Chapter 1

Natural Reasoning

> 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.
>
> —John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 3-4.

Is humanity just another instance of a biological organism, subject to the same sort of evaluation as chimpanzees and dolphins, or is it a different type of organism on account of exemplifying sui generis powers of rational practice and practical reasoning? This question asks the reader to give an account not only of the relation between humans and other animals but an account of the relation between *nature* and *reason*. The precise relation between nature and reason is an almost intractable philosophical problem. Every major tradition – from Platonic rationalism, Humean empiricism, Hegelian objective idealism, to Jamesean neutral monism – presents a sophisticated stance on this relation.

The neo-Aristotelian account I have been developed aims to demonstrate how human natural norms are instances of a broader category of natural norms. These human norms are, for us, practical reasons. Human norms are objective in that they provide normative guidance on how to live, regardless of one's awareness of or endorsement of them.

Such norms become *for the practical reasoner* when he or she correctly identifies them as norms *for him or her*. Unless tragedy, injury, defect, and illness interrupt the process, a young human being naturally matures into the sort of practical rational primate that has at least *one* practical reason: to do good and avoid evil. And every practical reasoner naturally strives to acquire new practical reasons by asking the "how to live?" question, thus adding to a growing stock of practical reasons.

The human norms I explored in the previous chapter – what Frey called "primitive goods" – are perceptible by any human being who has grown into adulthood and undergone a normal social process of formation. Namely, the obligation to acquire traditional virtues such as courage, moderation, and practical wisdom. These virtues represent good answers to the question of how to live; one ought to develop such virtues in oneself. Insofar as people acquire virtues, they overcomes the common temptations to vice and practical folly to benefit themselves and others; insofar as they succumb to vice and fall into practical irrationality, they fail to realize their own life form and suffer the intrinsic detriments thereof.

The account thus far developed has striven to be both *ethical* and *naturalistic*. Recalling the dispute between Foot and McDowell, I have argued that her sort of 'organic naturalism' is genuinely naturalistic. The (apparently unique) ethical and rational norms intrinsic to living a human life are of a piece with the kinds of norms intrinsic to a wolf or white oak. Hans Fink points out that an ethical naturalist is "someone who insists on a fundamental continuity between the ethical and the natural."[1] Just how that continuity is to be cashed out is the focal point of the dispute between Foot's organic naturalism and McDowell's social naturalism.

One of the attractions of the Footian sort of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is

1. Hans Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (August 2006): 203.

that it provides a unified account of nature and human nature. Foot's concept of natural normativity – intrinsic to life forms and natural ends – is a satisfying way of showing that continuity. For Foot, normativity is not exclusive to practically reasoning creatures like us. Every organism pursues its own goods – survival, reproduction, and the exemplification of its proper life form. Julia Annas says:

> 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… to have stressed this point. Like many important philosophical points, it is obvious once pointed out…[2]

Nevertheless, Foot's organic naturalism is far from "obvious" to some. One of the alleged drawbacks, according to John McDowell, John Hacker-Wright, and others, is that "Foot's naturalism draws on a picture of the biological world at odds with the view embraced by most scientists and philosophers."[3] McDowell endorses bald naturalism when it comes to the "realm of law" that the natural sciences study. Are natural norms – including human norms of practical reasoning – simply outmoded by modern science? Though I have tried to diffuse this worry in chapter 2, it is quite likely that something like this concern remains. For the self-reflective nature of human life creates special philosophical problems for the sort of naturalism I have developed. Humans are aware of – and partially in control of – their own life form and natural ends. Other organisms are not. Furthermore, when we scientifically reason about other organisms, it is commonly thought, we mostly describe. When we practically reason about ourselves, we also evaluate. So how could practical reasoning be fundamentally the same as descriptive, natural reasoning? The purpose of this chapter

2. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?" in *Virtue Ethics, Old and New*, ed. Stephen Gardiner (Cornell University Press, 2005), 11–29.

3. John Hacker-Wright, "What Is Natural About Foot's Ethical Naturalism?" *Ratio* 22, no. 3 (2009): 308.

is to put questions like this in a broader philosophical context and offer a fuller response.

Section 1 sets up the discussion by presenting Chris Toner's four requirements that a successful neo-Aristotelian naturalism must meet if it is to overcome the sort of criticisms McDowell poses. I provide further details on how my account thus far has already satisfied three of the four.

Section 2 argues that McDowell's alternative to Footian naturalism fails to satisfy Toner's fourth requirement. I detail McDowell's concepts of first and second natures. Since his paradoxical views have caused some consternation among his philosophical readers, I first offer an explanation of his beguiling metaphilosophical project. I then explain how he deploys these concepts in his ethical project.

Section 3 brings multiple charges of inconsistency against McDowell's account of nature. First, he seems to both deny and affirm that some relational properties (such as *meriting*) are part of primary nature. Secondly, drawing from Hans Fink to distinguish different concepts of nature and scientific reasoning, I argue that McDowell's conception affirms two conflicting concepts. On either of two plausible conceptions of nature and the natural, my account demonstrates that practical reasoning is natural reasoning. Thirdly, McDowell's account unwittingly falls into the very sort of undesirable nature/human dualism he emphatically wishes to avoid. Fourthly, McDowell's intersubjective notions of both scientific and ethical reasoning lead to an incorrigible relativism. For each inconsistency, I show how my accounts of virtue and practical reason (developed in chapters 4 and 5) are more adequate to the task of meeting Toner's fourth requirement. I suggest "recursive naturalism" as an appropriate name for my view, since human beings are natural organisms able to practically reason about nature, about themselves, and about practical reasoning itself.

1. Four Requirements

A recent article by Chris Toner argues that neo-Aristotelians (such as Foot and Michael 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…"[4] Fortunately, our account thus far has satisfied three of the four.

The first requirement is that *natural norms must be intrinsically able to motivate the bearer of the nature.* Put differently, the natural human norms pertaining to our nature must be, for us, practical reasons. In chapter 5, I argued that practical reasons, by definition, motivate us. Practical reasoning is not simply one of many ways we can be motivated; it is the very capacity to be motivated by reasons. Practical reasoning is, of course, not the only way we can be *moved*. Plants and animals are inclined or moved to their good by unreasoning genetic "programs," instinct, fear, irrational appetite and so on. They are moved but have no further capacity to take these sources of movement *as* practical reasons. Humans are inclined toward their good *both* by the same impulses (instinct, emotion, desire, etc.) *and* by practical reason. I also argued that the first object of human practical reasoning is a quite general conception of what is to be done and pursued (the good) and what is to be avoided (evil). By 'good' we did not mean a non-natural entity or property apprehended theoretically but any natural entity or property apprehended *as* choice-worthy, desirable, or 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.[5]

---

4. Christopher Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism: Requirements for a Successful Theory," *Metaphilosophy* 39, no. 2 (2008): 222.

5. Jennifer Ann Frey, "The Will and the Good" (PhD thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 88.

The objects of pursuit are many: friendship, knowledge, money, pleasure, and so on. I did not attempt to give a complete objective list. I rather argued that the natural human norms pertaining to our life form are on on the list. While there are many actions of humans, there is only one kind of human action: the unique process of taking natural inclinations and natural norms as prima facie practical reasons, reflecting on them, and organizing them all into a rational plan for what to do, all things considered.

This conclusion goes a long way to solving what Jennifer Frey calls the "Irrelevance Problem." She says:

> [Irrelevance] 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.[6]

As we saw in chapter 5, McDowell argues that – granting the existence of natural human norms to seek food, shelter, comfort, survival, society, and so on – these norms are not necessarily binding. His discussion of the "rational wolf" illustrates the objection.[7] Although a wolf is "supposed to" hunt in packs because that is a formal property of its nature, if a wolf were endowed with *logos* it would be just as free as human beings are to step back from such natural norms and either endorse or reject them. Nevertheless, even this higher order adjudication is subject to natural norms of practical reasoning. A practical rational primate ought to order his or her natural inclinations according to what is, all things considered, good for human beings. Even though I find within myself the desire, say, to eat good food, such norms direct me to eat certain things at certain times and in certain ways. A habitual glutton might feel a craving to overeat between meals, but decide that, all things considered, it is better to be moderate. Or an anorexic might feel psychological pressures to eat too little, but decide that, all things considered, it is better to eat a sufficient amount.

6. Ibid., 14.

7. John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 167–97.

Toner's second requirement is this: *natural norms must be intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearer of the nature.* Natural human norms must not be merely given; they must somehow justify themselves. Reflection must reveal that the norms are *good* practical reasons to all rational agents. The norms need not, Toner admits, *automatically* persuade a Callicles to repent of his wickedness. However, they must be *able to* become justifiable motivations under normal circumstances. 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.[8]

It is true that mere general descriptive facts do not motivate and that simple brute desires to behave in a certain way are not necessarily overriding motivators. However, as I have argued in chapters 2 and 3, natural norms are not reducible to either mere facts or brute desires. Rather, natural norms both characterize what traits count as virtues for practical rational creatures like us *and* they are intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearers of that nature.

This requirement affords the opportunity to respond to what Elijah Millgram calls the "Pollyanna problem," according to which 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."[9] Anscombe anticipates this worry when she says:

8. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 235.

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

> 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.[10]

Millgram et. al., might object that I was winking at the dark side of human nature when I built my inductive case for the generic that the human beings are practical rational primates. After all, empirical sociology can establish the truth of such generics as: politicians lie, sociopaths murder, businesses cheat, criminals steal, countries wage unjust war, parents abuse their children, and so on. Likewise, empirical biology shows that some acorns become fully grown, mature oaks, but other acorns become stultified, sickly specimens. (Most acorns never become anything other than acorns before they disintegrate into dust in the soil.) Some animals protect their young while other animals abandon or even consume their young. Are we supposed to allow, then, that "Human beings abandon their young" is a generic truth, indicative of the human life form? Are we obligated to fulfill all such norms? Just some? Which ones?

I think this problem, while important, is ultimately specious. In order to even pose the objection, Millgram et. al. have to discriminate between good and bad norms. Millgram cites such traits such as dishonesty, infidelity, and cruelty that are statistically prevalent but obviously immoral. The neo-Aristotelian can agree with his evaluation. Furthermore, good norms are not mere statistical generalizations. When we examine the behaviors of organisms, we begin with making generalizations. Even constructing scientific accounts of organisms, we do not stop there, but sift through them. Some remain mere generalizations about how some creatures happen to behave, while others are classified as essential or natural to how that creature behaves. The latter are natural norms. I have already argued that a good example of such natural norms is that humans are practical rational primates who

10. Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 14.

mature into practically wise and virtuous agents. But I do not mean that every such example is easy. How should criminals be punished? What kinds of sexual practices are acceptable? How should societies relate to one another? Aristotle points out that raiding neighboring tribes is a near-universal form of wealth-acquisition and concludes that it is natural – i.e., morally acceptable. I would object that mutual respect or arms-length trading (which are also statistically common) are morally acceptable. The point here is not that every natural human norm is easy to identify. But disputable cases are disputes over the very question of which behaviors are essential and which unnatural.

Furthermore, we do not need to concede a fundamental discontinuity between the kind of discrimination between good and bad norms essential to ethical reasoning and the kind of discrimination between normal and pathological that is essential to biological and other scientific reasoning. Rather, the process of sifting between various generalizations is one and the same, whether in scientific or ethical accounts. Moral and rational defects can be overwhelmingly common. Regardless of how statistically common the failure to conform to such norms, the discernment between virtuous and vicious is akin to the discernment between healthy specimens and unhealthy ones, normal animals and pathological ones. Indeed, part of having a properly-formed mind is that one can distinguish between natural norms and mere generalizations.

For example, the *National Geographic* narrates how a sloth bear in Washington D.C. gave birth in captivity to three cubs. The first one was immediately killed and eaten by the mother, but the second were nurtured and cared for. The zookeepers were appalled. When, after a week of caring for the remaining cubs, the mother killed and ate another, they intervened to save the third.[11] This event posed the question: is something wrong with the

11. Virginia Morell (2014, March 28). "Why Do Animals Sometimes Kill Their Babies?" *National Geographic* (March 28, 2014). Accessed online. http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/03/140328-sloth-bear-zoo-infanticide-chimps-bonobos-animals/

mother bear? First, the zookeepers observed the facts: the mother ate one cub and nurtured (temporarily) the other two. Then they made two quite different generalizations: (1) mother bears care for their young, and (2) mother bears kill and eat their young. The contradiction demands sifting. The zookeepers then discerned which is the natural norm. University of Southern California primatologist Craig Stanford points out that the consensus among biologists is to affirm the generic truth: a mother cares for her young. As a normative generic, we can say without a change in meaning that a mother bear is *supposed* to care for her young, and hence that infanticide is pathological. New data can confirm or disconfirm this evaluative judgment. For instance, the third cub of the sloth bear whom the zookeepers intervened to save turned out to suffer an elevated white blood cell count. It is possible that the other cubs were sick as well. The zookeepers speculated that the mother somehow knew this and so killed the ailing cubs. If this were true, it would give rise to a new normative generic: a mother cares for her healthy young. If it turned out that the two other cubs were *not* in fact ailing, the mother's behavior would be classified as pathological.

Similarly for humans and other primates.[12] Psychologist Christine Lawson narrates the horrifying story of when a mother drowned her two young children in order to ingratiate herself to a man she was dating who said, offhandedly, that he did not want children:

> [In 1992,] Susan Smith drove to a lake near Union, South Carolina, and parked her car at the top of a boat ramp. She stepped out of the car, released the parking break, and let the car roll into the water with her babies strapped inside. Covering her ears with her hands so she could not hear their screams, she ran up the ramp as the car rolled toward the lake. It too six minutes for the car to sink, drifting away from the ramp, bobbing nose first into the water.[13]

The father of the children and Susan's ex-husband shared his recollection:

12. Jane Goodall, "Infant Killing and Cannibalism in Free-Living Chimpanzees," *Folia Primatologica* 28, no. 4 (1977): 259–82.

13. Christine Ann Lawson, *Understanding the Borderline Mother* (Jason Aronson, Incorporated, 2000), 122.

> There were some troubling things that I learned in the aftermath of the killings… There's only one conclusion I could make. Susan watched the car as it sank. This was too awful, too terrible to imagine. Susan waiting, seeing Michael and Alex die. If that were true, there is no doubt something truly evil in Susan's character, something unspeakable.[14]

Statistically, the vast majority of human parents do an adequate job, but we do not posit "parents care for their children" as a mere statistical likelihood that admits of exceptions. Rather, psychologists correctly judge such exceptional cases of parental indifference and cruelty as normative errors. This particular parent was not merely a statistical anomaly but an example of a psychological disorder (in this case, Borderline Personality Disorder). Understanding and labeling her disorder should not lead us to soften the normative evaluation of her actions. (Many Borderline parents manage their disorder and do an adequate job in spite of it.) Susan Smith's behavior was criminal, but it was also pathological and – as David Smith said, truly evil. Lawson explains that "Susan Smith sacrificed her children in order not to be abandoned by her boyfriend, the wealthy heir to the town's largest industry."[15] To take a significant other's offhand comment about not wanting children *as a reason* to murder one's own is a devastating error in practical reasoning. The correct practical reasoning is almost too obvious to need stating: There is *good reason* to take care of one's child. Parents are *supposed to* care for their young, even when doing so is difficult or costly. These natural norms seem to me excellent examples of the sort of natural norms that are intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearer of human nature.

The same pattern holds when constructing norms pertaining to a whole host of virtues. As Toner mentions, "The requirements of the virtues can be articulated into what Hursthouse calls v-rules (do what is just, what is courageous, and so forth)."[16] I would articulate such norms or "v-rules" in the form of generics: human beings do what is just,

14. Ibid., 122.
15. Ibid., 123.
16. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 242.

what is wise, etc. The generic picks out what human beings naturally do; the failure to it is, accordingly, a defect.

Toner's third requirement is this: *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 (as represented by virtuous and wise exemplars) is successfully "anchored in" that 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.[17]

There are many examples of natural norms that philosophers plausibly take to be intrinsically justifying to human beings. I mentioned in chapter 4 a few examples from Russ Shafer-Landau, such as that "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, and to sell another's secrets solely for personal gain."[18] Richard Boyd follows Hilary Putnam in calling such norms "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

17. Ibid., 242.

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]

I think Boyd and Putnam are correct here. Some ethical laws are on a par with some scientific laws in being pretty well incorrigible. While the west has undergone "conceptual revolutions" that have overturned deeply-held traditions such as, say, slavery or the torture of prisoners, we can point to even deeper quasi-analytic principles that have never undergone revolution in the west or (to my knowledge) anywhere in the world: the importance of caring for children, the value of truth. One can find persons and societies that *in fact* violate these norms, but not that *in principle* believe children should be corrupted and that everyone should deceive themselves and others.

If quasi-analytic ethical laws indeed exist, the question is how to explain this. Recalling Frey's discussion of Aquinas "first principle of practical reason" can help us to draw the proper relation between these norms of morality and norms of practical reason. That fundamental normative principle was that good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided. This principle provides that major premise for a practical syllogism behind every rational action, where the minor premise is some virtually unrevisable evaluative judgment: e.g., evil is to be avoided, and torturing children is evil, therefore torturing children is to be avoided; good is to be pursued, loyalty is good, therefore loyalty is to be pursued. Practical irrationality does not arise when one judges that good is to be avoided and evil pursued but when one makes a fundamental mistake about what is good or evil and, hence, judges it to be the thing to do.

---

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

Toner's fourth requirement is this: *first and second nature must be related so that the second is a natural outgrowth of the first, and so that in our given makeup is (first) natural which does tend toward an ethically mature second nature.* While McDowell believes that his own alternative to Footian naturalism more adequately meets this requirement, I believe that a consistent reading can show that his account falls short.

2. First and Second Nature

Recall the quotation from chapter 1 that explains McDowell's objection to Foot's organic naturalism. He says:

> 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.[20]

McDowell makes clear that his dispute with Foot concerns her "concept of nature." McDowell's picture of the relation between nature and reason appeals to "second nature." He says he aims 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."[21] McDowell is an ethical naturalist in that he also insists on a "fundamental continuity" between the ethical and the natural. It is clear that he does not wish to fall into a dualism between biology and rationality. Nevertheless, it seems to me, he sets up another equally pernicious dualism.

---

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

21. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."

In order to make good on this criticism, it would be prudent to first put McDowell's ethical project in metaphilosophical context. McDowell is a proponent of "therapeutic philosophy." He says he is influenced by two main sources: the "Socratic tradition" and Wittgenstein.[22] 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 – philosophy that 'leaves everything as it is.'[23] McDowell believes many philosophical puzzles arise not from the puzzling nature of reality itself but from errors in *our own thinking*, so we need "therapy": dualisms need to be *exorcised*. He is both an anti-realist and an *anti*-anti-realist. He is therefore always fighting on two fronts, attacking a position while trying to avoid supporting its apparent opposite.

This feature of his thought is liable to puzzle and even frustrate some philosophers.[24] A bit of context can help make his project comprehensible in both its ethical and metaphysical expressions. For example, consider his philosophy of mind. In *Mind and World* he attempts to dissolve the "vacillation" between naive empirical realism (compare with: Footian organic naturalism) and "Rampant Platonism" (compare with: non-naturalism) 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, norms, ends, and reasons. 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.

Even in *Mind and World*, his solution depends on a neo-Aristotelian conception of human beings as practical reasoners. Understanding human reasoning in contrast to

22. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, preface.
23. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Section 124.
24. For examples of both puzzlement and genuine frustration, see Cynthia Macdonald and Graham Macdonald, *McDowell and His Critics* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

nature "requires a different conception of actualizations of our nature."[25] In that book, he deploys the concept of "second nature" to describe the way human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing by *Bildung* – that is, by education, formation, or cultivation.[26] Practical wisdom is one example of a virtue that the young human being does not have but that may be developed by formation. At first, the ethical demands of practical wisdom are not even perceptible to the young. They have the natural potential to become aware of (and answerable to) the demands of practical wisdom. Slowly, that potential is actualized or inculcated and a moral outlook is attained. Human beings are initiated into this stretch of the space of reasons by ethical upbringing (Bildung) which instills the appropriate shape in their lives. So initiated, practically wise behavior is not just a new kind of behavior but the maturation and development of a new kind of faculty in the human animal. He says that "[The ethical demands of reason] are essentially within reach of human beings. So practical wisdom is second nature to its possessors."[27] In this sense, a mature human being can be rightly described as "doing what comes naturally" when he or she engages in certain rational activities that have been deeply habituated.

McDowell's ethical writings employ the same solution expressed in almost the same terms. For example, "Values as Secondary Qualities" argues against both anti-realism and anti-anti-realism, but instead of opposing a vacillation between empirical realism and rampant Platonism, he opposes a vacillation between Footian naturalism and pure subjectivism. Instead of arguing that even primary qualities involve spontaneous conceptual capacities, McDowell argues that even the identification of values involves the subjective or intersubjective capacity to create value.

Subjectivists such as Mackie, Allan Gibbard, and Simon Blackburn believe that normativity is "projected" by philosophers and scientists onto the natural facts. McDowell

25. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996), 77.
26. *Bildung* (German): formation, education; from *bild*: form, image.
27. Ibid., 84.

grants that Mackie et. al. are right to assert that values, like secondary qualities, cannot be adequately conceived "except in terms of certain subjective states."[28] There is no such thing as "to-be-pursuedness" existing as a Lockean primary quality in first nature. Whereas Foot thinks that normative facts are response-independent features of (first) nature, McDowell dismisses this possibility out of hand. He says that naive realism about value is "impossible – at least on reflection – to take seriously…"[29] In considering the notion of intrinsically normative natural facts impossible to take seriously, McDowell agrees with Mackie: the "central doctrine of European moral philosophy" is a mistake;[30] it is wrong to think that some things *merit* certain responses by virtue of what they are and what we are.

A reader unfamiliar with McDowell's metaphilosophical project might conclude that he must think values are not objective features of nature and hence that they are purely subjective. But it does not necessarily follow that values are illusory projections onto the world. A secondary quality is not "a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it."[31] The problem with subjectivism is that it misses the way in which "ordinary evaluative thought [is] a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world."[32]

McDowell's alternative presents first nature as consisting of both Lockean primary qualities, which are response-independent, and Lockean secondary qualities, which are response-dependent dispositional properties. Colors and values are natural in the sense that they are dispositional properties. Color-properties must be defined partly by their "objective" or response-independent aspects and partly phenomenologically. It makes no sense to speak of what *redness is* apart from perceptions of red *in perceivers*. Similarly, he argues, it makes no sense to speak of "dangerousness" apart from a subject who is potentially vulner-

28. John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 139.
29. Ibid., 132.
30. John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin UK, 1977).
31. McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," 136.
32. Ibid., 131.

able or "rightness" apart from a subject who potentially judges the value of a thing. Even so the property of "being such as to look red" may or may not *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 an appearance of a particular phenomenal character. In the same way, goodness, badness, and other values are grounded in "second nature."[33] 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. And, as we saw in chapter 5, he thinks that the normativity of theoretical and practical reasoning is merely grounded in our shared form of life.

3. Inconsistencies

McDowell's view is, I think, ingenious, but vulnerable to a four criticisms. First, McDowell thinks that treating practical reasons as primary qualities of nature is "impossible to take seriously" because he wonders "how something that is brutely *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility."[34] Is this really so hard to imagine? We can find an example of this mundane relation in his own article.

To illustrate his point about human responsiveness to value, he presents an analogue in the animal kingdom which he (somewhat playfully) labels his "theory of danger." His theory of danger is that there is something about predators, say, that is really dangerous to their prey. The immanent presence of a bear does not just cause fear in a rabbit but *merits* it. To describe a bear as dangerous to rabbits is to assert something about both bears, about rabbits, and about their place in the animal kingdom on our planet. The rabbit does not

33. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 188 and following.
34. McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," 132.

need to use concepts or make rational judgments to see the bear as dangerous; it merely needs its natural perceptual capacities and its instincts. When a prey observes a predator, it feels fear; but the fear-response is not obviously reducible to a perception of some purely descriptive property, such as the bear's fur (other non-predators have fur) or its size (other non-predators are just as large or larger). Nor is "dangerousness" something projected by the rabbit onto the bear. Rather, the fear arises in response to the danger, or perhaps the bear-as-dangerous. Likewise, to describe a particular food as disgusting (say, rotten fruit) is to assert something about humans, about rotten fruit, and about the relation between the two. Given the kinds of beings we are, and given the natural properties of rotten food, the fact that we ought not to eat it seems to be a straightforward, natural normative fact. The brute presence of a bear stands in an internal relation to the exercise of the rabbit's natural sensibility: it had better run. In humans, the brute fact that parents have a child stands in an internal relation to the exercise of our natural, rational sensibility: they had better care for the child.

3.1 Restricted or Unrestricted?

Secondly, McDowell thinks the Footian sort of naturalism (which he called "naive realism") is impossible to take seriously because he thinks the view of that nature consist of both descriptive and some normative primary qualities is inconsistent with modern science. He says, "The most striking occurrence in the history of thought between Aristotle and ourselves is the rise of modern science."[35] Although he thinks Aristotle provides the right cues, the modern scientific picture of nature is "disenchanted" from intrinsic moral values or human norms.

In *Mind and World*, he expresses his view by saying that human beings "partially re-enchant" nature. Perhaps this is why some have objected to McDowell's account of the

35. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 174.

relation between nature and reason as being insufficiently naturalistic. For example, James Lenman says: "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."[36] The 'many philosophers' Lenman alludes to are probably physicalists or materialists. Physicalism is indeed a paradigmatic sort of naturalism, and McDowell is a staunch critic of physicalism. Nevertheless, I shall try to show that McDowell's view also has rightful claim to that title. McDowell's flaw is not an idiosyncratic definition of 'nature' but an inconsistent one.

Before we consider McDowell's definition of 'nature, we should ask: how do philosophers commonly deploy the term? Russ Shafer-Landau does an adequate job of exposing the flaws in a variety of common ways of stipulating what 'natural' means:

> Something is natural just in case, necessarily, it is . . . what? It isn't such as to be touchable, or tangible. Being a species isn't touchable. Neither is being a quark. Being natural is not the same as being non-conventional: moral properties, if non-naturalists are right, are certainly that. It isn't the feature of being material: certain physical fields, or vacuums, are natural in anyone's book, and yet not composed of matter. It isn't the feature of being causally efficacious: being such that everything is either red or not, being divisible by itself, and being self-identical are causally inert natural properties. Being natural is not the same as being a feature of the world prior to, or considered apart from, the presence of humans. For being human, or a human artefact, is a natural feature. Nor can we define a natural property as any property that is not evaluative. For moral properties are evaluative on anyone's reckoning, and so we would, by definitional fiat, thereby rule ethical naturalism out of court. It can't be got rid of as easily as that.[37]

Some readers may object to the level of detail at which I attempt to capture a definition of 'nature.' They might insist we must simply stipulate our definition of 'nature' and move on. I rather think it is a scandal that so many writers pass over such weighty matters with pithy,

36. James Lenman, "Moral Naturalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2014, sec. 4.1, footnote 18.

37. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 58–59.

commonplaces rather than rigorous definitions. Shafer-Landau's discussion of nature and naturalism is exceptionally thorough, he is still forced to settle on a "disciplinary" definition of the natural: "Naturalism… claims that all real properties are those that would figure ineliminably in perfected versions of the natural and social sciences. Since we don't have any of those versions in hand, we can't be absolutely sure about our naturalistic inventory."[38] The indeterminacy of such a disciplinary definition of the natural is unsatisfactory for someone defending the 'naturalism' of a theory against the accusation of 'non-naturalism.' When it comes to such important and highly ambiguous concepts as nature and science, much more is needed. Hans Fink says:

> 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.)…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 supernatural, or the non-natural, just as it is an open question what the nature of the natural is.[39]

In short, the concept of nature is treacherously ambiguous. For the remainder of this section, I shall summarize the key details of Hans Fink's essay on the topic, which clears up much of this ambiguity. Then I shall then show how McDowell embraces two mutually incompatible options.

Fink begins by pointing out that there are at least two broad kinds of conceptions of nature: The first is "Unrestricted nature" a conception which leaves nothing out. Fink explains the unrestricted conception in this way:

38. Ibid., 59.
39. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 206.

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

The alternative to unrestricted nature is (2) "restricted nature." Restricted nature picks out some subset of things as natural, exclusive of anything 'non-natural,' unnatural, or supernatural. Unrestricted naturalism is ecumenical. Restricted naturalism is parsimonious. Unrestricted naturalism is simple. Restricted naturalisms are legion. For example, Fink lists eight different conceptions by which one can use 'natural' to distinguish from the non-natural: the world unaffected by intelligent intervention (e.g., the arrangement of trees in the Yukon) is natural as opposed to the world so affected (a row of trees along a city street). Or, as Fink says, 'nature' could refer to "the empirical world as opposed to the intelligible world of the abstract, logical, or mathematical." And there are several other ways in which the restricted conception can be cashed out.

The advantage of the unrestricted conception is that it does not try, in advance, to stipulate what is and is not real. This can do the trick of resolving disputes about what is natural. 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."[41] On unrestricted naturalism, even culture, art, rationality, intelligent intervention, and so on are parts of reality. Fink's comment on the John Dewey passage in the epigraph above 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

40. Ibid., 206.
41. Ibid., 219.

> otherwise is both to mystify the aesthetical (and ethical) and to trivialize nature. The man-made, the artificial, the cultural, the historical, the ethical, the normative, the mental, the logical, the abstract, the mysterious, the extraordinary, are all examples of ways of being natural rather than examples of ways of being non-natural. Nature is never *mere* nature. That which is *more* than *mere* is nature, too.[42]

The disadvantage of the unrestricted conception is that it is tautologous: one can no longer use the accusation of "non-naturalism" as a weapon against opponents with a competing ontology. It obviously makes no sense to criticize someone for positing entities "over and above" nature after defining "natural" as "real" and hence "non-natural" as "unreal" by definition. As Stephen Brown says, "If by 'nature' we mean 'everything that is,' then of course there is nothing outside nature."[43]

The advantage and disadvantage of the restricted conception is the same: on the one hand, we can classify some entities as non-natural in advance, and exclude or bracket them; on the other hand, we are obligated to provide a principled justification for the classification of unfavored entities that doesn't, at the same time, exclude some favored entities. Fink's discussion of Plato's *Laws* shows how tricky this classification can be. In the *Laws*, the Athenian distinguishes three kinds of events and three corresponding kinds of causal explanation. First, the growth of plants and the orbit of the sun etc., come about by nature (*physis*). Second, anything that does not come about by nature or art comes about by chance, e.g., leaves fall into this or that pattern and mountain ranges form into this or that shape, etc.. Third, houses have roofs and humans wear clothes by art.

The Athenian then asks, which of these three types of events are "natural"? The first hypothesis, which he eventually rejects, is that the first two are natural – namely, nature and chance. They are natural because they come about prior to and independent of intervention from humans or gods. By this classification, however, the natural excludes not

42. Ibid., 217.

43. R. Stephen Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature: A Defense of Ethical Naturalism* (Continuum, 2008), 2.

only the supernatural but the cultural, the fictional, the aesthetic, and so on. The Athenian calls this conception of nature "dangerous" because it makes everything having to do with intelligence non-natural.

The second hypothesis, which the Athenian defends, is that the third kind of event (art) is the natural kind. He tries to prove that soul is ontologically prior to body. He says that "soul is necessarily prior in origin to things which belong to body, seeing that soul is older than body."[44] He first defines 'soul' as self-movement, and the cause of motion in other things, and 'body' as the things moved. Regardless of the merits of the Athenian's argument, it should be plain that the two hypotheses agree that the "natural" kind of event and cause is the *primary* one. Even though the Athenian's thesis is "pretty rampant Platonism," Fink points out that it is "clearly presented as an account of the soul as natural because primary in existence… mind is prior to world."[45] To illustrate the point, he shows how Aristotle defends a similar priority of form over matter: "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."[46] 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.[47]

If soul is the primary sense of nature, then body is "second nature." Mind (art, intelligence, reason) is the paradigmatic, primary thing against which mere body is contrasted. A final quotation from Fink puts the stakes clearly:

> 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

44. John Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato* (Hackett, 1997), *Laws* 891cff.
45. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 215.
46. Ibid., 216, quoting from Aristotle, *Physics*, 2014 2, 1 (192b7ff).
47. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 216.

> 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.[48]

Fink's distinction between unrestricted and restricted conceptions of nature illuminates a surprising fact about the ideological struggle between bald naturalism and non-naturalistic idealism: both are forms of restricted naturalism. Classical materialism (bald naturalism) is one paradigmatic form of naturalism. But the idealist, too, can rightly lay claim to the title of naturalism – and not in a "Pickwickian" sense. Whatever one holds to be the "inner source or cause" of a thing, the immediate constituent matter or the shape, one is a 'naturalist.' Each account lays claim to the title 'naturalism' and impugns its rival as 'non-naturalistic.'

McDowell I think rightly sees that bald naturalistic materialism and non-naturalistic idealism merely presume their preferred conception of restricted nature and accuse the other side of 'non-naturalism.' For example, some restricted naturalists simply beg the question against idealism by defining nature as a material, spatio-temporal, causal system studied by natural scientific methods. Other restricted naturalists beg the question against materialism by defining nature as the formal, immaterial, ideal order studied by rational or practical methods. My point is not to defend either one but to suggest that logical consistency demands we choose one or the other restricted conception of nature (or else resort to the unrestricted conception).

We can now more exactly pose the challenge to McDowell's account: is he employing an unrestricted conception of nature or a restricted one? If a restricted conception of nature, which? On one hand, McDowell rejects the restricted conception of nature offered him by classical materialism. He variously impugns this cluster of views as bald naturalism, philistine scientism, naive realism, etc. On the other hand, he also explicitly rejects

48. Ibid., 214.

the restricted naturalisms of rampant Platonism or Kantian idealism.[49] It would seem, then, that he has selected the unrestricted view of nature by default.

Instead of explicitly embracing the unrestricted conception without qualification, he puts the ball in one cup and then moves it around to the other side, pretending the ball was in the other cup all along. He keeps his conception of nature restricted (anti-platonist, anti-supernatural) while *calling* it unrestricted (neither idealist nor physicalist). Like the materialist, he still wants to wield "non-naturalism" as a rhetorical weapon against some opponents; but like the idealist, he wants to wield "philistine scientism" as a rhetorical weapon against others. McDowell claims to deny dualism by employing an unrestricted conception of nature while fully endorsing a restricted conception of nature. The McDowellian picture of nature is simultaneously restricted and unrestricted.

My view, by contrast, is that organisms (including human beings) are part of the natural order – and that organic norms (including human norms) are natural. It is clear that, on unrestricted naturalism, this way of stating things poses no problems. If organisms and organic norms can exist in the scientific account of the world, then they are "natural" by definition.

What about the various restricted naturalisms? I think the only position excluded by my argument is bald naturalism or classical materialism. Like McDowell, I think the restricted, mechanical conception of nature is refuted by the existence of practical rational primates like ourselves. As 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."[50] Unlike McDowell, I think bald naturalism

---

49. Cf. McDowell, *Mind and World*. Chapter 6.

50. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism. 219, quoting *Mind, Value, and Reality* 112-31, especially section 5. Roy Wood Sellars provides a pure specimen of such ideological 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." (Roy

misunderstands all living organisms. 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.[51]

I have problemetized the reductive picture of nature as a mathematical order excluding not only reasoning but fundamental categories such as organic life in chapter 2. Even on some restricted forms of naturalism, the best evidence from biology suggests that there are such things as natural norms. We cannot build a scientific account of any organism without them. The picture of nature that emerges is one in which the natural and normative worlds coincide at the level of biological life. So, as long as the restricted form of naturalism includes both descriptive facts studied in sciences such as physics and normative facts studied in sciences like biology, then it would be consistent with my view.

3.2 Nature/Human Dualism

The inconsistency in McDowell's account causes other problems. For example, he falls prey to the very kind of dualism he explicitly aims to avoid. Namely, despite *calling* exercises of human practical reasoning (aimed at becoming virtuous and practically wise) "second

Wood Sellars, "Why Naturalism and Not Materialism?" *The Philosophical Review* 36, no. 3 (1927): 216–25 217) Note that the first sentence explicitly endorses an unrestricted conception of nature while the next sentence secretly slides the ball into the other cup, overtly stipulating that the "space-time-causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed" is "identical with reality." Whether that stipulation is true is the very question at hand. 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 to nature.

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

nature," it is clear that he thinks such exercises belong only to human nature, not to the (first) natural world. The result is a nature/human dualism that cuts human beings apart from the non-rational (organic) natural world. As Julia Annas summarizes, non-reductive naturalism risk trivializing moral or normative facts by relegating them to humans alone: "Non-naturalistic accounts of ethical terms assume that their function, prominently their normativity, is something that arises with humans, or is produced by humans, in a way which owes nothing to the nature which we share with other living things."[52]

What's worse, McDowell's unwitting sort of reason/body dualism cuts human beings down the middle.[53] For human beings are also animals, with animal sensations and emotions. If human responsiveness to the space of reasons is utterly separate from emotional responsiveness, then we are left to conclude that emotions are irrational while practical reason is unemotional.

We might express the contrast by saying that McDowell presents human as *practical rational agents* full stop, where I presented humans as practical rational *primates*. I suggested in chapter 4 that this error leads him into the corresponding error of concluding that successful practical reasoning is virtue as a whole; by contrast, I argued that practical wisdom is a virtue of practical reasoning, while other virtues (such as moderation) are virtues of rational practice. McDowell ignores that even "non-rational" phenomena such as emotions and even the human body can be made "rational" in two senses: first, one can take these into account when reasoning about what to do; and secondly, one can direct one's body, emotions, and desires toward good ends. Indeed, forming one's emotional reactions into rational patterns is necessary for the acquisition of certain virtues.[54]

---

52. Annas, "Virtue Ethics," 12.

53. McDowell would vehemently deny this charge. (Cf. McDowell, *Mind and World*, Lecture VI.) My point is not that he admits to embracing reason/body dualism but that his explicit view entails it.

54. Cf. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1998), chap. 5.

The attraction of my view is that one can see one's own nature as a practical rational primate in continuity with non-human nature. The natural human norms inherent in human practical reasoning are of a piece with the natural non-human norms of all organic life. As Annas said above, "we find normativity in the realm of living things, plants and animals, already." The exercise of practical reasoning is part of the same natural order as our biological life form and function. That we practically reason *is* the natural fact that defines our life form and what we practically reason *about* are the natural facts that already obtain for human beings. Chris Toner argues that, on this view, "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)."[55] Toner explains why this view is more adequate:

> The acquisition of the virtues not only prevents emotions from interfering with practical reasoning but also, in McDowellian terms, "opens our eyes" to new sorts of reasons for action, not visible to the immature, that make the good of others part of our good.[56]

In chapter 5, I endorsed McDowell's view that part of successful practical reasoning is the initial perceptual sensitivity to certain facts about what is required. However, the facts to which the virtuous person becomes sensitive are not a sui generis set of "second natural" facts but the same natural facts that animals are sensitive to without reflection. By allowing normativity into our picture of nature at the organic level as a whole, human powers of theoretical and practical reasoning come to light as the *awareness* of that normativity, rather than its invention.

---

55. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 243.
56. Ibid., 243.

3.3 Inside/Outside

As I briefly mentioned in chapter 5, another major disadvantage of McDowell's intersubjective anti-anti-realism is an incorrigible relativism about practical reasoning (and, for that matter, all reasoning). Despite his allegiance to "modern science," McDowell rejects the putative superiority of scientific knowledge over ethical knowledge, namely, that scientific knowledge is answerable to the world. Rather than scientific and ethical inquiry being answerable to the facts of the world, they are partly responsible to the world while ultimately partly responsible only to ourselves. This position not only renders scientific knowledge somewhat more shaky than, I presume, he would wish, it leaves ethical traditions at the mercy of their own ability to rebuild Neurath's boat while at sea.

McDowell is clear that even when a practically wise person actualizes his or her nature to acquire the moral outlook, any possible examination of that moral outlook will be done from *within the moral outlook* itself. The circularity of this inculcation and new second natural faculty is not accidental to his account. He says that practical wisdom is responsive to reasons and so becomes a prototype "for the…faculty that enables us to recognize and create … intelligibility."[57]

By contrast, Foot's account aligns more closely with the commonsense commitment to the objective purport of both morality and rationality. Our efforts to attain practical wisdom are not *merely* answerable to the shared form of life of the other practical reasoners with whom we find ourselves in community; they are also answerable to the natural norms of our own nature.

I believe Rosalind Hursthouse's account of neo-Aristotelianism falls prey to the same criticism as that I have leveled against McDowell's. Even though she draws heavily on Foot's work, she seems to vacillate between McDowell's and Foot's naturalisms when she

57. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 79.

says, "Ethical naturalism is not to be construed as the attempt to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature."[58] She claims that her account is, like McDowell's, still loosely naturalistic in that it is based on "human nature" or "second nature." But then hasn't she thereby rejected Footian naturalism? 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.[59]

My view emphatically *does* aim to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature; where I disagree with Hursthouse, mostly, is that I reject the assumption that "scientific" has to mean "non-normative."

My conception of nature retains a distinction between human beings (as practical reasoners aware of normativity) and the rest of organic nature (which is normative but doesn't know it). The fundamental distinction to be made is not between rational and non-rational natural entities, but between living and non-living entities, where humankind shares with other living species a distinctive set of rational potentialities that constitute natural normativity. To paraphrase Thomas Nagel, the existence of objective value is coextensive and co-terminal with the existence of living things.[60] I think the common term 'objective value' is an unfortunate way to express the notion of natural normativity. My preferred expression is 'natural norms.' Natural norms such as natural ends exist in all organic life. Natural norms are, for us, practical reasons. The question is not how human beings perceive or create "value" but why they act at all. Put this way, it is clear that every sufficiently matured

58. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* especially chapter 10.
59. Cf. Frey, "The Will and the Good. 44, footnote 55.
60. Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 117.

human organism naturally has reasons to pursue some ends and to avoid other ends. My picture of nature is one in which the class of natural facts includes both descriptive facts and such natural norms.

The corresponding picture of reasoning and knowledge underscores why the irrelevance problem (mentioned above) is not a problem for my view. The reason McDowell saw natural norms as irrelevant to practical reasoning is that he simultaneously endorsed bald naturalism (about organisms) and social naturalism (about humans). This dualism makes the practical, normative dimension of nature appear detached from the theoretical, descriptive dimension, when they are more adequately understood as dimensions of one and the same world. Jennifer Frey says:

> …the ethical naturalist must be able to show how … 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.[61]

The Footian solution is to insist that the two forms of judgment are different ways of apprehending the same fact. The zoo keeper can apprehend the life form of a sloth bear only "externally"; and the sloth bear, not being endowed with logos, cannot apprehend its own life form internally. When it comes to human beings, we can apprehend both ways. For example, a rational alien who did not share our life form could only apprehend the life form (practical rational primates) externally just as scientists can apprehend our life form externally. But a rational human being can *also* apprehend the selfsame life form "internally" by reflecting on who and what we are. The facts do not change when we alternate between the two points of view. Since practical reasoning *does* contribute to the process of deciding

61. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 65.

on a course of action, we can see how norms which are perceived as objective and external become recognized as relevant and binding.

If both practical and theoretical forms of knowledge grasp the same object, then the putative opposition between natural facts and practical reasons is dissolved. General judgments about a life form unite with practical inferences that are to be acted upon. Scientific reasoning includes both the external, descriptive point of view and the internal, normative point of view. Or rather, the normative point of view simply is one of the scientific points of view. Theoretical reasoning and practical reasoning are both, broadly, scientific.[62] Despite McDowell's concession to bald naturalism that the modern scientific picture excludes the space of reasons, on my account, natural scientific reasoning is no less evaluative than any other expression of reasoning. Hence, the scientific worldview is capacious enough to include practical primates and all that they reason about: chemicals, quarks, mathematical models, biological life forms, or functions. Natural, organic norms (including those of human beings) are part of the modern scientific worldview.

4. Conclusion

This chapter laid out four requirements that the neo-Aristotelian must meet. I critiqued McDowell's recourse to a distinction between "first" and "second nature" which does not explain but mystifies the place of human norms within the natural order. By contrast, I defended the Footian alternative which illuminates human norms as instances of natural norms obtaining in all organisms. If we take an unrestricted view of nature that absorbs the aesthetic, the ethical, the logical and so on, then it is merely tautologous to call it 'natural' when human beings engage in normative practical reasoning and reason about normativity.

62. I take my view to be similar to those defended, especially in "Miracle of Monism" and "The Inseparability of Science and Values" by John Dupre. *Processes of Life: Essays in the Philosophy of Biology.* (Oxford University Press; 2012).

But even if we take a restricted view of nature to exclude *some* sorts of entities as non-natural, the kind of natural normativity that includes human practical reasoning should be included as natural. Since human beings are natural organisms, and practical reasoning is natural to our life form, practical reasoning is natural reasoning.

If I were pressed to coin a new term to describe my Footian organic naturalism, I would call it "recursive naturalism." Nature "recurs" within itself. Defining human beings as practical rational primates entails that we are the one natural organism who reasons about natural organisms. We can observe the pattern of recursion in each element of the argument: Humans engage in natural reasoning about all sorts of things, including natural reasoning itself. We practically reason about practical reasoning. One of our (basic) natural functions is to discover (in greater detail) what our natural function is. Having a virtue (in part) enables us to become more virtuous. Being practically wise enables us to discern when and how to pursue more practical wisdom.