "Reason is the discovery of truth and falsehood."
3. Wallace, "Practical Reason."

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

There are two sides to this paradox. On the one side, if we define practical reasoning as a process that results in a kind of knowledge, then all it can do is grasp what is true. Knowledge is is "theoretical" or "speculative" or "contemplative". (Affirming the proposition, *The complete works of Plato is lying on the table* does not lead one to read Plato without some intervening motivational state, such as *I've been wanting to read Plato for awhile but could not find my complete works*.) So the first problem is that theoretical knowledge cannot (by itself) motivate to action, and practical reasoning results in such knowledge, so practical reasoning cannot motivate to action. It cannot be *practical*.

On the other side, if we define practical reasoning as a process that results in a kind of action or at least a motivation to act, then it does not seem to be able to grasp what is true.

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. But is a "disposition" a form of knowledge? 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).

So, according to this paradoxical way of viewing things, either practical reasoning is not *practical* (action-guiding) or it is not *reasonable* (grasping truth and false). If "practical reason" is the name for a single capacity that is both cognitive and volitional, then in a very real sense, the challenge is to *defend the concept of practical reason itself*.

II.1. The Solution in General

The solution to this problem can be approached via the question "how should one live?" The neo-Aristotelians, from Bernard Williams to Alasdair MacIntyre to more recent writers have almost universally fixed on this question as a crucial starting point for ethics. For example, John McDowell says that the whole "point of engaging in ethical reflection… lies in the interest of the question 'How should one live?' "[4]

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

Recall Jay Wallace's general definition: "Practical reason is the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do."[5] My suggestion is that the capacity for resolving what to do is the source of "how?" questions and also the source of their answers. The answer to "how?" questions is an item of knowledge. For example, imagine that a child exercises practical reasoning when he asks: "How do I unscrew the light bulb?" The answer is an instruction ("twist left") or set of instructions, ("first, grip the light bulb; then twist left until it comes loose."). The instruction need not be put in the imperative mood: "twisting left unscrews a light bulb" is in the indicative mood (indeed, it is a generic proposition). The answer to a "how?" question is not just a proposition (that too) but an action, or rather an "actionable" proposition. The action and the abstract thought can be conceptually divided, but they are not divided *when we practically reason and live our lives*.

Similarly, the answer to the "how should one live?" question will be a plan, an actionable proposition. And the person who is living how he or she should is actually executing the plan. The virtuous person, McDowell argues, knows what to do. Hence,

4. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 331.
5. Wallace, "Practical Reason."

virtue is a kind of practical knowledge. Virtue is a kind of knowledge, namely *practical knowledge* (a "disposition to act well"). The answer to the question of how to live will be not just a proposition but a plan. 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*.

So McDowell argues that the virtues are various "sensitivities" to the salient facts about how to live.

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

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

This process is *practical* by definition. Practical reasoning is not something one does *before* resolving what to do, as one picks up an item in a store *before* purchasing it.

Practical reasoning is the name we give to the process of *resolving what to do*, as checking out from the store is the process of purchasing it.

This process is practical *reasoning* by definition. Practical reasoning is thus like theoretical reasoning in at least one important respect: it is normative. Theoretical reasoning is a process by which I aim to determine *what to believe* – to answer the question "What should I believe?" When I assess evidence for and against some proposition P, I am looking for *reasons* to believe P is true or false. The successful conclusion of a rational argument is the judgment that P or not-P. (Or I may not have enough evidence to judge either way, in which case I may withhold judgment.) Similarly, when I consider a scientific hypothesis, I suppose that P and then conduct an experiment that will reveal reasons that confirm or disconfirm the supposition. To fail to believe P upon coming to know good evidence for it, or to believe P in spite of good evidence against it, is to make an intellectual error. If Q entails P and I already know and affirm that Q, then I *ought* to affirm that P. Similarly, if some reason to π entails a reason to φ, and I already know and am committed to π, then I ought to φ.

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

Another pre-analytic sign that there need not be a divide between knowing and practicing is the linguistic parity between π-type reasons and Q-type reasons.[6] Both are a species of "*reasons*", though they differ in their use. For example, Philippa Foot says that reasons of type (A) are "Reasons for acting, which we may call practical reasons" and type (B) are "Reasons for believing, which we may call evidential or demonstrative reasons." She continues:

6. R. Edgley, "Practical Reason," *Mind* 74, no. 294 (1965): 174–91.

> As philosophers, and therefore theoreticians, our job is of course to give the second type of reason, arguing for or against the truth of a variety of propositions that seem to involve special problems—like those, for instance, about personal identity or the existence of an external world. But among these many 'philosophical' subjects we find that of the nature of practical reasons, and in this special case we shall have to give reasons of type B for theses about reasons of type A.[7].

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

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

One does not practically reason about what to do *and then decide* to do it; there is no gap between the conclusion of a deliberation and a decision. To borrow Gibbard's unforgettable phrasing, practical reasoning is "thinking how to live."[8]

In the case of practical reasoning, then, reason and practice are not divisible. And so far as we know, there are no other purely theoretical reasoners. We can imagine angels, Artificial Intelligences, and Alpha Centaurians who think but do not act; but so far as we know, to be a reasoner at all is to be responsive to Sellars' "space of reasons", including both practical and theoretical reasons. This consideration is part of the reason why, in chapter 3, I insisted that practical reasoning, and *not* abstract theoretical reasoning, defines human nature.

Without being clear on the very notion of practical reason, one cannot understand any of what the neo-Aristotelians are up to. Practical reasoning is not a value-neutral pro-

7. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 64–65.
8. Allan Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

cedure, as I shall argue below. It is inextricably bound up in the moral life. Jack Weinstein explains the relation between practical reasoning and morality in this way:

> The term practical rationality is derived from Aristotle's *phronesis*. It is to be distinguished from *sophia*, a more technical form of reasoning. Practical rationality leads to more approximate conclusions; it takes context and relative facts into account, and it usually leads to moral or political conclusions.[9]

Phronesis guides one in "answering" questions (or providing a range of strategies) to solve problems of action and appraisal. The difficulty separating "moral" and "non-moral" problems is no fault of the account, as I shall argue below. And the relative fuzziness of practical reasoning is no fault either. But this is to get ahead of the argument a bit.

III. McDowell on Thinking How to Live

The general neo-Aristotelian solution to the problem of practical reason (to be explicated in more detail) is this: practical reasoning (the process) is both practical and rational by definition. Practical reasoning results in practical reasons (the product) that both give us *reason* to act or not act in particular way, and *motivate* us to do so. For more details, let us turn to McDowell's argument that virtue is practical knowledge.

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

McDowell aims to support his own rendition of the old Socratic thesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge. Namely, virtue as a whole is a perceptual sensitivity to salient facts and

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

what to do about them; virtues in particular are specific manifestations of that perceptual sensitivity.

To see why it makes sense to conceive of virtue as practical knowledge, suppose that some platitudinous value (say, kindness) is really a virtue. The kind person is reliably kind and is kind *on purpose*. A person who merely happens to be kind or who commits acts of kindness resulting from blind instinct does not seem to merit the ascription of a virtue. A person who is kind once, or even every now and then, likewise does not seem to merit the ascription of a virtue. Rather, a kind person is one who is regularly sensitive to a range of reasons for behaving in a particular way. The kind person, McDowell adduces, "has a reliable sensitivity to a certain sort of requirement which situations impose on behavior" and such "deliverances of a reliable sensitivity are cases of knowledge."[10] The kind person *knows* what is called for, is intentional about avoiding cruel or indifferent behavior, and so on.

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

He gives two answers: the first is that when a virtuous person is sensitive to the "requirement imposed by the situation" that requirement must "exhaust his reason for acting

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

as he does."[11] It would disqualify the act as a candidate for an example of kindness if the agent performed it *because* it was kind *and because good repute was likely to follow*. If we run the same calculus on each particular virtue, we can hypothesize that virtuous agents' behavior in each case is explained by their sensitivity to those particular kinds of reasons. In turn, their behavior in general (when virtuous) is explained by their sensitivity in general. He concludes:

> Thus the particular virtues are not a batch of independent sensitivities. Rather, we use the concepts of the particular virtues to mark similarities and dissimilarities among the manifestations of a single sensitivity which is what virtue, in general, is: an ability to recognize requirements which situations impose on one's behavior. It is a single complex sensitivity of the sort which we are aiming to instill when we aim to inculcate a moral outlook.[12]

In other words, the virtuous person is sensitive to a whole range of reasons; since reason A and reason B might commend different acts, part of virtue must be the meta-cognitive capacity to reflect upon all those reasons available to one, to rank and order them.

This thesis that virtue as the sensitivity or set of sensitivities to requirements for action is not liable to persuade the expressivist. In McDowell's example, one is aware that one's friend is in trouble and that the friend is able to be comforted (the cognitive bit) and a desire (or motivation or inclination or settled passion) for helping one's friends (the non-cognitive bit). Surely these two *together* and neither in isolation explains the behavior. For suppose that two persons in the same situation are equipped with identical perceptual capacities and so sensitive to the same range of reasons for action, but only one of them does the right thing. If such a supposed situation were to obtain, it would disconfirm McDowell's conclusion.

McDowell's criticism of 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

11. Ibid., 332.
12. Ibid., 333.

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

This response from McDowell is not conclusive, but it is a good start. For it highlights the deep fault line between the Humean and the Aristotelian camps. It is true that if two people are identically sensitive to a morally salient fact but act differently that virtue cannot simply be that sensitivity. But one person's *modus ponens* is another's *modus tollens.* So if virtue is to be identified with a single complex sensitivity, then a supposed situation in which two persons perceive a situation and its practical requirements identically but act differently cannot obtain.[13]

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."[14] The point of such an allowance is that the break between the sensitivity to reasons (which is virtue) and a resultant wrong action occurs when other psychological factors interfere. What interference? McDowell mentions desires and also a "distortion in one's appreciation" of the relevant reasons.[15]

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

13. Ibid., 333.
14. Ibid., 334.
15. Ibid., 334.

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. Furthermore, the virtuous person is not always one who "balances" reasons for X against countervailing reasons for Y. The virtuous person is the one for whom simply identifying a reason ("in this situation, courage requires that I run into danger") silences countervailing reasons. The virtuous persons sees the danger (and perhaps feels rightly apprehensive) but also sees that courage in the face of this danger is required; the latter perception, according to McDowell, "silences" other pressures.[16] The merely continent person has to "weigh" reasons; the virtuous person fluently and instantly *acts* on the best reason.

So McDowell's thesis is that virtue is a kind of knowledge, namely, a perceptual sensitivity to a range of facts that are conceptually defined as reasons for action. The hypothetical counterexample presented by his Humean critic is one wherein two agents are "sensitive to" or "notice" identical reasons for action but do not actually *act* identically. McDowell's response is that while noticing a requirement for action is necessarily motivating *to some extent*, other psychological factors may interfere with the resulting correct action. Nevertheless, the case is not yet settled.

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

16. Ibid., 335.

also assumes this deductive model of practical reasoning.)

The problem with this objection, McDowell thinks, is not so much a problem with our moral theory but a problem with our conception of rationality. The problem stems from a "deep-rooted prejudice" that rationality is a rule-following procedure. If rationality is a rule-following procedure, then it follows that *either* practical rationality and morality are likewise rule-following procedures *or* that practical rationality and morality is not, ultimately, sufficiently *rational*. Some philosophers (often followers of Hume but not necessarily Hume himself) think that morality is a not rational domain but a domain of sentiments, desires, commitments, approvals, and so on. Other philosophers (often followers of Kant) think that morality is a rational domain and hence must be a matter of identifying first principles and "applying" them to particular situations. But what they share in common is a belief that "rationality must be explicable in terms of being guided by a formulable universal principle."[17] This common belief McDowell wishes to refute. MacIntyre, similarly, denies the assumption that normative ethical rules can be derived from universal ethical principles the way we "apply" universal logical truths to particular logical conclusions via a middle term.[18]

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

17. Ibid., 337.

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

mechanism, underlying his behavior, by an inference analogous to that whereby one might hypothesize a physical structure underlying the observable motions of some inanimate object."[19] The "ground and nature of our confidence" that we will reliably apply rules is not but a common form of life. The 'form of life' is a term of art here from Wittgenstein (and quoted with approval from Stanley Cavell) that refers to that difficult-to-define process by which we learn how reliably to use words in our native language, how to make exclamations like a pained "ow!" or an excited "ooh!", when to laugh at jokes, and when to cry in pity. Our shared rationality, McDowell suggests, is not grounded in "external" objective rules but in a shared form of life or what he calls a "congruence of subjectivities."[20] McDowell admits this is a disconcerting hypothesis; it induces "vertigo." But, our response to such vertigo should not be to embrace a "consoling myth". That myth he says is the two notions that (a) rule-following is a psychological mechanism that — absent mistakes — guarantees consistency, and (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.

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

19. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 337.
20. Ibid., 339.

The 'practical syllogism' takes the following shape:

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

On the strictly deductive logical model, the role of the major premise is to provide rock solid universal ethical principles from which to derive particular moral duties. But McDowell resists this model. On the strictly non-cognitivist model, without universal ethical principles we are left with universal psychological states (consistent desires, plans, values, or norms). McDowell also resists this. On the non-codifiable model, what does the major premise do? Its role, he says, is to state a "certain conception of how to live… [namely] the *virtuous person's conception* of the sort of life a human being should lead."[21] 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. What kind of life should a human being lead? The answer "cannot be definitively written down."[22] 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…"[23] 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.

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

21. Ibid., 343. Emphasis added.
22. Ibid., 343.
23. Ibid., 343.

ing a plausible explanation of moral motivation (reasons one might act in some way) and moral behavior (reasons one acted that way). To paraphrase McDowell: "Explanations of judgments about what to do are explanations of actions."[24] 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."[25]

In sum, McDowell thinks virtue is a kind of knowledge or sensitivity to salient facts which call for a certain response and which intrinsically motivate a suitably sensitive (read: virtuous) person to respond in that way, at least in the absence of interfering passions. The kind of "knowledge" that virtue amounts to is uncodifiable, but that does no harm to the account. Virtue-knowledge is rather a broad conception of how to live and a series of specific sensitivities to a range of specific practical reasons. Practical reasoning is *consistent*, moreover, but not by being "objective" (in the sense that even McDowell admits would be desirable) but by being rooted in our communal form of life in precisely the same way logical reasoning is.

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

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

25. Ibid., 346.

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

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

IV. Why Does One Act at All?

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

One familiar and influential way of framing the "how should one live?" question is this: There are two sorts of motives that drive everyone. They are *prudential* reasons and *moral* reasons. Prudential reasons incline one to look out for oneself while moral reasons

compel one to look out for others. We are all naturally, selfishly inclined to pursue our own happiness or well-being. And yet we are all morally constrained to do our duty.

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

> And there is indeed much in Kant to suggest that, although he shares with Aristotle the view that we have not just one, but two principles of movement, in other respects his philosophical psychology is Humean. He seems committed to the view that our emotions or inclinations are no part of our rationality. They come from the 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.[26]

Kant is commonly cited in this familiar framing of the issue. Kant (or a common caricature of Kant) presents morality as a single, universal moral law obligates one to do what is right, whether or not it is prudential. Our duty is sometimes in accord with our inclinations but often against them. Morality lives and dies at the intersection of two competing kinds of reasons. The immoral person is the one who gives into prudential reasons while the moral person is the one who elevates moral reasons.

But, on this view, when life does not present a moral dilemma, when the two kinds of reasons do not compete, morality is idle. One is free to live one's life in response to

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

prudential considerations which are neither (morally) good nor (morally) bad. 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. Just do not break the moral law.

IV.1. An Alternative Frame

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

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

> The business of ethics is to clarify and solve "problems", i.e. situations in which it is difficult to know what one should do; that the ultimate beneficiary of ethical analysis is the person who, in one of these situations, seeks rational ground for the decision he must make; that ethics is therefore primarily concerned to find such grounds, often conceived of as moral rules and the principles from which they can be derived; and that meta-ethics consists in the analysis of the terms, claims, and arguments which come into play in moral disputation, deliberation, and justification in problematic contexts.[27]

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

> …thought of ethics as a branch of politics, which in turn he thought of as a very wide-ranging subject having to do generally with the planning of human

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

> 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.[28]

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

> This question is posed in a characteristically modern way, presupposing a distinction between the moral and the non-moral that is not drawn, as such, by the Greek thinkers. But if one objects to that characterization, one can rephrase it: for example, What role does concern for others for their own sake play in here scheme of ends? What role does political justice play in her scheme of ends? And so forth."[29]

Foot makes a similar point:

> Many if not most moral philosophers in modern times see their subject as having to do exclusively with relations between individuals or between an individual and society, and so with such things as obligations, duties, and charitable acts… 'moral' and 'prudential' considerations [are] contrasted in a way that was alien to Plato or Aristotle.[30]

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

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

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

30. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

reasons). McDowell remains unclear on whether moral reasons are *one type* of practical reason, or whether any practical reason count as a "moral" reason (broadly construed).[31]

My alternative is this: there is only one kind of reason for action: practical reasons. And though there are distinctions between various kinds of practical reasons, the proper distinction is not between "moral" and "non-moral" or "prudential" ones. Certainly considerations about myself are conceptually distinct from considerations about my family, my friend, my society, or my species. And certainly there is a powerful social and psychological force to the distinction between moral and prudential, other-regarding and self-regarding,[32] altruistic and egoistic[33], benevolent and selfish, conscience and self-love.[34] But getting the distinction right is crucial to understanding the kind of knowledge that virtue is.

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

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

31. Foot, *Virtues and Vices* 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

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

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

34. 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.

icance only in their referential meaning. The intuitionists, of course, concluded that moral terms refer to a non-natural property, while the emotivists concluded that moral terms do not refer to such a property and so do not refer at all. (Naturalists, later in the 20th century, argue that moral terms refer to natural properties.) MacIntyre's alternative denies the assumption entirely; moral judgments "have their own kind of logic" and their importance comes from "exhibiting the logic of their usage."[35] 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.[36]

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

35. 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*.

36. Ibid.

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.

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

MacIntyre came to the same conclusion, partially through his study of ethics. As a young philosopher, he was troubled about emotivism in particular and modern metaethics in general. Emotivists, intuitionists, naturalists, and error theorists all seemed to assume that moral terms are *referential.* If moral terms within moral judgments are supposed to pick out a property in the world, then either we must identify that property or (if we cannot) conclude that moral terms are literally meaningless. He argued that this assumption is a mistake. Instead, he concluded that the significance of moral judgments is that "they enable us to solve problems of appraisal and of action."[37] 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.

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

The point about this tangled relationship between practical reasons and moral reasons is not merely of historical or etymological interest (though of course, the narrow sense of the word 'moral' in discourse today is clear enough). The point is that qualities such as benevolence and generosity we tend to call human "moral goodness" are of a type with a *broader category of goodness*. Foot explains: "I want to show that judgments usually considered to be the special subject of moral philosophy should really be seen as belonging to a wider class of evaluations of conduct with which they share a common conceptual structure."[38]

IV.2. A Brief History of the Error

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

As Nussbaum and others highlighted above, the Greek way of thinking did not sharply divide *ethos* from rhetoric, politics, or theoretical philosophy. At some point in the history of western moral philosophy, the topic of the "moral" began to separate off from the broader topic of the practical. Foot cites Mill as an early proponent of the distinction:

> J. S. Mill, for instance, expresses this modern point of view quite explicitly, saying in his essay *On Liberty* that 'A person who shows rashness, obstinacy, self-conceit . . . who cannot restrain himself from harmful indulgences' shows faults (Mill calls them 'self-regarding faults') which 'are not properly immoralities' and while they 'may be proofs of any amount of folly . . . are only a subject of moral reprobation when they involve a breach of duty to others, for whose sake the individual is bound to have care for himself.'[39]

Mill distinguishes folly from immorality by treating folly as a failure to provide goods for oneself. He treats imprudence as "bad" but not *morally bad.* The same distinction shows

38. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.
39. Ibid., 68.

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

> The terms "should" or "ought" or "needs" relate to good and bad: e.g. machinery needs oil, or should or ought to be oiled, in that running without oil is bad for it, or it runs badly without oil. According to this conception, of course, "should" and "ought" are not used in a special "moral" sense when one says that a man should not bilk. (In Aristotle's sense of the term "moral" [ήθικός], they are being used in connection with a moral subject□matter: namely that of human passions and [non-technical] actions.) But they have now acquired a special so□called "moral" sense – i.e. a sense in which they imply some absolute verdict (like one of guilty/not guilty on a man) on what is described in the "ought" sentences used in certain types of context: not merely the contexts that Aristotle would call "moral" – passions and actions – but also some of the contexts that he would call "intellectual."[40]

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

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

> 'Moral' is the etymological descendant of 'moralis'. But 'moralis', like its Greek predecessor *ethikos* – Cicero invented 'moralis' to translate the Greek word in the *De Fato* – means 'pertaining to character' where a man's character is nothing other than his set dispositions to behave systematically in one way rather than another, to lead on particular kind of life… The early uses of 'moral' did not contrast with " 'prudential' or 'self interested' " nor with " 'legal or 'religious'… The word to which it is closest in meaning is perhaps most simply 'practical'."[41]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IV.3. Practical Reasoning as Willing the Good

The first point in this case is 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.[42]

We have argued above that the growth into maturity of an organism is growth into the exemplification of its form of life. This form of life is what Aquinas calls a thing's nature. Hence, a wolf hunts in packs by nature, trees extend roots into the ground by nature, reptiles warm themselves in the sun by nature, and so on.

In plants and animals, the "natural inclination" toward their good is not reflective or intentional, and Aquinas did not make this mistake. Frey says:"Aquinas would agree with us that it is a category mistake to say that a sunflower wants to grow towards the light, if by this we mean that the flower somehow registers a positive feeling or has an inner impression towards the light, which "causes" it to move toward the light. The plant does not apprehend

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

or desire anything; thus Aquinas is very careful to say that it does not have a power of appetite. In fact, Aquinas is at pains to note that a plant has no window onto the world at all—it just has conditions in which it characteristically comes into being, maintains, and reproduces itself.[43]

Plants merely grow and reproduce; while animals grow, reproduce, and enjoy conscious experiences, such as sensory perceptions of material objects and of their own hungers, thirsts, pains, and so on. When it comes to human beings, however, we observe a difference. Human beings grow, reproduce, and enjoy conscious experiences like other animals but human beings also *know* that they do so. To quote John Haldane again, "things are specified by their power."[44] And we observe our "power" or capacity to engage in cognitive and deliberative activities. Simply put, we are able to reason, to reason theoretically and practically.

Practical reasoning is the distinctly human activity. While animals can not only sense but *perceive*, humans have the capacity of "intellection," the power of abstracting the forms themselves from percepts. An animal can *sense* an informed, organized object; an animal can be affected by the object. But the human animal can *acquire information* from the organized object. The ability to perceive something *as*, or even to perceive something big and brown with a smudge on its nose, does not imply the ability to perceive that thing as a cat.[45]

When it comes to inclination or "appetite", animals pursue and avoid objects. The antelope pursues healthy grass and flees a lion. The animal can only experience what is good or bad for it as a particular object. Animals incline toward their own good. They also have sensory perception of beings. But animals do not perceive beings *as* falling under

43. Ibid., 69–70.

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

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

universal categories.

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

Frey summarizes:

> Rational animals, like any animal, have a natural inclination towards their good as a whole, and like lower animals this power is actualized through their apprehension of things in the world. But Aquinas argues that a rational animal relates to the world through the application of universal concepts, and thus it is inclined to pursue or avoid things under an intellectual, universal apprehension of them. Thus, Aquinas says that the will is inclined towards its objects under the formality of the "universal good," rather than the particular good.[46]

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

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

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

> animal has a general conception of its own good, and thus a general sense of how to live.[47]

Frey's argument here is that the question of 'how to live' is a question about my good as a human being; answering that question requires practically reasoning, which is a distinctively human activity. And since every "sane, mature adult" engages in this activity, every sane mature adult has a general notion about the answer. Without it, one would not act at all. Frey points out:

> no human action is intelligible without attributing to the agent herself some conception of this end, no matter how inarticulate, unsystematic, or unreflective it might be. Aquinas takes it for granted that in coming to be a human being—i.e., being raised in a community of other human beings, coming into the possession of concepts, a language, and coming to have a world—one comes into some such conception, and thus comes to act voluntarily.[48]

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

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

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

47. Ibid., 78–79, italics in original.
48. Ibid., 87.

They eventually come to perceive objects *as* objects, as individual objects, and to name and categorize them with language acquired in a social setting. Likewise, the first thing practical rational animals like us apprehend is "good." Aquinas says:

> Now as "being" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, so "good" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. Consequently the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of good, viz. that "good is that which all things seek after." Hence this is the first precept of practical reason, that "good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided."[49]

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

IV.4. Practical Reasons and Motivation

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

The motivational internalist argues that any practical reasons "out there" that are practical reasons *for me* necessarily connect up with my motivational structure.[50] 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.

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

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

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

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

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

A safer and clearer strategy is to avoid this terminological mess altogether and recapture the simple insight that any *reason to φ* is a practical reason that can feature in an overall account of *what to do, all things considered*. The 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. So, the final or verdictive ought belongs only to the ought that is the conclusion of the total process of practical reasoning.

Seen in this light, it is obvious that 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 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.[51]

V. Objections

V.1. Substantive Reasoning?

Although I am employing a "substantive" or structural conception of practical reason, this is not the only view. The opposing view is a "procedural" or instrumental account of practical reason.[52] 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 crit-

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

52. 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.

icize 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 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.

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

The first is that the substantive conception is needed to show how both prudential (self-regarding) and moral (other-regarding) reasons can be rational. 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?[53]

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

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 ap-

53. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 63.

prehension 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.[54]

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

> For practical reason, the starting points are the most primitive human goods that the will is naturally inclined to seek: life, knowledge, family, friendship, play, political community, and so on. These are the ends that all human beings want for their own sake, as intrinsically valuable to them. And they want these things in a rational way—viz., because they have a conceptual apprehension that they are constitutive of their general good.[55]

Reasoning about ends may be a difficult and messy business. But we do it. It is an empirical fact that we reason – indeed, disagree and debate – about ultimate ends. Suppose Betty says to her friend, "I'm concerned about you. You haven't returned my calls. I heard you lost your job and your spouse 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:

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

> 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.[56]

Warren Quinn, likewise argues that we reason about goods:

> Practical thought, like any other thought, requires a subject matter. And for human beings the subject matter that distinguishes thought as practical is, in the first instance, human ends and action insofar as they are good or bad in themselves […] practical thought deploys a master set of non-instrumental evaluative notions: that of a good or bad human act, a good or bad human life, a good or bad human agent, and a good or bad human action. Practical reason is, on this view, the faculty that applies these fundamental evaluative concepts.[57]

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

Although this process is messy, it is fundamentally so. Any attempt to configure the process by subjecting to a set of ready-made rules or criteria will make it easier to understand only at the cost of losing grasp of the process. Wiggins suggests that there are psychological,

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

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

not philosophical, reasons behind the attempt to reduce the process of practical reasoning to something mathematical and formal:

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

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.

V.2. What About Immorality?

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

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

avoid future ills. The cruel person judges that it would be better to cause suffering than to be kind.

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

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

VI. Conclusion

This chapter has argued in more detail for a conception of practical reason as the set of capacities that defines human beings as practical reasoning animals. 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 defin-

59. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 57.

ing 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 historical perspective on the notion of "moral" that shows how the older sense of the term included considerations beyond simply "other-regarding" reasons. Instead, 'practical reasoning' is an acceptable term for *any* reason in favor of an action. I also argued that practical reasons are intrinsically capable of motivating. Nevertheless, there are many practical reasons calling for action, and they sometimes conflict. So success in identifying how to live and what to do requires a complex process of adjudicating between all the available goods known to one, sorting them, ranking them with care and wisdom, and forming them into a complete life plan. Success is defined as practical knowledge of what to do; failure is defined as practical error — or perhaps ignorance — of what to do. I argued that the procedural view of practical reasoning is itself committed to certain substantive normative judgments, such as that one ought to do whatever will bring about one's chosen ends; but more to the point, I argued that the substantive view of practical reasoning is more plausible: we reason about apparent goods and bads and act accordingly.

This account of practical reason must do two kinds of work for my general argument. First, it must show the genuinely *moral* significance for virtue ethics of rational practice and practical reasoning. One cannot be "moral" without exercising fully the potential for practical reasoning. And secondly, it must show the genuinely *natural* position of reasoning withing naturalism. The mere capacity to reflect on our natural inclinations is a "natural power" of human nature. We are practical rational animals by definition. Or rather, we have the potential to become such with time (no infants have this capacity). The first prin-

ciple 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 common-sense 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.

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

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

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

Pretty clearly, I have been assuming a kind of realism. Such an assumption is not viciously circular. Realism about practical reasons is what Nagel calls a "defeasible presumption."[61] That is, most of us have no pre-analytic objection to the seeming fact that some reasons for

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

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

acting are good reasons, and others bad. Some brute norms (is wrong torture animals, or that one is not to use ineffective means to achieve one's ends) have a quasi-analytic force to them.

Even anti-realism's most sophisticated advocates concede the that realism is the default view. For example, John Mackie admits that "the main tradition of European moral philosophy" accepts objective values. He even admits that moral thought and language assumes it: the notion of objective value has "a firm basis in ordinary thought, and even in the meanings of moral terms."[62] Alan Gibbard likewise says, "Normative language does involve claims to objectivity in some sense—that seems clear enough."[63] Gibbard goes so far as to say that Platonism about reasons is common sense.[64]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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66. Wallace, "Practical Reason."
67. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 154.

Chapter 6

Natural Reasoning

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

I. Introduction: Three Problems

Either humans are just another instance of biological organisms, like chimpanzees and dolphins, subject to evaluation by the same patterns of normativity or they are a different type of organism on account of exemplifying sui generis powers of rational practice and practical reasoning.

The relation between nature and reason is an almost intractable problem not only for philosophers but also for natural scientists, social scientists, and others. Every major philosophical tradition – from Platonic rationalism, to Humean empiricism, to Hegelian objective idealism – has an important and sophisticated stance on this relation.

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

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

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

The last chapter's theme was practical reasoning. This chapter's theme is *natural reasoning*. The last chapter attempted to bring to light the ethical normativity of practical reasoning. If I was successful, the pressure shifts to whether or not practical reasoning can be shown to be natural.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. There is a third problem to address as well, the "Pollyanna problem" which I explain below.

formal disciplines such as mathematics, logic, computer science, and so on.

II. The Problems and its Requirements

The Irrelevance problem (hereafter "Irrelevance") states that the natural norms are *ethically* irrelevant or at least not definitive. Jennifer Frey places this objection in context of the is-ought gap: "The irrelevancy objection is a more sophisticated presentation of the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy.' But rather than crudely rejecting any move from 'is' to 'ought', it merely blocks the inference at one crucial juncture—the inference from the 'is' of the species, to the 'ought' that governs the rational will."[5]

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

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

The organic naturalist's attempt to collapse genuinely normative obligations into natural norms seems to him a commitment to "philistine scientism", that is, an over-zealous application of empirical methods to ethical matters. He would strenuously object to sentiments like that expressed by E.O. Wilson: "the time has come for ethics to be removed temporarily from the hands of the philosophers and biologicized" (Wilson 1975, 562). Instead of such crass scientism, what McDowell thinks is needed is the kind of self-reflection discussed above. We must understand the good of human life, commit to pursuing it, and resist temptations to deviate from that pursuit. This self-reflective practical reasoning may not stay within the lines of orthodox "empiricism" but, McDowell would say, so much the worse for empiricism.

A related problem is what Elijah Millgram calls the "Pollyanna problem," which states that any honest, empirical assessment of human natural norms would include vicious norms as well as virtuous ones because justice and injustice are both statistically "normal."[ˆ86] On this objection, the critic might argue that I was waking at the dark side of human nature when I built my inductive case for the generic that "the human being" is a practical rational animal. After all, human beings lie, murder, cheat, steal, rape, wage unjust war, and so on. Parents abandon or abuse their children. If we gather a robust sample of such behaviors and count them all as natural norms. Are we obligated to fulfill all such norms? Just some? Anscombe anticipates this worry when she says:

> The search for "norms" might lead someone to look for laws of nature, as if the universe were a legislator; but in the present day this is not likely to lead to good results: it might lead one to eat the weaker according to the laws of nature, but would hardly lead anyone nowadays to notions of justice.[6]

Expanding the scope of observation to include plants and non-human animals makes matters even worse: Empirically, some acorns become fully grown, mature oaks, but other acorns become stultified, sickly specimens. Most acorns never become anything other than

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

acorns before they disintegrate into dust in the soil. Some animals protect their young while other animals abandon or even consume their young. Are we supposed to allow, then, that "Human beings abandon their young" is a generic truth, indicative of the human life form?

The force of Pollyanna is similar to Irrelevance. In both problems, putative human norms that were supposed to indicate what a virtuous human being is and does, such norms appear either irrelevant or vicious. One can only ignore all instances of human vileness if one has a prior bias in favor of the light and sweet and sympathetic side of humanity. And where would this bias come from? It could only come from prior *ethical* beliefs, beliefs that are already normatively loaded instead of, scientific, objective, and open.

Selfish traits such as cruelty and deception sometimes secure good outcomes for their possessors: the unjust person may "play a crucial role in human survival and reproduction."[7] So some traits that are clearly vices from an ethical standpoint would turn out to be instances of natural goodness. After all, my presentation of human nature was supposed to provide an objective basis for showing how instances of natural goodness are virtues. If some putative vices are instances of natural goodness, then, absurdly, they too would be virtues.

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

The attempt to reconcile the two can twist one into knots: Rosalind Hursthouse

7. Chrisoula Andreou, "Getting on in a Varied World," *Social Theory and Practice* 32, no. 1 (2006): 71.

seems to vacillate between the two. She explicitly endorse's Foot's naturalism (of first nature) but also seems to endorse McDowell's "naturalism of second nature." She says, "Ethical naturalism is not to be construed as the attempt to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature."[8] She claims that her account is, like McDowell's, still loosely naturalistic. She still bases ethical considerations on our nature as rational agents, i.e., "human nature" or "second nature." But then hasn't she thereby rejected Foot's view? Jennifer Frey also observes:

> On this issue, Hursthouse seems to be speaking out of both sides of her mouth. She wants to acknowledge to Aristotelian critics like John McDowell that naturalistic considerations do not convince anyone to change their basic moral beliefs or motivate them to action. But at the same time, she thinks that she can approach the Humean or the Kantian and argue for "the rational credentials" of our moral beliefs based upon a "scientific" and "objective" naturalistic account. It is unclear how she is supposed to satisfy both parties at once, and the tension remains unresolved in her own work.[9]

Julia Annas says, of Foot's view:

> What is so helpful for ethics from this kind of biological naturalism is that we find that the normativity of our ethical discourse is not something which emerges mysteriously with humans and can only be projected back, in an anthropomorphic way, onto trees and their roots. Rather, we find normativity in the realm of living things, plants and animals, already. It is part of the great merit of the work of Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse to have stressed this point. Like many important philosophical points, it is obvious once pointed out…[10]

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

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

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

10. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?" in *Virtue Ethics, Old and New*, ed. Stephen Gardiner (Cornell University Press, 2005), 13.

II.1. Requirements for an Answer

In his (2008) article,[11] Chris Toner argues that those neo-Aristotelians who agree with Foot and Thompson have not yet adequately responded to McDowell's objections and satisfied four requirements "naturalism must deliver if it is to support a revived Aristotelian virtue ethics…"[12] Gladly, our account thus far has satisfied three of the four. Let us list the four criteria for a successful neo-Aristotelian naturalism and comment on each one.

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

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

> …I say "intrinsically able to motivate or justify" rather than "intrinsically motivating or justifying": the natural norm is such that it can motivate or convince persons, provided they are not in too dysfunctional a state. In the same way a rose is such as to be intrinsically able to convince us of its being red. Its failure actually to do so in my case because I am color-blind or jaundiced does not impugn this intrinsic ability. Natural norms can motivate and convince because they are neither "mere facts" about the way a given species does go on nor "brute desires" a given species happens to have as a result of its evolutionary history.[13]

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

We have argued above that virtues are intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearer of a practical rational nature. Toner mentions that "The requirements of the virtues can be articulated into what Hursthouse calls"v-rules" (do what is just, what is courageous, and so forth)."[14]

Thirdly, *natural norms must be anchored in and express universal human nature.* In chapter 3 I defended a definition of "universal human nature," that we are practical rational primates. And I argued that the natural norm that one ought to become a fully mature practical rational primate (whatever that turns out to mean) is an example of a norm "anchored in" and expressing this nature. More specifically, all the virtues of rational practice and practical reasoning are examples of such norms. For, as Toner says:

> … the possession and exercise of the virtues is essential to human flourishing as dependent rational animals. Thus natural norms or the requirements of the virtues, in articulating what we need (to have, to be, to do) to flourish, are anchored in and express universal human nature.[15]

Fourthly, *first and second nature must be related so that the second is a natural outgrowth of the first, and so that that in our given makeup is (first) natural which does tend toward an ethically mature second nature.* This fourth criterion is the aim here. Even though McDowell is critical of Foot's biological or organic naturalism, he does not wish to fall into a dualism between biology and rationality. Rather, he believes that it is possible to "formulate a conception of reason that is, in one sense, naturalistic: a formed state of practical reason is one's second nature, not something that dictates to one's nature from outside."[16] Note that he links the epistemological point with the metaphysical one: the dictates of practical reason come from "inside" one's rational point of view; yet reason is "naturalistic" in the sense that it expresses one's nature.

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

The problem with McDowell's view is not just that it fails to be "naturalistic", as some have alleged. Rather, the problem is that McDowell vacillates between two contradictory concepts of 'nature': an unrestricted monistic one and a restricted dualistic one. Each concept has its defenders, and each has its theoretical attractions and costs. Nevertheless, one must *choose*. McDowell, instead, defends the restricted, dualistic view of nature while insisting that his concept of nature is the unrestricted, monistic one. The result is incoherence.

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

III. McDowell's First and Second Natures

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

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

> Philippa Foot has long urged the attractions of ethical naturalism. I applaud the negative part of her point, which is to reject various sorts of subjectivism and supernaturalist rationalism. But I doubt whether we can understand a positive naturalism in the right way without first rectifying a constriction that the concept of nature is liable to undergo in our thinking. Without such preliminaries, what we make of ethical naturalism will not be the radical and satisfying alternative to Mrs Foot's targets that naturalism can be. Mrs Foot's writings do not pay much attention to the concept of nature in its own right, and this leaves a risk that her naturalism may seem to belong to this less satisfying variety. I hope an attempt to explain this will be an appropriate token of friendship and admiration.[17]

As this quotation makes clear, McDowell shares Foot's rejection of "subjectivism and supernaturalist rationalism." The key point is that he disputes her "concept of nature." McDowell's classifies his own view as a "sort of naturalism" – namely "relaxed naturalism."[18] McDowell invokes Aristotle's notion of ethics, by which he hopes to rethink our conception of human nature and nature as a whole. He says, "the rethinking requires a different conception of actualizations of our nature."[19] Second nature is that space in which human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing.

For McDowell, nature consists of Lockean primary qualities, which are response-independent as well as dispositional properties which are response-dependent. "Values" are the latter sort. There is no such thing as "to-be-pursuedness" existing as a Lockean primary

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

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

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

quality in first nature. Whereas Foot thinks that normative facts are response-independent features of (first) nature, McDowell finds this view impossible to entertain. He says that naive realism about value is "impossible – at least on reflection – to take seriously…"[20] The first reason McDowell can't take naive realism seriously is the impossibility of explaining "how something that is brutely *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility."[21] In this McDowell agrees with Mackie: the "central doctrine of European moral philosophy" is a mistake;[22] it is wrong to think that some things *merit* certain responses by virtue of what they are and what we are. A second worry is that the doctrine of objective value, where normative facts are primary qualities of nature, has been discredited or outmoded by modern science. The modern scientific picture of nature is "disenchanted" from such intrinsic values as meaning and morality. He says, "The most striking occurrence in the history of thought between Aristotle and ourselves is the rise of modern science."[23]

If McDowell is right that the modern scientific worldview prohibits believing that values are objective primary qualities, a natural move would be to embrace a form of error theory or expressivism or subjectivism. Subjectivists of the sort discussed above (such as Mackie, Alan Gibbard, and Simon Blackburn) believe that normativity is "projected" by philosophers and scientists onto the natural facts. But McDowell resists this move. He says that Mackie's error theory gets right the common sense view that "ordinary evaluative thought [is] a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world."[24] Secondary qualities are "subjective" in that they cannot be adequately conceived "except in terms of certain subjective states"[25] but not in that they are therefore illusory. A secondary quality is not "a mere

20. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo, eds. (Blackwell, 2007), 137.
21. Ibid., 143.
22. John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin UK, 1977).
23. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 174.
24. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 137.
25. Ibid., 139.

figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it."[26]

What is the alternative to the apparently exhaustive dualism of seeing values (or norms) as *either* facts of nature like primary qualities *or* unreal, illusory, and purely subjective. His answer is that values are "secondary qualities" or "dispositional properties" of nature. His essay "Values and Secondary Qualities" argues that values are like colors and unlike shapes.[27] We might paraphrase this thesis by saying that natural norms are qualities *in the world* (not just in our heads) but they are not Lockean "primary qualities." They are, rather, Lockean secondary qualities. Knowledge of such qualities is intersubjective, grounded in a form of life, grounded in our communal rationality itself. He says a secondary property ascription is true "in virtue of the object's disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance."[28] Experience of secondary qualities is a (sense) perceptual experience. This is a Lockean doctrine. Redness is not *merely* a microscopic texture property (say, the texture that scatters all light waves except red ones) because microscopic textures don't *look red* and things that *look red* appear so to observers with no knowledge of such textures.

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

26. Ibid., 139.

27. John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," in *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*, ed. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo (Blackwell, 2007), 137–45. I shall cite this anthology. The essay is also printed in McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, chapter 7.

28. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 138.

the value of a thing.

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

Goodness, badness, and other values are therefore grounded in "second nature."[29] The space of reasons in which our rational capacities operate makes us sensible to those dispositional properties of primary nature which become, for us, values such as goodness and badness. We will explore McDowell's view of second nature a bit more in a later chapter. Suffice it for now that "second nature" is a distinctly human phenomenon. We partially re-enchant nature by bringing primary facts into the space of reasons when they weren't there before.

III.1. Discursus on McDowell's project

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

To make his view here more comprehensible, it is advisable to briefly give some context on McDowell's metaphilosophy. McDowell is a proponent of "therapeutic philosophy." He says he is influenced by two main sources: the "Socratic tradition" and Wittgenstein.[30] From the Socratic tradition he draws a way of thinking in which dualisms do not even arise. And from the later Wittgenstein he draws a way of doing "therapeutic" philosophy[31] – phi-

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

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

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

losophy that 'leaves everything as it is'[32]. That is, McDowell believes many philosophical puzzles arise not from puzzling reality but from errors in *our own thinking*, so we need "therapy": dualisms need to be *exorcized*. He is an "anti-anti-realist." He is always fighting on two fronts, attacking a position without thereby supporting its apparent opposite.

With this in mind, we can more readily see how his objection to Foot and his quasi-subjectivist alternative is consistent with his solution to the mind-body problem. In *Mind and World* he attempts to dissolve the "vacillation" between naive empirical realism and "Rampant Platonism" by arguing that even primary qualities are not given to us in experience without the involvement of spontaneous conceptual capacities. He wants to accept the modern scientific picture of nature as "bald nature", a mechanical "realm of law", disenchanted from values, teloi, and other esoterica. But he does not want to accept that human rationality is likewise mechanical. Instead, he argues that humanity exists in a space of reasons where we recognize reasons for belief and reasons for action.

McDowell here invokes Aristotle's notion of ethics, by which he hopes to rethink our conception of human nature and nature as a whole. He says, "the rethinking requires a different conception of actualizations of our nature."[33] Second nature is that space in which human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing by *Bildung* — that is, by education, formation, or cultivation.[34] Practical wisdom is one example of a virtue that the young human being does not have but that may be developed by formation. At first, the ethical demands of practical wisdom are not even perceptible to the young. They have the natural potential to become aware of, and answerable to, the demands of practical wisdom. Slowly, that potential is actualized or inculcated and a moral outlook is attained. Human beings are initiated into this stretch of the space of reasons by ethical upbringing (Bildung) which instills the appropriate shape in their lives.

32. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations.* Section 124.
33. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 77.
34. Bildung=formation, education; bild=form, image.

So initiated, practically wise behavior is not just a new kind of behavior but the maturation and development of a new kind of faculty in the human animal. That moral outlook may be later examined, but only from within the moral outlook. The circularity of this inculcation and new second natural faculty is not accidental: Since practical wisdom is responsive to reasons, it becomes a prototype "for the…faculty that enables us to recognize and create … intelligibility."[35] "[The ethical demands of reason] are essentially within reach of human beings. So practical wisdom is second nature to its possessors."[36]

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

III.2. Objections to McDowell's Solution

Some have objected to McDowell's view of mind and world as being insufficiently naturalistic. James Lenman is one example: "McDowell is certainly pervasively inspired by Aristotle and he describes himself as a naturalist. See especially his 1995. But I suspect many philosophers would find his use of the term 'naturalist' here somewhat Pickwickian."[37] I think McDowell's ingenious alternative to "strict naturalism" is flawed, but the flaw is not an idiosyncratic definition of naturalism. The flaw is a contradiction by sleight of hand. This section attempts to demonstrate that the problems with McDowell's ingenious alternative to empirical naturalism is not that it ends up being a form of non-naturalistic idealism but that it incoherently both affirms and denies empirical naturalism. Fink[38] expertly exposes McDowell's sleight of hand here, so this section will trace his argument in some

35. Ibid., 79.
36. Ibid., 84.
37. James Lenman, "Moral Naturalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2014.
38. "Three Sorts of Naturalism."

detail.

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

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

> It would express the idea that there is one world only, and that that world is the realm of nature, which is taken to include the cultural, artificial, mental, abstract and whatever else there may prove to be. There are no realms above or beyond nature. To be is to be in nature and to be in continuity with everything else in nature. Even the greatest and deepest differences are differences within nature rather than differences between nature and something else.[39]

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

> This is a terminological issue, but it is not easy to resolve simply by choosing one's definition of 'nature' and then sticking to it. No account of naturalism should forget the fact that 'nature' is, as Raymond Williams puts it, 'perhaps the most complex word in the language' (Williams 1981: 184), or as Hume puts it, a word 'than which there is none more ambiguous and equivocal' (THN: III.I.II.). In this section I shall try to give a somewhat systematic

39. Ibid., 206.

> overview of some of this complexity that simply cannot be reduced by philosophical fiat…Indeed, it is a deep root of ambiguity that we can talk about the nature of art, law, language, culture, morality, normativity, history, civilization, spirit, mind, God, or nothingness even if we otherwise regard these as non-natural, that is, as not belonging to nature as a realm. There is no contradiction in talking about the nature of the unnatural, the super-natural, or the non-natural, just as it is an open question what the nature of the natural is.[40]

Both idealism and empiricism are forms of restricted naturalism. Calling idealism a form of naturalism may sound outrageous to the more empirically minded. But the argument is sound. Fink first derives Plato's *Laws* a Greek trichotomy from between events that come about by nature (*physis*), chance, and art. 'Nature' and 'chance' explain why plants grow, why the sun moves, and so on. 'Art' explains why houses have roofs, why humans wear clothes, and anything else that we do and that nature and chance could *not* have done. The "natural" pair in this trichotomy consists of the first two: that which comes about, so to speak, on its own, *prior to* and *independent of* intelligent intervention from humans or gods. This conception of nature excludes not only the supernatural but also the cultural, the fictional or imaginative, and so on. The Athenian does not accept this "dangerous" conception of nature. Rather, he argues that "soul is necessarily prior in origin to things which belong to body, seeing that soul is older than body."[41] Fink comments on this passage:

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

It is highly interesting that the Athenian stranger rejects this definition of nature. He tries to prove that soul is "older than" and prior to body – by first defining 'soul' as self-movement,

40. Ibid., 206.
41. Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato*, *Laws* 891cff.

and the cause of motion in other things. Material bodies either do not move at all or they are moved by something else. Since all material things are either moved (by another moving thing) or unmoved, material things cannot be the first principles of motion. But since soul *is self-motion*, it is the first principle of motion. Or rather, the first *ensouled* body is able to move itself, and therefore to move other material things. Regardless of the merits of this argument, Fink's point is that both sides are grabbing for the rights to the conception of nature. He says: "This, I take it, is pretty rampant Platonism but clearly presented as an account of the soul as natural because primary in existence… mind is prior to world."[42] If soul is the primary sense of nature, then body is "second nature." Mind is the primary thing, the first thing, the paradigmatic thing, against which mere body is contrasted.

As Fink points out, Aristotle confirms that the issue between materialists and idealists is a disagreement about nature. Aristotle says: "Some identify the nature or substance of a natural object with the immediate constituent… e.g., wood is the 'nature' of the bed… [others] that 'nature' is the shape or form."[43] Fink's comment is:

> Like in Plato, we find here both a definition of the word 'nature' (an inner source or cause of being moved and being at rest) and two competing conceptions of what that source is, namely matter and form (the material and the formal cause in Aristotle's sense). Aristotle himself finds it most satisfying to regard the formal (and the teleological or final) cause as the nature of x.[44]

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

Classical materialism is one paradigmatic form of 'naturalism.'[45] By Fink's lights,

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

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

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

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

classical materialism is a form a restricted naturalism for it affirms that whatever is material is part of nature, and so that the label 'not-natural' applies to whatever is not material (or not obviously material, such as ghosts, souls, and fairies). But *the idealist, too, can rightly lay claim to the title of naturalism* – and not in a "Pickwickian" sense. Idealism and materialism turn out to be *identical* in one respect: they offer a "restricted conception of nature" and relegate to a "secondary" status everything that is not "natural" in the privileged sense. Idealism and materialism of course *contrast* – indeed, *compete* – in that they fight each other for the right to call *their* preferred side of the matter-form divide the *first* and *natural* side. No single philosophical view has automatic copyright on the terms 'nature' and 'naturalism.' Indeed, the age-old ideological struggle between materialism and idealism is a struggle over such a copyright.

Though the struggle clearly cannot be settled by presumption, it seems that the temptation is overwhelming, on both sides, to presume their own view and hence to accuse the other side 'non-naturalism.' Some restricted naturalists beg the question by defining nature as material, spatio-temporal, causal system studied by (natural) science. The materialist presumption is what McDowell calls "philistine scientism."[46] Fink says, "McDowell has convincingly shown that what Bernard Williams calls the absolute conception of reality is merely restricted, bald naturalism ideologically presented as absolute (MVR: 112–31, esp. sect. 5)."[47] Wilfred Sellars provides a pure specimen of such question-begging: "I mean that naturalism takes nature in a definite way as identical with reality, as self-sufficient and as the whole of reality. And by nature is meant the space-time-causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed."[48] Note that the first sentence explicitly endorses an unrestricted conception of nature while the next sentence secretly slides the ball into the other cup, explicitly endorsing an incompatible restricted conception of nature.

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

The second sentence merely *assumes* that the "space-time-causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed" is "identical with reality." But that is the question at hand. One cannot assert one's answer with exclamation points ("nature is the space-time-causal-system!") and pretend to have delivered an argument. Or rather, one cannot assert an answer that, so phrased, idealists and supernaturalists would accept just as easily. No one disputes that unrestricted nature is all there is; but some do dispute the implicit assumption that the space-time-causal-system is all there is.

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

As Fink puts it, "Nothing less than a naturalism that deserves to be presented as absolute could help break the spell of bald naturalism without merely replacing one restricted sort of naturalism with another and thus keeping the oscillations going."[49] Culture, art, rationality, intelligent intervention, and so on are part of the all. Fink quotes Dewey to make this point:

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

Fink's comment is this:

> On this conception the aesthetical (and the ethical) are not independent of nature, but they are not somehow based on nature or supervening on it either; rather, they simply are nature in some of its manifest operations. To think otherwise is both to mystify the aesthetical (and ethical) and to trivialize nature. The man- made, the artificial, the cultural, the historical, the ethical, the normative, the mental, the logical, the abstract, the mysterious, the extraordinary, are all examples of ways of being natural rather than examples

49. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 219.

> of ways of being non- natural. Nature is never *mere* nature. That which is *more* than *mere* is nature, too.[50]

Where the materialist and idealist are fighting over the definition of primary nature, the unrestricted conception refuses to fight. Instead, it embraces both body and mind, brain and consciousness, matter and form, as existing on a single continuum. That continuum is, ex hypothesis, neither material nor formal, neither mental nor physical. Unrestricted naturalism has this great attraction, that one can bow out of the materialist/idealist struggle over the conception of nature. Unrestricted naturalism has a great cost: one can no longer use "non-naturalism" talk as a weapon against one's opponents. While such triumphalist rhetoric makes sense within philistine materialism, it will not do when we have expanded our conceptions of nature and science to mean all of knowledge about all that is real. It makes no sense to criticize opponents for positing something real "over and above" nature when we have defined "natural" as "real" and hence "non-natural" as unreal by definition.

McDowell does reject the restricted conceptions of nature offered him by the philistine scientism and by Kantian idealism.[51] He even rejects the equation of this picture with "science", allowing that the practical point of view of humans in the space of reasons can and does feature in the scientific worldview. Therefore, it seems he has chosen the unrestricted definition of nature by default. Nevertheless, he is of two minds. Like the materialist, he still wants to wield "supernaturalism" as a rhetorical weapon against some opponents; like the idealist, he wants to wield "philistine scientism" as a rhetorical weapon against others. McDowelleian relaxed naturalism is compatible with agnosticism or with theism, but not with dogmatic atheism.

Instead of explicitly admitting that he embraces the unrestricted conception without qualification, he puts the ball in one cup and then moves it around to the other side, pretending the ball was in the other cup all along. He keeps his conception of nature restricted

50. Ibid., 217.
51. Cf. McDowell, *Mind and World*.

(anti-supernatural) while *calling* in unrestricted (neither idealist nor physicalist). McDowell as a hero of anti-dualism has allowed himself merely to *claim* he is using an unrestricted conception of nature while fully endorsing a restricted conception of nature. He has not earned the conceptual rights to his definition of nature. McDowellian nature is both restricted and unrestricted. It is, in a word, incoherent.

Perhaps I am being too hard on McDowell, when what he wants to do is show the inadequacies of each view and not replace them. Perhaps he means, in a sense, that 'nature' is an indefinable mystery. Nature is like an enormous box and we don't know its contents. Even then, we cannot exclude *in advance* any hypotheses about what will or will not appear in the box.

III.3. Practical Reasons as Primary Qualities

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

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

Indeed, McDowell himself supplies this example. Elsewhere in his article, he playfully presents an "epistemology of danger" or a "theory of danger."[52] This moral epistemology helps explain why his view is not a variant of "projectivism."

His theory of "danger" is this: Just as there is *something* about red things *themselves* that makes them give us redness experiences, likewise there is something about the

52. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 142–3.

dangerous animal itself that gives us fear experiences. That quality may not be *the form of red* or *the form of danger*, but it is also not *nothing.* The "theory of danger" is intended to capture this "something" with the important notion of *merit*. Red objects *just appear as red* to us under the proper circumstances. They *just do* dispose us to have red experiences. But dangerous objects *merit* appearing fearful and dangerous. They *merit* that we have a fear experience. To describe a bear (say) as "dangerous" to rabbits is to say something about bears and about rabbits in their context on planet earth. The rabbit need not engage in concept-use or perceptual judgment – seeing the bear *as dangerous* – rather the rabbit merely needs the instincts and perceptual capacities to see the bear. His response is not reducible to a response to the bear's size or fur or any other obvious empirical quality; the rabbit is responding to the danger. Likewise, when we see certain kinds of food as "disgusting" (rotten banana peels, say) we need not assume that we are projecting disgust onto the food; it is more plausible, by McDowell's own lights, that we are coming to discover an internal relation that certain kinds of decaying substances stand in to animals like us.

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

III.4. Science and Secondary qualities

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

McDowell wants to denigrate one kind of scientific realism (say, realism about eval-

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

I would suggest that "the scientific worldview" is capacious, including the best deliverances of our best sciences, including the deliverances of biology, logic, and so on. It is hard to be asked to reject "science" (scientific knowledge from biology) on behalf of "science" (scientific knowledge from physics). One begins to suspect, as John Dupre argues, that the request is that we reject genuinely scientific hypothesis from biology on behalf of philosophical materialism. Just because such materialism "dresses itself in the mantle of science" does not mean that a restricted conception of science can enjoy, undisputed, trademark on the concept.

James Barham captures the dualism into which McDowell unwittingly falls:

> …the philosophical literature tends to work with a scientifically outdated image of living things as rigid "machines." This results in a picture in which only human beings (or at most the higher animals) can be properly ascribed purposes and agency in the full normative sense. From this perspective, we appear to be faced with an unappealing choice between eliminating teleology and normativity from our picture of nature altogether and understanding these phenomena as they are manifested in our own human form of life as floating free from any grounding in the natural world.[53]

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

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

IV. An Alternative Solution

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

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

Frey puts the dilemma succinctly: "The problem our dilemma poses is how we can reconcile what on the surface appear to be quite different sorts of teleology: natural and practical."[54] The solution, in brief, relies on the account of practical reason defended above. Practical reasoning allows us to apprehend one and the same identical object apprehended in two different ways. That is, our natural human life form as practical rational animals, including the natural norms binding on us, can be apprehended both "externally" by the alien anthropologist who does not bear that life form and "internally" by human beings who do bear that life form.

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

Frey provides a summary:

54. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 63.

> the ethical naturalist must be able to show how these two seemingly opposed teleologies (the natural teleology of life and the practical teleology of action) and these two seemingly different senses of good (the good we can derive from an account of what simply is and the good as practical goal) can be unified into one and the same account. That is, we need an account of natural normativity that will show us how the relation between a general judgment articulating some fact about a life form (a judgment about a fact that is potentially known from the outside) and a judgment concerning a particular bearer of that form in a particular situation, can take the form of a practical inference whose conclusion is an action that exemplifies that very same form of life.[55]

I argued above that practical reasoning is not one of many ways of being motivated but is the very capacity to be motivated by reasons. Plants and animals are inclined or motivated to their good by instinct or irrational appetite. They cannot pause to reflect on whether they should follow through on the instinctual flight from predators or pursuit of food and shelter. Humans are inclined by their good *both* by instinct (and emotion, desire, etc.) *and* by reason.

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

> Although natural inclinations depend upon conceptual apprehension, we should not be tempted to think that they are objects of contemplation. These goods, as first principles of practical reason, are apprehended as ends—as objects of pursuit rather than as objects of contemplative knowledge.[56]

What is good in this sense for human beings is specific to our species. The primary good of a kind for us is the human life form. The derivative goods for us are any and all things necessarily related to the human life form. In virtue of what we are, it is good for us to achieve humanity, to become fully human. We aim to become what we are. That is, we aim

55. Ibid., 65.
56. Ibid., 88.

to become in actuality what we we already are potentially. Some of these goods are basic human goods toward which we are naturally inclined: food, shelter, companionship, knowledge, etc. They are starting points without which human beings would not be motivated to do anything at all.

Their status as basic goods is not to be interpreted as unrevisable. The normal process of practical reasoning about what to do can and sometimes does overrule the basic inclination toward a basic good in pursuit of some alternative good. The point is that this overruling judgment is not something over-and-above the practical pursuit toward the good but another expression of the same pursuit. For example, some people overrule their inclination toward the basic good of human companionship by becoming a solitary monastic but they only do so in pursuit of *other* goods judged to be *better*.

As Frey says:

> all practical reasoning is ultimately reasoning for the sake of attaining or maintaining these ends. Consequently, all practical reasoning is ultimately for the sake of living the sort of life that pertains to man. Indeed for Aquinas, there could be no practical teleology without natural teleology, since there would be nothing to reason towards if the will were not by nature inclined towards the exemplification of human form.[57]

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

57. Ibid., 66.

IV.1. Vice

The natural inclination toward the good in general and a few basic goods does not guarantee success or exclude the possibility of mistakenly pursuing bad things. For we do not *know* a priori what we are by nature. The human life form must be discovered; basic goods for human beings must be discovered – and they usually are at some point in the course of a normal life. More particular or less basic goods must be discovered with great effort. Mistakes are possible. However, correction of such mistakes is also possible. Once we have a well-supported hypothesis about our form of life, we can begin to sift through many available natural objects, traits, states of affair, and so on to see which, if any, actuate it.

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

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

An adequate account must allow for Hesiod's insight: "Vice in abundance is easy to get; / The road is smooth and begins beside you, / But the gods have put sweat between us

and virtue."[58] Many people are irrational. Many people are not virtuous. But that is just to say that many people are imperfectly human, and not just by bad luck or misfortune; they are imperfectly actuating the human life form by making bad choices, being ill-informed, being lazy, being greedy.

IV.2. Natural Discernment

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

McDowell aims for this conception of practical reason when he says it is possible to "formulate a conception of reason that is, in one sense, naturalistic: a formed state of practical reason is one's second nature, not something that dictates to one's nature from outside."[59] But, as I have argued, that he does not quite succeed in achieving it. The reason is that McDowell shares with non-cognitivists an implicit nature/human dualism whereby human rationality (in the space of reasons) is entirely of a different order than organic and inorganic nature (in the realm of law). The alternative I have been defending dissolves this dualism.

Toner says: "the virtues are seen as acquired traits that fit human beings for the exercise of practical rationality toward which their shared nature directs them (thereby rejecting McDowell's sharp separation of first and second natures)."[60] This view is more adequate because, as Toner explains:

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

58. *Works and Days* 287-9, quoted in *Republic* II, 364c.
59. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."
60. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 243.

> the good of others part of our good. So… MacIntyre links first and second natures much more closely than does McDowell.[61]

Human beings are *animals* after all, with animal sensations and emotions and urges, the "sharp separation" between biology and rationality not only cuts humans apart from the rest of the cosmos, but cuts human beings down the middle. McDowell's concept of human nature is not that we are practical rational animals; his unwitting concept of human nature is we are *practical reasoners* full stop. This error infects his definition of virtue as well. He believes that all virtues pertain to practical reasoning (or "sensitivity") where I argued that some virtues pertaining to practical *reasoning* while others pertain to rational *practice.*

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

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

V. Summary

My account of virtue, thus far, argued that virtue is excellence in rational practice and practical reasoning. Insofar as virtue is necessarily related to practical rationality, an account of practical reason was needed. I argued that practical reasoning is the capacity for identifying and acting on practical reasons. As practical reasoners, we observe some facts as practical reasons. I briefly argued that "practical reasons" are simply facts viewed by practical reasoners as desirable or undesirable, as good or bad. Just as speculative reason is by

61. Ibid., 243.

definition the faculty for judging true and false, practical reason by definition judges worth or its absence. A practical reason can and does motivate one, all by itself; in conjunction with or absent other immediate inclinations or desires. Practical reason, furthermore, motivates when one judges that a course of action or an outcome is good in itself, that it is *desirable* in the sense that it is to be desired whether one presently desires it or not.

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

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

Chapter 7

Conclusions

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

This dissertation has defended the claim that human beings are practical rational primates and hence *ought* to become fully practically wise.

The potential for wisdom is part of who and what we are. Actualizing that potential is both *natural* (according to the sense of 'natural' I have defended) and *ethically* obligatory.

Virtue ethics is, on my view, a very useful guide to action, in personal life, political life, bioethics,[1] business,[2] and education.[3] It would be an improvement to almost any area of human life if we were aware of our own vices and worked to expunge them, and if we understood the virtues and pursued them. Yet many obstacles from philosophical and social tradition stand in the way. My dissertation is part of an attempt to remove such obstacles and, in their absence, render not only palatable but desirable a pursuit of virtues.

1. Beauchamp and Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*.
2. Ron Beadle, "MacIntyre's Influence on Business Ethics," in *Handbook of Virtue Ethics in Business and Management* (Springer, Dordrecht, 2015), 1–9.
3. David Carr and Jan Steutel, *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education* (Routledge, 2005).

Virtue, practical reason, and flourishing are age-old themes. Nevertheless, they are significant themes. Treating them adequately requires more work than I can claim to have done here. As Glaucon said to Socrates, “The measure of listening to such discussions is the whole of life.”[4]

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

.1. Bibliography

.2. CURRICULUM VITAE

Keith Buhler

Doctoral Candidate

Department of Philosophy

University of Kentucky

Lexington, KY, 40506

keith.buhler@uky.edu

.3. AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Ethics, Metaethics.

.4. AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Ancient Philosophy, Bioethics, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Mind.

.5. EDUCATION

2016 Ph.D. Philosophy, University of Kentucky *(in progress: expected completion in 2016)*

2015 M.A. Philosophy, University of Kentucky

2014 M.A. Applied Orthodox Theology, University of Lebanon

2004 B.A. Humanities, Biola University

.6. CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2016 "The Cosmic Question": Teleology without Theology in Thomas Nagel's *Mind and Cosmos*, Society of Christian Philosophers, San Diego, CA.

2014 "Nihilistic Fairy Tales: Analyzing the Empty Hero in Kung Fu Panda and Great and Powerful Oz", Faith & Film Conference, Baylor University, TX.

2014 "Is the Cosmos Causally Closed? Inductive Arguments Can't Show It," Oxford University, Ian Ramsey Center, St. Anne's College.

2014 "Socratic Spiritual Direction," SOPHIA Conference, TX.

2014 "I Wouldn't Imagine That if I Were You: Moral Imaginative Resistance in a Virtue Ethical Frame," South Carolina Society for Philosophy, SC; and Midsouth Philosophy Conference, MI.

.7. ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

2014-16 Instructor of Philosophy, Asbury University

2012-16 Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Kentucky

.8. COURSES TAUGHT

.9. University of Kentucky

2016 Business Ethics (upper division)

2015-16 Health Care Ethics (upper division)

2013-14 Introduction to Philosophy

2013 Introduction to Ethics

2013 Introduction to Logic

2012 Introduction to Logic (teaching assistant)

.10. Asbury University

2016 Philosophy of C.S. Lewis (upper division)

2016 Philosophy of Religion (upper division)

2016 Wisdom & Virtue (upper division)

2014-2016 Introduction to Philosophy

.11. Biola University

2004 Philosophy of Science (teaching assistant)

.12. Veritas Academy

2013 Western Civilization: 20th Century British Thought

.13. Torrey Academy

2011 Plato Seminar

2009-2010 Aristotelian Logic

2009-2012 Western Civilization: American Thought

2008-2012 Western Civilization: Ancient and Medieval Thought

2007-2012 Western Civilization: 20th Century British Thought

.14. OTHER LEADERSHIP AND TEACHING POSITIONS

2013-2014 Director of High School Studies, Veritas Academy

2010-2012 Master Tutor, Torrey Academy

2001-2011 Tutor & Lecturer, Wheatstone Academy, Fullerton, CA.

2010-2012 Tutor, Etum Academy, Fullerton, CA

2007-2010 Tutor, Torrey Academy, La Mirada CA

2004-2005 Assistant Director, Wheatstone Academy

2001-2002 Great Books Tutor, Willow Elementary, Long Beach, CA.

2001 English Teacher, Biola University Abroad, Mongolia.

.15. INVITED PUBLIC LECTURES

2014 "Morality: Rule-following or New Life?", Wesleyan Society.

2013 "Reading as Classical Education", Veritas Academy.

2012 "The Goodness of Goodness: Lewis' *Abolition of Man*", Torrey Academy.

2012 "Is Vainglory Pride? Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night*", Torrey Academy.

2011 "Does Love Cover a Multitude of Sins?", Hope Academy.

2011 "Hope and the Cycle of Desire", Hope Academy.

2011 "The Divided Self", Hephatha Lutheran Church.

2010 "The Art of Conversation; Conversation with Art", Wheatstone Academy.

2009 "The Virtue of Constancy", Hope Academy.

2007 "Learning From Experience", Torrey Honors Institute, Biola University.

.16. REFERENCES

David Bradshaw, Professor of Philosophy
University of Kentucky, 1415 Patterson
dbradsh@uky.edu / 859.257.7107

Anita Superson, Profesor of Philosophy
University of Kentucky, 1433 Patterson
superson@uky.edu / 859.257.4186

Daniel Breazeale, Profesor of Philosophy
University of Kentucky, 1417 Patterson
breazeal@uky.edu / 859.257.4376

Clair Budd, Department Chair, Religion and Philosophy
Asbury University
clair.budd@asbury.edu / 859.257.7109.

.17. GRADUATE COURSES

.18. Ethics

S2016 Seminar on Post-Kantian Ethics: Fichte and Hegel on Right. Dan Breazeale.

F2015 Metaethics (Dissertation research).

S2014 Seminar on Ethics: Bodily Autonomy. Anita Superson.

S2014 Ethical Naturalism (Independent study). David Bradshaw.

F2012 Ethics from Hobbes to Feminism. Anita Superson.

F2015 Seminar on Metaethics and Motivation. Anita Superson.

F2014 Virtue and After Virtue (Independent study). David Bradshaw.

.19. Ancient

S2016 Seminar on the Death of God: Plato's Forms (audit). Eric Sanday

S2014 Seminar on Plato: Philebus and Timaeus. Eric Sanday.

S2013 Seminar on Plato's Parmenides. Eric Sanday.

S2013 Aristotle and Aristotelians on Mind (Independent study). David Bradshaw.

F2012 Ancient Greek Metaphysics. Eric Sanday.

.20. Philosophy of Mind

F2013 Seminar on Mind: Imagination. Clare Batty.

S2009 Philosophy of Mind. JP Moreland.

F2012 Seminar on Kantian Idealism. Stefan Bird-Pollan.

.21. Metaphysics, Epistemology, etc.

F2013 Seminar on Metaphysical Naturalism. David Bradshaw.

S2013 Philosophy of Religion. David Bradshaw.

S2013 Seminar on Language & Normativity. Tim Sundell.

F2013 Symbolic Logic. Tim Sundell.

F2008 Metaphysics of Substance and Property. JP Moreland.

.22. LANGUAGES

Ancient Greek (proficient reading knowledge)

Spanish (fluent speaking knowledge)

.23. AFFILIATIONS

American Philosophical Association, 2014-present

Society of Orthodox Philosophers in America, 2014-present

International Society for MacIntyrean Enquiry, 2015-present

.24. TEACHING EVALUATIONS

3.6 out of 4, cumulative average in overall teaching quality (University of Kentucky and Asbury University)

3.5 out of 4, cumulative average in overall course quality

.25. DISSERTATION

Working Title: "THE VIRTUE TRIANGLE: PRACTICAL REASON, EXCELLENCE, AND NATURAL TELEOLOGY IN THE RECENT NEO-ARISTOTELIANS" (Chair: David Bradshaw)