# Chapter 1

# Virtue and Reason in the Neo-Aristotelians

*"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."*

–Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 208.

### Introduction

In this chapter, I shall explicate in detail the accounts of virtue and reason from Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre.

## I. Foot: Excellence of Will

Foot argues that virtue is excellence of the rational will.[1] Even Foot will expand her concept of will beyond its typical meaning to include intentions (see below). Since now is not the place to distinguish the two concepts, I shall herein treat her 'rational will' as identical to my 'practical rationality'.

We saw above that virtues are, for Foot, examples of 'natural goodness.' That is, the concept

1. I have hitherto avoided the word 'will' because it is not a cross-cultural concept. Cf. David Bradshaw, "The Mind and the Heart in the Christian East and West," *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 5 (2009): 576–98. There 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.

of goodness being deployed in appellations such as a 'good person' is structurally the same as the concept of goodness in 'a good oak' or 'a good wolf.' A good person exemplifies those good-making features shared by all exemplary members of a natural species. What exactly can we say about such good-making features of rational animals?

Foot's best account of the virtue argues that: (1) virtues are beneficial, to self and others, while vices are bad for self and others; (2) virtues are distinct from skills (such as strength, keen eyesight, reliable memory, etc.) because such excellences are not excellence of will or practical reason; (3) virtues are corrective of some tempting vice; and (4) virtues are only 'operative' toward good ends.[2] Let's examine each of these propositions in turn.

## Virtue is beneficial

First, virtues are beneficial. She says, "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."[3]

But whom is benefited? Does a person possessing a virtue benefit the virtuous person or the society in which the virtuous person lives? For some virtues, the answer is more clearly *both*. For example, moderation with alcohol benefits oneself, one's family, one's community and so on. For other virtues, such as justice or charity, the answer is less clear. She 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."[4] 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

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

3. Ibid., 2–3.

4. Ibid., 3.

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 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 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, "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."[5] 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 self-preservation *and* inclined to obey the moral law.

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."[6] We cannot ignore the notorious tensions between altruism and egoism, but we must move on in the pursuit of a definition of virtue.

## More than strength

The next — and more interesting question is how to distinguish moral virtue from a great memory, keen eyesight, or other admirable qualities we do not intuitively classify as virtuous.

Even defining virtues are "beneficial characteristics… a human being needs to have", she admits that, "This will not, however, take us far towards a definition of a virtue, since there are many other qualities of a man that may be similarly beneficial, as for instance bodily characteristics such as health and physical strength, and mental powers such as those of memory and concentration.[7]

5. Peter Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 17.
6. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 4.
7. Ibid., 4.

And this is no small matter. 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¿"[8] And moral philosophers have continued to try to answer for the last 2,400 years. A recent volume edited by Mark Alfano[9] discusses the range of which positive traits count as virtues.

What distinguishes virtue from strength? At first glance, the answer seems to be something about the *will*; Foot thinks virtues are revealed not only by a person's abilities but by his or her *intentions.* But what are intentions? Foot argues that the 'will' must be understood in its broadest sense, "to cover what is wished for as well as what is sought."[10] Intentions are not the *only* thing we judge, for a well-intentioned nincompoop who always harms when "helping" is rightly judged as deficient in virtue. 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*, though it also perhaps it the exculpation is called for because circumstances were not favorable, chances of success were low, etc.

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.

Foot's comment on this passage 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

8. John Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato* (Hackett, 1997), *Meno* 70a.
9. Mark Alfano, *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, ed. Mark Alfano (Routledge, 2015).
10. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 5.

> 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 often the surest signs of a man's moral disposition.[11]

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.[12]

If virtuous dispositions are "multi-track,"[13] is it necessary that good intentions and attitudes be effective in good action? If so, it seems that virtues become skills. But as we saw comparing virtue with strength, there seems to be something flat about calling the virtuous person *merely* skillful.[14] The worry here is that we don't want to call skills morally valuable when they do not seem to have any moral import. 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? This seems to us moderns to smack too much of the "Homeric" sense of virtue as *any* admirable quality.

What, if anything, differentiates virtues from skills? Foot's solution is an interpretation of the line from Aristotle that "in the matter of arts and skills… voluntary error is preferable to involuntary

11. Ibid., 5.

12. Robert Adams's concept of 'being for' is helpful in this connection. We intuitively (and correctly) judge that one must *be for* the good in the most general sense of orienting oneself – in thoughts, deeds, words, intentions, and wishes – toward the good.

13. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1998): "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.)".

14. 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).

error, while in the matter of virtues… it is the reverse."[15] While this might be a bit baffling, the thought seems to be that deliberately erring in an art or skill is compatible with mastery; the teacher can err on purpose in order to instruct students. By contrast, deliberately erring in morality is still an error. One ought not steal to demonstrate to children that stealing is wrong.

## Corrective

Foot also argues that virtues are "corrective". That is, each one stands "at a point at which there is some temptation to be resisted or deficiency of motivation to be made good."[16] In this discussion, she is illuminating a statement of Aristotle that "virtues are about what is difficult for men" and also objecting to a statement of Kant that *only* "actions done out of a sense of duty" have moral worth. In this connection, she discusses 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 (which Aristotle builds into the definition of a virtuous person); he doesn't just grit his teeth and do good (which Aristotle would call mere *continence*).

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."[17] So the solution to the happy philanthropist problem is that if

15. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 7.
16. Ibid., 8.
17. Ibid., 13.

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 she 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 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.[foot2002virtues 14]

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 judges 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.

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.

## Operative toward good ends

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 it is impossible to exercise any virtue, with the exception of technical skill, wrongly."[18] 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.[19]

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". 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 moderation.

A second response, though, is that we do admire some who have only a subset of all the virtues:

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

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

> 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.[20]

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. Before we stop to synthesis Foot's account, let's look at McDowell's.

## II. McDowell: knowing how to live

McDowell argues that the virtues are various "sensitivities" to the salient facts about how to live. McDowell's theses are that: (1) "The point of engaging in ethical reflection… lies in the interest of the question 'How should one live?' "[21]; (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."[22] Let's examine each of these in turn to uncover McDowell's account of virtue.

The first point is that ethical reflection aims at answering the ever relevant question "How should one live?"[23] We notice that ethical reflection is *reflection* about *practice*. It seems to me that this obvious truth is almost too close to be seen, like one's nose. It is far too often overlooked. We do not *merely* act (like a deer or a dog) nor do we *merely* calculate (like a computer or an angel); we reflect upon what we ought to do, how we ought to live. Such reflection only makes sense concerning issues within my control. Insofar as one cannot but sleep sometimes, the question of whether or not to sleep at all is not an ethical question; it is 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

20. Ibid., 17.
21. John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 331.
22. Ibid., 331.
23. Ibid., 331.

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."[24]

## Virtue is Knowledge?

As for the thesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge, McDowell argues that morality is *practical knowledge* (a "disposition to act well"). Such practical knowledge (and this is the third point) seems to demand "a moral outlook" to act well.[25] 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."[26] The kind person *knows* what is called for, is intentional about avoiding cruel or indifferent behavior, and so on.

If kindness is "a sort of perceptual capacity", "specialized sensitivity" to a particular range of reasons for action (say, the feelings of others), then perhaps the same holds true for other virtues.[27] In fact, McDowell suggests, the notion that virtues are specialized sensitivities — each a kind of knowledge — helps us understand the Socratic notion of the unity of virtue.

These reflections support the notion that this kind of knowledge ("sensitivity to reasons") is

24. *Hamlet* III.1
25. Ibid., 331.
26. Ibid., 332.
27. Ibid., 332.

necessary for the virtue but not sufficient. For it might be that one is sensitive to what another would feel but still fail to act rightly. Why? Perhaps, like the overindulgent parent, one is *too* sensitive to the feelings of the child or *not sensitive enough* to other considerations, like the child's health or (McDowell's example) fairness. 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.

McDowell's "preliminary case" that virtue is knowledge is that the "requirement imposed by the situation… must exhaust his reason for acting as he does."[28] 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."[29]

## Two Objections

One objection to the view that virtue is that a "single complex sensitivity" to requirements upon one's behavior arises from considerations of the internalism/externalism debate regarding moral motivation. Suppose 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.

28. Ibid., 332.
29. Ibid., 333.

But one man's *modus ponens* is another man's *modus tollens.* 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.[30] Socrates took this line. But 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."[31] The point of such an allowances 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.[32]

A second possible objection McDowell draws from Donald Davidson. 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 pressures (from desires, say) to do the wrong action. Since a fully developed virtue definitionally 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.[33] The merely continent person has to "weigh" reasons; the virtuous person fluently and instantly *acts* on the best reason.

30. Ibid., 333.
31. Ibid., 334.
32. Ibid., 334.
33. Ibid., 335.

## Is virtue-knowledge *codifiable*?

McDowell considers the objection that if virtue is knowledge, 'knowing-what-to-do' must be codifiable in propositional form. But 'knowing-what-to-do' is not codifiable, so virtue must not be knowledge. On this objection, the virtuous person enjoys knowledge of one or a few universal ethical precepts and reliably calculates the application of those principles to individual occasions. The virtuous person's ethical arguments "take the form of a 'practical syllogism' " wherein the universal proposition is the major premise and the "relevant particular knowledge" is a minor premise, while the issuing conclusion is the judgment of "what is to be done."[34] Furthermore, on this objection, the defender of Humean moral psychology can keep the identification of relevant particular knowledge with a "minor premise" but substitute the proposed major premise (a proposition such as "It is always good to be courageous") with a non-cognitive desire or commitment (such as "*I want* to be courageous" or "Be courageous!"). Now, they can explain how a virtuous person and non-virtuous person can both perceive a situation identically but fail to perform the same action with reference to their different desires or commitments.

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

34. Ibid., 336.

formulable universal principle."[35] This common belief McDowell wishes to refute.[36]

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 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."[37] 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."[38] 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 that there exist objective facts of the matter over and above the congruence of subjectivities. If we abandon these

35. Ibid., 337.

36. In Alasdair MacIntyre, "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist* 67, no. 4 (1984): 498–513. MacIntyre argues a similar point. In this essay, he 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.

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

38. Ibid., 339.

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.

## The Moral Outlook

Recall McDowell's third thesis: The question of how to live must be approached from "within" a moral outlook and approached "*via* the notion of a virtuous person."[39]

McDowell's solution to the problem of the "vertigo" we feel when contemplating the dependence of our rational concept-application on nothing more than our shared form of life is to simply accept that we cannot think from a third-person, detached, "sideways on" point of view; we can only think from within our point of view. His main opponent, of course, is the notion that morality can be adduced from an objective third-person sort of view. He says, "The cure for the vertigo, then, is to give up on the idea that philosophical thought, about the sorts of practice in question, should be undertaken at some external standpoint, outside our immersion in our familiar forms of life."[40] This is part of the movement toward his thesis that that virtues are ethical qualities that only make sense 'from within', that they lend a certain kind of perceptive ability to their bearers.

McDowell points out the familiar case of a discussion or disagreement that end at loggerheads, with both parties asking "But don't you see?" Although it is tempting to want to resolve such loggerheads by appeal to a third-personal point of view standing outside either of our forms of life, McDowell thinks it must be resolved, if at all, from firmly within our form of life. That is not to say that persuasion is not possible. He reassures us that the "Don't you see?" question "can often be supplemented with words aimed at persuasion."[41] Rather, persuasion will consist in "bring[ing] someone to see it as one wants", in one or both parties appreciating reasons they may not have seen before. It sometimes takes efforts to make someone see (to make oneself or others see) "the right

39. Ibid., 331.
40. Ibid., 341.
41. Ibid., 342.

way to handle a given situation."[42]

Now, if virtue knowledge 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? Section 5 of the article answers this question by way of Aristotle's practical syllogisms.

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 be 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."[43] It is clear upon reflection that this account is a sort of circular reasoning. 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."[44] Further-

42. Ibid., 342.
43. Ibid., 343. Emphasis added.
44. Ibid., 343.

more, "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…"[45] 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. (Hence 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 providing a plausible explanation of moral motivation (reasons one might act in some way) and moral behavior (reasons one acted that way). To paraphrase McDowell: "Explanations of judgments about what to do are explanations of actions."[46] 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."[47]

## Two Further Objections

McDowell cites a common objection, familiarly attributed to Hume, that practical reasons by themselves cannot motivate — that they need the presence of a conative mental state (such as a desire) as well. The common judgment is that "cognition and volition are distinct." Surely the virtuous person's behavior is conditioned both by knowledge and their non-cognitive psychological states. 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

45. Ibid., 343.

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

47. Ibid., 346.

behavior.

The problem with this objection is that, as McDowell has plausibly argued, an essential component of the awareness that one's friend is in trouble is the very sensitivity that is virtue. 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. Furthermore, McDowell points out, this non-cognitivist makes use of the deductive model of practical reasoning he has been at pains to deflate.

Perhaps, furthermore, to be rational, a genuine reason must be verifiable from an external, "neutral standpoint" open to any rational observer whatsoever. Surely *something*, such as scientific or deductive logical beliefs, are objective in the sense that they look the same to any rational being whatsoever.

Even here, McDowell undermines the objection as based partly in "vertigo". It is a "craving for a kind of rationality independently demonstrable as such."[48] He admits that the intelligibility and consistency of the virtuous person's way of life are an "orectic state" but not that it is a straight-forward desire as much as "a conception of how to live."

Although McDowell sees another more "subtle non-cognitivism" arising from the ashes, he does not fully develop it. Rather, he says:

> "I suspect that its origin is a philistine scientism, probably based on the misleading idea that the right of scientific method to rational acceptance is discernible from a more objective standpoint than that from which we seem to perceive the saliences. A scientistic conception of reality is eminently open to dispute. When we ask the metaphysical question whether reality is what science can find out about, we cannot, without begging the question, restrict the materials for an answer to those which science can countenance."[49]

48. Ibid., 346.
49. Ibid., 346.

## III. Summary if Needed

## IV. MacIntyre: Rational Tradition

Foot's definition of virtue is excellence of the rational will; McDowell's definition of the sensitivity to values (qua secondary qualities) which are conducive to the virtuous life. MacIntyre's definition of virtue is acquired human qualities that enable their possessors to sustain and improve traditions, to live a successful whole life, and to succeed in practices.

This robust concept of virtue he derives from a careful study of the history of the concept within the broader western tradition. In order to capture all of the (sometimes opposing) features of virtue from Homer to Jane Austen, MacIntyre's account includes three concentric stages: the first is virtues relative to "practices." The second is virtues relative to the whole of an integrated human life. The third phase is virtue related to tradition and rationality.[50]

### Initial account

The first stage of MacIntyre's definition is is that virtues are "acquired human qualities that enable their possessor to achieve those goods which are internal to practices."[51] This is perhaps a puzzling definition. Let's examine it a bit more closely.

First, virtues are acquired *human* qualities. Presumably, human qualities are opposed to analogous qualities of non-human animals. The flexible flagellum of a bacterium, the swiftness of a deer – formal or functional biological features that enable an animal to survive and thrive – are excluded from the class of virtues by definition. MacIntyre's later *Dependent Rational Animals* retracts the assumed divide between human and non-human animals. (But here, virtues do not arise from

50. For MacIntyre "tradition" is almost synonymous with "rationality". He calls it "tradition-constituted rationality" We will examine his notion of tradition-constituted rationality in the next chapter.

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

nor depend on biology. In this, MacIntyre's initial formulation disagrees with Foot but agrees with McDowell, as we saw.)

Secondly, virtues are *acquired* human qualities. This is an important point and relates to the first, for natural biological features are inborn. Virtues, rather, are acquired. That is not to say that 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, such as singing and telling jokes is *the kind of thing we do*. In this, he agrees with Aristotle that virtue is *in accordance with* nature but not *by nature*. Rather, virtuous traits are a "normal" psychological outgrowth of cultivating excellence within particular human practices.

Thirdly, virtues enable their possessor to achieve particular *goods.* This clause assumes that virtues are beneficial. A virtuous trait *cannot* be directed at achieving ills. This assumption 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?) It certainly seems that the answer is yes. Even indexing virtues to practices does not solve the problem; can practices be wicked? For McDowell, this problem does not arise, since he builds *knowledge* into his definition of virtue. I shall discuss this problem a bit more in the next sub-sections.

Fourthly, since virtues "enable their possessor to achieve … goods", it may seem that virtue are mere *instruments* to goods, not goods themselves. This would be a grave misunderstanding. Virtues *are* instrumental for MacIntyre, but they are not *merely* instrumental. They are both instrumental (to the achievement of certain goods) and also *partly constitutive of those goods.* Virtues are both means to an end and also ends in themselves. Now, this conflation of means and ends is liable to worry some critics. The worry is not trivial. However, for the sake of completing my presentation of virtue, I must set it aside for now.

## First Stage: Practice

What are "*practices*"? Practice is a key term of art; to misunderstand it would be to misunderstand MacIntyre. A practice is a social activity aimed at defined ends. (We commonly speak of "practicing" medicine in this sense.) MacIntyre mentions farming, chess, and political activity, among other examples. A practice is not merely a reflexive action (like scratching an itch) nor merely a single, discrete, intelligible action (like pulling a weed); it is an intelligible set of actions.

For example, a farmer is engaged in a series of activities, from tilling, sowing, watering, protecting, harvesting, storing, etc., all of which are embedded within a social context and organized around a particular goal. Each practice has a history, a set of practitioners, a common set of standards, and a common goal. And virtues are those qualities that enable their possessor to excel in practices. 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.[52]

Let's consider an example of a practice in a bit more detail: teaching. A secondary school teacher, say, is engaged in a series of activities, in order to give children the basic knowledge and skills they need to transition to functional adults in society, whether by getting a job, starting a business, or advancing to higher stages of education.[53] Secondary education in the U.S. is a practice with a history (or a set of histories) from the present time back to when Americans completing high school

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

53. Secondary education has other (perhaps de facto) purposes, like to socialize young people in a community of peers and authorities, and to afford them opportunities for recreation, art, clubs, to give parents a break, and so on. 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 legal adult.

(rather than beginning work on a farm or in town 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.

I've spoken of the goods of teaching. But MacIntyre defines virtues with reference to goods *"internal to"* practices. What does he mean by employing the internal/external relation here? MacIntyre later refashions the contrast between 'internal' and 'external' goods into one between 'goods of excellence' and 'goods of effectiveness.' (I prefer the latter terminology. But the point is, I think, clear.) The goods of excellence just are those that necessarily contribute to success within a given practice. In secondary education, success is defined by, say, graduation 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 *neces-*

*sary* 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.[54]

## Second Stage: Whole Life

The second stage depends on the notions of a complete human life, the sum of all the practices of one's life.[55] 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."[56] The example given shows how justice demands an ordering of the various goods of excellence within each practice. 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."[57]

Despite the obstacles to such a vision, it is possible. The obstacles MacIntyre cites are both "social and 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."[58] 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

54. 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.

55. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 15.

56. Ibid., 202.

57. Ibid., 204.

58. Ibid., 204.

various projects and pursuits of life are partitioned, labelled, 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 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 second and philosophical obstacle is the tendency to atomize "complex actions… in terms of simple components."[59] 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.'[60]

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.[61] 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."[62] 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

59. Ibid., 204.
60. Ibid., 206.
61. Ibid., 207.
62. Ibid., 208.

essential genre for the characterization of human actions."[63] MacIntyre scholar Stanley Hauerwas explains the significance of this conclusion: "the central contention in *After Virtue* is his remark that "the concept of an intelligible action is a more fundamental concept than that of an action."[64]

The actions one performs in practices 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 turn people take in speaking to each other 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.[65]

Hauerwas continues:

> This may seem a small philosophical point, but much revolves around it: His understandings of the centrality of practical reason, the significance of the body for agency, why the teleological character of our lives must be displayed through narrative, the character of rationality, the nature of the virtues, why training in a craft is paradigmatic of learning to think as well as live, his understanding of why the Enlightenment project had to fail, his particular way of being a historicist, and why the plain person is the necessary subject of philosophy.[66]

Clearly these are weighty matters. MacIntyre's discussion of narrative is highly interesting but can be left aside.[67] For we have arrived at a the supports needed for building the second stage of his

63. Ibid., 208.
64. Ibid., 209.
65. Ibid., 211.
66. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre," *First Things*, 2007.
67. Cf. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 216. Consider such fascinating statements as: "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' "

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."[68]

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?

> 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 catalogue 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.[69]

In the first stage, virtues enabled success in practices. In this second stage, virtues enable us to coordinate various practices and pursuits – including relationships with friends, family, fellow citizens, and strangers – into a coherent quest to live our lives well.

## Third stage: Tradition

MacIntyre's third stage of his virtue account situates what has come before in a broader social and historical context. That context he simply calls 'tradition.' What is a MacIntyrean tradition? He calls it a "historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition."[70] In this third stage, virtues are qualities that enable the health and persistence of traditions.

> 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

68. Ibid., 219.
69. Ibid., 220.
70. Ibid., 222.

> which derive their life from the traditions of which they are the contemporary embodiments.[71]

While we shall pick up MacIntyre's highly contentious concept of tradition in a later chapter, here it will be worth underscoring a few key points.

## Tradition-constituted rationality objections

One family of objections pertain to the way MacIntyre's ethical theory appeals to tradition-constituted rationality.

MacIntyre argues that we should return to the Aristotelian tradition of virtue and practical reason. We must beware one misunderstanding. Any talk of "returning" is liable to sound nostalgic. At the risk of sounding paradoxical, we might put it this way: MacIntyre's positive ethical positions are *traditional* but not *nostalgic*. In fact, his definition of tradition is *progressive*. Tradition is an ongoing, socially-embedded argument over time, which necessarily entails that moral enquiry is dynamic – even *modern*. To be traditional is not to be past-oriented; to be traditional is to be staunchly future-oriented, since the business of life is not only the pursuit of our telos but the transmission of everything valuable and precious to the next generation.

One critic who misunderstands MacIntyre along these lines is Martha Nussbaum.[72] She begins her review of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* with an age-old dilemma between the social stability afforded by tradition (with its danger of hidebound error) and the social volatility endemic to critical reflection (with its opportunity of progress toward truth). She alludes to this dilemma as articulated by Aristotle:

> In the second book of the Politics, Aristotle asks whether it is a good thing to encourage changes in society. Should people be offered rewards for inventing some change in the traditional laws? No, he writes, because this would lead to instability and unnecessary tampering with what is working well. Should we, on the other hand, listen

71. Ibid., 223.

72. Martha Nussbaum, "Recoiling from Reason," *The New York Review of Books* 36, no. 19 (1989): 36–41.

> to those who wish to keep ancestral traditions fixed and immune from criticism? No again—for if we reason well we can make progress in lawmaking, just as we do in other arts and sciences.[73]

Aristotle's solution is that it should be *hard but not impossible* to change societal structures. Of course, we don't have to pick just one or the other. But one necessary feature of every society is a particular level of difficulty in making social changes. Should one err on the side of difficulty or ease?

Putting it starkly, of the two it is better to gamble for progress toward truth at the risk of instability than to gamble for stability at the risk hidebound error. Strangely, Nussbaum takes MacIntyre to be reversing Aristotle's balance. She thinks MacIntyre is urging for betting on social stability even if it means sticking closer to existing tradition (and hence surpassing or intentionally avoiding critical reflection) than is compatible with unfettered progress.

This is not an objection to MacIntyre — it is a misreading. He rejects fideism and this kind of conservative traditionalism. MacIntyre sides with Aristotle, in my view, that the risk of complacent error is greater than the risk of instability. For hidebound error is likely to perpetuate itself across generations, while the instability arising from a cacophony of disagreement is likely to be short-lived. Nussbaum does not see that MacIntyre's proposed solution is not a sort of *anti-progressive* longing for the past. It is radically progressive. His solution is not to reverse progress but to replace the Enlightenment's standard of progress with a more tenable alternative.

MacIntyre anticipates this misreading of his theory. He says:

> We are apt to be misled here by the ideological uses to which the concept of a tradition has been put by conservative political theorists. Characteristically such theorists have followed Burke in contrasting tradition with reason and the stability of tradition with conflict. Both contrasts obfuscate.[74]

In short, tradition cannot be a name for the impulse to resist change or to fear political tension and turmoil. Quite the contrary: political tensions of a particular character and expression are

73. Ibid.
74. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

intrinsic to MacIntyre tradition. As he defines tradition, the internal conflict about the "goods which constitute that tradition" is a necessary feature.

Ironically, it appears to me that Nussbaum is too conservative in her defense of the Enlightenment's standard of progress; MacIntyre is the progressive here. Rather than accusing MacIntyre of being too conservative, Nussbaum should focus on his critique of the Enlightenment. MacIntyre's critique may be wrong, but it is with that critique that she should take issue. She should not accuse him of failing to "make progress… [in] arts and sciences" but of "tampering with what is working well." MacIntyre's theory of rationality may be wrong, but it is not wrong along the lines that Nussbaum attacks.

## Not rival to rationality

Secondly, tradition is not rival to reason and critical reflection. Rather, one learns to reason – to critically reflect – within a MacIntyrean tradition. It is a truism that one learns one's first language within a culture. But it is equally true that one learns facts and methods of reasoning within a tradition, conceived as a community of thinkers who share not only a common tongue but common concepts and a repertoire of facts, beliefs, customs, etc.

So, rather than tradition being opposed to reason, tradition is the first source of our reasoning. And rather than tradition being opposed to critical reflection, tradition is the first source of the habit of critically reflecting. The very ability to expand the repertoire of facts or modify the methods of thinking depends upon the awareness that one inhabits a tradition. This awareness MacIntyre even elevates to the level of a virtue, saying it is "one whose importance is perhaps most obvious when it is least present." What is that virtue?

> the virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which one belongs or which confront one. This virtue is not to be confused with any form of conservative antiquarianism; I am not praising those who choose the conventional conservative role of *laudator temporis act*. It is rather the case that an adequate sense of tradition manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present. Living traditions, just because they continue a not-yet-completed

> narrative, confront a future whose determinate and determinable character, so far as it possesses any, derives from the past.[75]

## Conclusion on Tradition

In short, a tradition is an extended argument, in part about the goods that constitute that tradition and the terms of that argument. 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.

We should note that the very concept of virtue MacIntyre defends exemplifies his method of working within a tradition. He derives his account of virtue from a careful study of the history of the concept within the broader western tradition, but does not limit himself to what has come before.

There is much more to say about tradition, and we shall say some of it in a later chapter. But this is all we shall say about tradition here. For MacIntyre, rationality itself is tradition-constituted. So insofar as practical rationality is the differentium 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.

# V. Discussion

For Foot, virtues are those beneficial qualities that we need qua human beings in order to safely navigate the normal human temptations to corrupt oneself and others. They are beneficial These qualities are what Hursthouse calls multi-track, embroiling our whole psychology as it is directed by what might call the 'will' or 'practical rationality', including intentions, attitudes, deliberative choices, and habits. Virtuous traits are only 'operative' toward good ends, and so we need the

75. Ibid., 223.

tutelage practical wisdom in order to attain virtues, and even once acquired, virtues stand in need of the governance of practical wisdom.

Foot's account of virtue satisfies all of these: For virtues are operative only toward good and are beneficial to humans as a species (benefiting the group and also, usually, benefiting the individual), which satisfies criterion (1); virtues are more than strength or skill in engaging all the motives, intentions, habits, and so on that fall under the broadest appelation of the rational will, which satisfies criterion (3); they are corrective of typical temptations to vice, which satisfies (1) and (2); and genuine virtues are operative only to good ends, which satisfies (1) as well. How do these neo-Aristotelians satisfy, or fail to satisfy, these criteria?

McDowell argues that rational virtue is a kind of knowledge — a kind of sensitivity — against the objection that rational virtue is either a type of universalizable, objective, deductive logic or else non-cognitive. His rebuttal is to deny that deductive reasoning is so objective. Rather, deductive reasoning is not rule-following, except in that we follow a vague collection of rules associated by our common forms of life. We only know deduction, too, from within. So moral reasoning, he avers, we also know from within, by doing it, while doing it, because of our common forms of life. He does not much advance a view of virtue beyond the Aristotelian notion that virtues are qualities of reliable good-choosing, good-acting. He does however limit Aristotle's optimism about the metaphysical realist assumptions underlying an understanding of deductive reason and practical reason. McDowell's account of virtue is especially strong in satisfying (1), since for him not only evaluative practical reasoning but all reasoning derives from a shared form of life – the "congruence of subjectivities."[76] His account, likewise, satisfies (3) by emphasizing the role of reason (both theoretical and practical) in constructing one's view of a life worth living. McDowell's account is less adequate with regard to (2). He simply takes it for granted that the virtuous person (with a virtuous outlook) will notice what is morally salient, without giving any further suggestion as to what details might be morally salient. He mentions a morally salient fact (a friend in trouble) but does not seem to

76. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 339.

acknowledge that "trouble" is not just a feature of human animals. A mother lioness can notice that her cub is in trouble; a cardinal can be in trouble, even if no human or animal notices. While positing the moral outlook as something unique to humans, McDowell has estranged the non-human world. And, finally, McDowell's view takes a disastrous misstep in attempting to ground all our ethical thinking in a groundless human form of life. While he grants that "incorrect" evaluations can be corrected piecemeal, like the ship of Neurath, he denies that they can be corrected against external reality. We cannot match up – or fail to match up – our moral judgments with the moral facts. By arguing (rightly I think) that the moral outlook can only be ratified from *within the moral outlook*, McDowell has cut off a range of reasonable supports to the moral outlook that can be drawn from "outside." We *can* draw from other natural objects (via generics or Aristotelian categoricals) notions such as "health" and "sickness", "exemplary" and "defective". Just as disastrously, McDowell makes the same point about theoretical reason. This is his capitulation to Kantian idealism. He accusses those who think his view irrational of "longing" for some "comfort" by external validation from without, when really my accusation has nothing to do with feelings. His view helps itself to the correspondance theory of truth even while denying that there is any truth to which our judgments may correspond. I shall return to this objection in a later chapter.

MacIntyre argues that virtues are those acquired human qualities that enable the achievement of goods of excellence in one's whole life, in traditions, and in practices. MacIntyre, like McDowell, is strongest on the social and practical criteria but less strong on the biological criterion. His biggest insight is to conceptually link individual virtue with tradition, and to link tradition with rationality itself. Virtues, as we shall argue, cannot be defined as "moral" traits and severed from intellectual traits (such as sensitivity, perceptiveness, proactivity, judgment). But our intellectual traits cannot be acquired in isolation; we initially acquire our thoughts and tools for thinking such as we possess from the culture in which we are raised and the tradition in which we are educated. As for biology and animality, the *After Virtue* account is inadequate but it is much corrected by the *Dependent Rational Animals* account. Our remaining task, then, is to discuss the unity of animality and

rationality, or biology and tradition.

Foot's account is lacking in some respects that McDowell and MacIntyre can supply. What Foot is missing is an account of human virtue and rationality *in society and tradition*. The virtues are not just beneficial to human beings tout court, unmediated by tradition. The human experience unmediated by tradition does not exist. To be a human being is, as McDowell rightly says, to participate in *Bildung*, a process of formation in which a person with language, thoughts, beliefs, desires, evaluative judgments, etc. are (at least initially) the product. What MacIntyre is missing is a full account of humanity as not just a social being but a biological being. We are animals. We are *rational* animals, to be sure – but animals just the same. Similarly, McDowell is missing a clear accounting of the relation between second nature and nature. (Rationality will be the main theme in a later chapter.) By locating the activity of evaluating solely in human nature's inhabitation of the space of reasons, he has divorced humanity from the world. As Julia Annas summarizes, non-reductive naturalisms risk trivializing moral or normative facts by implausibly cordoning them within humans: "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."[77] That link is supplied by Foot (and Thompson et. al.) As Annas continues:

> 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…[78]

If one knows the natural function of an organism, evaluations as to its excellence or defect are not purely subjective impositions of the evaluator's preferences or opinions, nor are they mere "facts"

77. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics, Old and New," ed. Stephen Gardiner (Cornell University Press, 2005), 12.

78. Ibid.

given by the situation. Rather, the evaluator must judge the function of the thing and judge how well its performance matches up or fails to match up to that function.

An intuitive inference to make would be that moral virtues are qualities that enable a human being to achieve his or her natural function. But, as soon as the inference is stated, it sounds odd. Do human beings have a function? Surely each of us has a "function" within our family system (son, daughter, the responsible one, the funny one, peacemaker) or within society (teacher, student, parent, voter). But does it even make sense to speak of singular natural functions qua living thing? Even if there were such a thing as a "human function," would it be the same function (e.g., 'to think') for all human beings as such or would there be an unlimited set of functions (e.g., to do and become whatever we want, whatever that might be)? Or perhaps is there some definite plurality of functions (e.g., to survive, to reproduce, to enjoy ourselves, and to reason)?

## VI. Conclusion

# Chapter 2

# Wisdom: Virtue in Excellent, Practically Reasoning, Social Animals

*"This is the first precept of [practical reason], that 'good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.'"*

–Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* IIa. Q.94. Art. 2.

*"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

The theme of this dissertation is virtue in relation to practical reason and natural teleology. But my thesis throughout has depended on the *formal* requirement that any account of one of these three must be presented in terms of the other two. In other words, I have maintained that one cannot adequately define virtue absent a definition of practical reason; one cannot understand the natural teleology of humanity without both. For these reasons, my cumulative case puts growing importance

on later chapters. The foundation in natural teleology (in chapter 2) allowed us to speculate about human nature (in chapter 3). The account given of human nature allowed us to specify criteria that any account of virtue ought to satisfy, and we began constructing such an account (in chapter 4). Now I must make good on my claim that the same account cannot be completed without an account of practical reason. Then, in a later chapter, we will crown the project with a detailed account of human teleology that will, we may hope, will be plausible in its own right and render more plausible what has come before.

## The Centrality of Practical Reason

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

This chapter defends a particular view of the place of practical reason in ethics – what it is, what it's worth, and whether it is objective and significant. I draw significantly from the recent work of Jennifer Frey.[3]

## Questions in Brief

Three sets of questions will occupy us:

**I. What is practical reason?**

1. Are moral reasons one type of practical reason?

1. Warren Quinn uses 'practical reason' to mean the faculty and 'practical rationality' to mean the excellence use of the faculty. I prefer to treat 'practical reason' and 'practical rationality' as synonymous, contrasting them with 'practical wisdom', which is the excellence thereof. Cf. Warren Quinn, "Rationality and the Human Good," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 9, no. 02 (1992): 81–95

2. Cf. Especially Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001), chap. 4; McDowell, "Virtue and Reason"; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

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

2. Is morality only about how we treat others?
3. Can practical reason motivate?
4. Is practical reason about means only or means and ends?
5. Is it one or many?

**II. What is the excellence of practical reason?**

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

**III. Is practical reason and value objective?**

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

## Answers in brief

1. According to my account, practical reason is the human capacity for resolving generally how to live and specifically what to do, and for reflecting on action, and evaluating good and bad. Practical reason is the capacity for thinking about *practical reasons*, that is, reasons to $\phi$ or not to $\phi$.
2. The phrase 'moral reasons' is ambiguous: In one sense, moral reasons (i.e., facts about what is good for others) are simply one type of practical reason; but in another sense, *any* practical reason (i.e., objective normative and evaluative facts about what is worth pursuing and worth avoiding) are "moral reasons".
3. Practical reasons can and do sometimes motivate us, even absent other psychological phenomena such as desires, endorsements, or plans.
4. We practically reason about both means *and* ends.
5. The excellence of practical reason is practical wisdom.
6. Practical wisdom is a moral and intellectual virtue.

7. Practical wisdom is not the only virtue but it is the master virtue, an executive and a necessary condition of the other moral virtues and a gateway to further intellectual virtues.
8. Practical wisdom and practical reasons are not subjective. I shall contend that there is one rationality, although it is a one-over-many concept that is capacious. This practical reason is most likely not subjective. My case for this very difficult conclusion rests on the belief, virtually incorrigible, that practical reason is *important*. It is of unquestionable intrinsic value to human beings. Furthermore, insofar as virtue is relative to rationality, rationality itself must be fixed to preserve moral realism. A practical reason can and does motivate one, all by itself; in conjunction with or absent other immediate inclinations or desires. Practical reason, furthermore, motivates when one judges that a course of action or an outcome is good in itself, that it is *desirable* in the sense that it is to be desired whether one presently desires it or not.
9. Practical wisdom is not only extremely valuable; it is both intersubjective and objective. And since discussions *about* rationality are only undertaken *within* rationality, there are complications having to do with the self-referential or iterative nature of the discussion. These complications should lead us to predict that conceptions of rationality will differ more than other difficult concepts. If two parties share an identical conception of rationality, then a long and arduous debate is not necessary; if two parties enjoy differing conceptions that differ in a sufficient number of respects, a long and arduous debate is not likely to resolve the difference. As the Greek proverb asks, "if we choke on food, we drink water to wash it down. If water chokes us, what shall we drink?" And indeed, MacIntyre especially gives us a recursive theory of rationality adequate (or almost adequate) to the task of both capturing what is common in differing conceptions of rationality and helping to enhance the possibility of resolving disagreements.
10. Furthermore, practical wisdom is 'naturalistic' in a broad sense. The above conclusions, by themselves, may or may not sound plausible to the reader. The case for these conclusions below may or may not be persuasive to the reader. If they are not persuasive, the resistance is likely to arise from a commitment to *naturalism* combined with the belief that the "objective normativity" of practical rationality is somehow not consonant with naturalism. Nature consists of descriptive facts while objective normativity posits evaluative and normative facts "out there" in the world. The reader may notice that this alleged contrast – between nature and normativity – is the same contrast we attempted to dismantle above. The dilemma of ethical naturalism rises again: if ethics is normative, how is it natural? If it is natural, how is it normative? So in this chapter we will return to it and do what we can to diffuse the worry. My answer will be that this form of naturalism is more adequate to the scientific facts, and is non-dualistic in a desirable way. I call this neo-Stoic naturalism, or Recursive Naturalism, since it is recursive in two ways: first, the normativity of human rationality is both an *instance* of nature and is *about* nature, including about itself. Second, the object of practical reason is both to discover *the thing to do* and to become more practically reasonable.

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

Jay Wallace defines practical reason generally enough for us to use his definition as a starting point: "Practical reason is the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do."[4]

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

I argued above (in chapter 3) that rationality in part defines our nature. We are animals of a particular sort: rational animals. We identify ourselves (scientifically, philosophically, religiously, anthropologically, psychologically) as creatures normally capable of language, abstract thought, argumentation, mathematics, philosophy, natural science, and so on. But we are not merely rational; we are also practical: we *practice*. One can conceive of rational creatures (gods, martians, angelic intelligences, artificial intelligences) that are not also "practical" creatures – that do not practice anything. Douglas Adams's computer character Deep Thought is a *knower* with nothing to do. Hence the problem of practical reason is the problem of human nature: These are the two sides of the same paradox about our human nature. We are "embodied minds in action"[5] or "psychological animals."[6]

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

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

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

## Are moral reasons one type of practical reason?

The first question to be asked is whether, according to neo-Aristotelians, moral reasons are *one type* of practical reason, or does any practical reason count as a "moral" reason (broadly construed)?[7] The question receives its urgency from two quarters: the first is the familiar Kantian distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives. Kant assumed that one's natural selfish inclinations took as practical reasons anything that lead to one's happiness or well-being; the moral law provided reasons to do one's duty, sometimes in accord with, but often against one's inclinations. The second is the familiar modern assumption that the philosophical ethics is to resolve ethical dilemmas.

Edmund Pincoffs distinguishes two broad conceptions of philosophical ethics he calls "Quandary Ethics" and "Character Ethics." Quandary ethics is focused on the short-term resolution of immediate moral problems, either by dissolving moral perplexity or giving some (hopefully rational) basis for a particular decision or course of action. The Quandary ethicists are those Pincoffs quotes at the beginning of his article (such as Hare, Toulon, Brandt). They think that

> The business of ethics is to clarify and solve "problems", i.e. situations in which it is difficult to know what one should do; that the ultimate beneficiary of ethical analysis is the person who, in one of these situations, seeks rational ground for the decision he must make; that ethics is therefore 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.[8]

By contrast, character 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:

7. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, chap. 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.

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

> …thought of ethics as a branch of politics, which in turn he thought of as a very wide-ranging subject having to do generally with the planning of human life so that it could be lived as well as possible. Moral problems are given their due but are by no means stage-centre. The question is not so much how we should resolve perplexities as how we should live.[9]

These two broad conceptions correlate to two conceptions of moral reasons. It might seem that moral reasons are distinct from non-moral reasons (such as prudential, aesthetic, egoistic reasons etc.).

Let the Quandary ethicist represent 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 reasons). 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?" But she 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."[10]

Foot makes a similar point in distinguishing our sense of 'moral' from the older sense.

> 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.[11]

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

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

11. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

There is a powerful social and psychological force to the distinction between moral and prudential, other-regarding and self-regarding,[12] altruistic and egoistic[13], benevolent and selfish, conscience and self-love.[14] It results in a bifurcation between two kinds of reason. And certainly considerations about myself are conceptually distinct from considerations about my family, my friend, my society, or my species. The question is: is the difference between self-regarding reasons and other-regarding reasons the difference between "moral" and prudential? Not necessarily.

How did this distinction between moral and non-moral reasons arise in western thought? 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.'[15]

Mill distinguishes folly from immorality, where folly is failure to provide goods for oneself. MacIntyre further summarizes the conceptual roots of the terms 'moral' and 'ethical'.

> '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'."[16]

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

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

14. Julia Annas, "Morality and Self Interest," ed. Paul Bloomfield (Oxford University Press, 2009), 205–21; Alasdair MacIntyre, "Egoism and Altruism," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York, Macmillan, 1967), 462; Paul Bloomfield, "Virtue and Happiness," ed. Rachana Kamtekar, 2012; Yong Huang, "The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2010): 651–92.

15. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

16. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 38.

This conceptual history illuminates that moral and non-moral reasons each exemplify, in their own ways, a broader conceptual structure of practicality. We identify *reasons to act*.

This point 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."[17]

In the story of the word 'moral' we can trace the history of the concept of practical reason. The domain of practicality is the domain of practical reasons (objective values in the world) identifiedy by the practical reason (of an agent). That domain was subdivided into narrower fields: First, it meant a particular way of life, habit, or character. Then, it meant 'maxim', a practical lesson, like the "moral of the story", the point, that to be acted on, the rule. Third, it came to mean a domain of rules of conduct that are "neither theological nor legal nor aesthetic."[18] Finally, in the 1700s, it meant a particular kind of conduct, especially sexual conduct.

The distinction between moral and non-moral *reasons* shows up in a similar distinction between two different kinds of 'ought' or 'should'. Elizabeth Anscombe had observed in 1958 that a similar distinction (between moral and non-moral) runs betweeen two senses of 'ought':

> 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

17. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.
18. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 39.

actions--but also some of the contexts that he would call "intellectual."[19]

The peculiarly *moral* 'ought' means, for some, 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. I should prefer rather to reserve the final, verdictive ought for what Foot (following Davidson) calls what someone should do "all things considered."[20]

What would happen if we re-opened our focus and looked at practical reasons as a whole? That is exactly what the broader "Character ethics" conception of practical reasons does. Julia Annas' presentation of virtue as as a skill illuminates this same point, I think, beautifully. She says, "I should develop an account of virtue in which I show have central to the idea that the practical reasoning of the virtuous person is analogous in important ways… to the practical reasoning of someone who's exercising a practical skill."[21]. What she calls the "skill analogy" might be taken as problematic since it drains the peculiarly *moral* quality out of virtue. The opposite is true: The skill analogy fills the projec of living daily life with the potential for virtue. The virtuous person is *good at* and not just *good* — good at helping others, good at thinking ahead, good at human life. The vicious person, by contrast, is not just bad but *bad at* the essential elements of human life. Of course, being born with a paucity of natural talents is not a matter of immorality; but making good use of one's fortune is admirable.

MacIntyre's earliest ethical work distinguished the significance of moral judgments compared to other kinds of judgments. In a careful critique of both intuitionists such as Moore and emotivists such as Stevenson, MacIntyre concluded that both (mistakenly) assume that moral judgments and moral terms have significance only in their referential meaning. The intuitionists, of course, concluded that moral terms refer to a non-natural property, while the emotivists concluded that moral terms do not refer to such a property and so do not refer at all. (Naturalists, later in the 20th century, argue that moral terms refer to natural properties.) MacIntyre's alternative denies

19. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19.
20. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 57.
21. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 3.

the assumption entirely; moral judgments "have their own kind of logic" and their significance, like other kinds of judgments, comes from "exhibiting the logic of their usage."[22] 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.

MacIntyre's point is that moral judgments are not *simply* useful in moral dilemmas or quandaries. They appear, at the earliest stages of childhood development, in a pattern of usage that is inextricable from the human activities of reasoning, acting, and appraising. Evaluative judgments appear in the widest imaginable spread of human activities, from politics to playgrounds, from sociology to social life, from the practices of law and medicine to the professions of journalism and psychology, from the sciences to the arts. Even if this point be granted, moral dilemmas are not *unreal*. Moral dilemmas are a special version of our general "problems of appraisal and action." They may be particularly vexing, but they are no different from the general problems of how to live, how to be happy, what kinds of public policies to pursue, what apparently meaningful types of life are really meaningful.

That is not to say that practical reason does not include the domain of "concern for others". It is only to argue that other-regarding qualities such as benevolence and generosity (which are easily thought of under the description human "moral goodness") are *of a type* with a broader category of goodness. She says: "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."[23]

22. Mark C. Murphy, in *Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. Mark C. Murphy (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 118, quoting p. 73 of MacIntyre's master's thesis *The Significance of Moral Judgments*.

23. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.

That said, concern for others I call "2nd-personal morality". That is, my duties to you and to others. This would include obligations, values, and virtues as well as broader social or political ones. I suggest that the dominant virtue here is not only justice but love — I.e., a strong regard for the other, a charitable orientation to promoting the good of others, refusing to harm them, and committing to protect them from harm. But the rest of the practical domain I call 1st-personal and 3rd-personal. The entire set is the domain of practicality — what one ought to do or ought to think, say, etc. The three sub-domains are defined by the object with regard to which one ought to do and not do this or that.

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

The domain of 3rd-person morality is proper respect and care for everything that is not you or me — animals and plants, pets and work animals, our possessions, our earth and environment, and perhaps even our solar system. The primary virtue of this domain is justice, a respect for the whole and the proper arrangement of all the parts.[24]

Considering practical reason as a whole in this way helps us to understand Aristotle and the neo-Aristotelians. Jack Weinstein says: '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."[25] If we take philosophical ethics to be reflection on morality as a whole then, on this view, philosophical ethics is reflection on practical rationality. Practical rationality is simply the process of deciding what to do. It is the process of thinking through

24. If God exists, then 3rd-personal morality would require piety to him or her, since on most theisms God is not strictly speaking "one of us" but still demands our allegiance, sacrifice, or what have you.

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

what to do. Or, in Gibbard's unforgettable phrasing, it is "thinking how to live."[26]

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

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

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

26. Allan Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

progress rather than regress in moral theorizing.

## Can practical reasons motivate?

Seen in this light, it is obvious that practical reasons can and do motivate us. There might be reasons to ϕ that I am not aware of and thus am not motivated by. Perhaps it is true that one ought to save for retirement, but I may fail to do so. The internalist urges that reasons *for me* must connect up with my motivational structure. Defined widely enough, I can agree to this way of stating things. If by "my motivational structure" we simply mean my overall disposition toward the good. I am oriented to pursue good things, and avoid bad things. Whatever may appear to me to fall under the description of 'good' I will, ipso facto, be oriented toward (whether I pursue it or merely approve of it and admire it). Whatever may appear to me to fall under the description 'bad' I will, ipso facto, oriented away from it (whether I avoid it or merely disapprobate it).

Apparent counterexamples that one might furnish to disprove the point actually serve, with sufficient clarification, to reinforce it. For example, someone might say, "It's ridiculous to think that I always pursue the good, because I sometimes do wrong." Of course, sometimes we do the wrong thing. The proper response is that we perceive the bad as the good. Someone might say, "But sometimes I perceive the bad *as bad* and pursue it anyway." The response is that we sometimes take a bad or dismotivating reason into an overall reason to do something, all things considered.

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

considered.

## Motivation thoughts

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

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

My view is that practical reason is the general human capacity for deciding, through reflection and sensitivity to practical principles, what to do, and for evaluating one's own actions and those of others. Although we can by verbal sleight of hand define practical reasons as 'desires', the judgment of what to do is a distinct mental state from desiring, wanting, wishing, or instinctual attraction. Hence, practical reasons can (and most often do) motivate, all by themselves, even in the absence of desires (etc.); however, desires can (and often do) function as reasons for action.

There are many reasons for action. But the concept of a reason for action is the concept of pursuing what is good or what is best, all things considered. Practical reason runs into quandaries because there are so many reasons for action, and they sometimes conflict. Some have to do with what is best for me, what is best for others, what is best for me and what is best for me later, what is permissible and what is required, etc. Although we may want to reserve the word 'moral' for other-regarding reasons, it is important to keep in mind that our goal of living well demands sensitivity to a whole range of reasons, regarding self, other, world, and (perhaps) God.

> I entertain the unfriendly suspicion that those who feel they *must* seek more than [the Aristotelian view of practical reason] provides want a scientific theory of rationality not so much for a passion for science, even where there can be no science, but because they hope and desire, by some conceptual alchemy, to turn such a theory into a regulative or normative discipline, or into a system of rules by which to spare them-

> selves some of the agony of thinking and all the torment of feeling and understanding that is actually involved in reasoned deliberation.[27]

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

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

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

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

David Enoch's recent volume *Taking Morality Seriously* builds a case for moral realism on the basis that moral realism is the best explanation for the moral earnestness which most of us *cannot but help*

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

*feel*.[28] Similarly, Foot is persuaded that we must assume a definition of practical reasoning that is substantive, rather than merely procedural. Practical reasoning does not just aim at means to ends, nor does it merely aim at "ends"; it aims at *the apparent good*.

> This now seems to me to be the correct way of meeting the challenge that I myself issued in 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' and at that time despaired of meeting: namely, to show the rationality of acting, even against desire and self-interest, on a demand of morality. The argument depends on the change of direction that Quinn suggested: seeing goodness as setting a necessary condition of practical rationality and therefore as at least a part-determinant of the thing itself. Nor is this a quite unfamiliar way of arguing. Many of us are willing to reject a 'present desire' theory of reasons for action because we think that someone who knowingly puts his future health at risk for a trivial pleasure is behaving foolishly, and therefore not well. Seeing his will as defective, we therefore say that he is doing what he has reason not to do. Being unable to fit the supposed 'reason' into some preconceived present-desire-based theory of reasons for action, we do not query whether it really is a foolish way to behave, but rather hang on to the evaluation and shape our theory of reasons accordingly. And it is exactly a generalization of this presumption about the direction of the argument on which I am now insisting. For what, we may 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?[29]

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

Foot identifies an argument for the importance of practical rationality on the basis that *we cannot help but value it*. Foot follows Quinn's lead in criticising a view of reason that makes the goal "the maximal satisfaction of an agent's desires and preferences, suitably corrected for the effects of misinformation, wishful thinking, and the like."'[30] The trouble, Foot says, is that we *cannot consistently believe this view.*

> He pointed out that by this account, practical reason, which would concern only the relation of means to ends, would therefore be indifferent to nastiness or even disgracefulness in an agent's purposes. And Quinn asked, in the crucial sentence of

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

29. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 63.

30. Quinn, "Rationality and the Human Good," from the abstract.%.

> the article, *what then would be so important about practical rationality?* In effect he is pointing to our taken-for-granted, barely noticed assumption that practical rationality has the status of a kind of master virtue, in order to show that we cannot in consistency with ourselves think that the Humean account of it is true.[31]

Reasoning about ends may be a difficult and messy business. But we do it. Reasoning – indeed, disagreeing and debating – about ultimate ends is an empirical fact. Suppose Betty says to her friend, "I'm concerned about you. You haven't returned my calls. I heard you lost your job and your spouse left. Now I see you're gaining weight. What's wrong?" It would be no consolation for her friend to respond, "Nothing's wrong. Yes, yes, all that is true: I'm destitute, alone, and unhealthy. But that's what I was *aiming* for." Betty would rightly think, "Well, then… you are a fool." Betty would rightly wonder "what is wrong such that you have taken as your aims such unhealthy and ridiculous goals?"

Jay Wallace rebuts the charge that if reasoning about ends is not a mathematically-precise procedure, then it must not really be rational:

> 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.[32]

As for John McDowell, we saw in the last chapter his view of practical reason. He agrees that it is really a mode of *reason* (though neither reason nor practical reason are "objective" in the sense that they can hope for a sideways-on view of ourselves or a truly universal "view from nowhere" of the world). Furthermore, the judgments about what to do in this or that particular situation are inseparable from the overall "moral outlook" by which one lives and reflects upon the all-important

31. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 62.
32. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 6.

question of "Character Ethics": "How should one live?"[33] Ethical reflection is *reflection* about *practice* – ethical reflection simply is practical reasoning.

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

> These aspects coalesce in the description of the practically wise as those who understand what is truly worthwhile, truly important, and thereby truly advantageous in life, who know, in short, how to live well. In the Aristotelian "eudaimonist" tradition, this is expressed in the claim that they have a true grasp of eudaimonia.[34]

33. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 331.

34. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2013, sec. 2.

# Chapter 3

# Eudaimonia: Virtues as Realizing our Natural Human Telos

**Quotation**. "γένοι' οἷος ἐσσὶ μαθών" ("Become such as you are, having learned what that is") Pindar, *Pythian* 2, line 72.

**Quotation** *"What use would it be if a man had the wisdom of Nestor and wanted the necessaries of life, food and drink and clothes and the like? Where would be the advantage of wisdom then?" Eryxias (attributed to Plato)*

"Secular morality has lost a sense of the final importance of a good death for salvation. There is no guiding vision of the normatively human." – Tristram H. Engelhardt, *Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, xii.

## I. Introduction: Destiny and Destination

**Thesis:** Virtue partially constitutes human flourishing (the realization of our human telos); there is a human telos, and virtue partially constitutes it. It *only partially* constitutes it.

**Summary: Virtues as partly constituting the realization of our natural human telos.** This chapter presents an account of human teleology as partly achievable through the virtues. I distinguish various senses of telos and consider several potential specifications of this indeterminate concept. There is traditionally some link between virtues and the human telos whether eudaimonia,

flourishing, thriving, welfare, etc.[1] Bentham and Nietzsche, among others, mock this alleged role.[2] The questions I am to answer are: What is our telos and how do virtues relate to it?[3] If virtues to bring about happiness, again, is that just egoism?[4] Is there even a telos for humanity, or is there no sense in speaking of a *human function*?[5] How relevant to ethics is human "metaphysical biology"?[6] Is ethics partly dependent on our animal nature[7] or solely on our rationality?[8] Are virtues necessary for true or "deep happiness"[9] or are they necessary and sufficient?[10] Is it possible to be virtuous and miserable? What is misery? Can we know happiness without knowing whether or not there is an after life? Virtue partly constitutes human flourishing but does not completely constitute it, because luck and fortune out of our control have a real impact on our happiness and our objective flourishing.

## A Dim Future

Suppose the year is 8,000 AD, and a lone spaceship is hovering over the planet formerly known as earth. All the greenery hewn away by human industry has regrown, and the impossibly high towers have toppled. Whether the climate changed beyond the tipping point, or nuclear war made

1. R. Stephen Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature: A Defense of Ethical Naturalism* (Continuum, 2008) is not a eudaimonist, but alleges that virtues do contribute to the realization of the human telos of reproduction.

2. Cf. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*.

3. Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford University Press, 1993); Robert M. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Clarendon Press, 2006), chap. 4; John McDowell, "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics'," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (University of California Press, 1980), 359–76.

4. Huang, "The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics."

5. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts* (Mouette Press, 1998); Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, chap. 2; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 5.

6. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, chap. 3 and 4; John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

7. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); Bailey, "Animalism"; James Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology" (PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame; Web, 2011).

8. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996); Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

9. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chap. 6.

10. Annas, "Virtue Ethics, Old and New."

farming impossible, or disease ravaged the race – no living humans remain on earth. Perhaps they voluntarily gave themselves up for extinction, preferring to end their millenia-long reign as the king of the food chain.

Would it have been worthwhile? Is it better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all? These questions are not science fiction, but have a pressing hypothetical import. For they impact our reasons for being moral *now*.

Geach says that we do not need to know our natural teleology in detail in order to pursue it. Perhaps well-begun is half done.

## The problems addressed in this chapter

The theme if our present chapter is to puzzle through some of the most difficult ethical questions.

1. Why be good? If the conclusions from the previous inquiry were on the mark, then we can rephrase this question without a change of meaning: why is virtue (especially practical wisdom) necessary for human flourishing? This is the same question, since, "virtue" (especially practical wisdom) is what *good* is for creatures like us; and "human flourishing" is a name for, ex hypothesis, that indeterminate concept of the one thing worth pursuing. The question "why be good?" or "why be virtuous?" should not be taken as the irrational question in the vicinity: "why do anything at all? Why be motivate?" Such a question is practical irrationality unadulterated, as we saw with Melville's Bartleby. The preference not to do anything — or the lack of preference to do anything — is inhuman "madness" or mental illness.

> Now this can easily be made to seem a strange worry. The thought that virtue is sufficient for happiness or flourishing is apt to produce Aristotle's response: you can't be serious. But if you accept that a flourishing life isn't just one in which you have lots of stuff, or one in which you get success by any means – if, that is, you accept that wicked or selfish people do not in fact flourish, so that only those who live virtuously have a chance of flourishing – then a problem does emerge as to why virtue is not sufficient for flourishing. For it is up to me whether I live virtuously, or at least try to, but Aristotelian theories accept that even if I do the best I can I may still be deprived of happiness by factors that are beyond my control. For Aristotle, happiness is a hybrid combination of living virtuously and of achieving a measure of success in

worldly terms. The latter is not under my control, and cannot be guaranteed.[11]

2. Is realizing our telos a human goal or somehow supernatural? Surely teleology is not natural after all, but only psychological, intentional?
3. By my definition of virtue, it is virtuous to pursue happiness – but is it *morally good* to pursue happiness? The worry here arise from the fact that, as we draw closer to the concept of telos (from human nature to virtue or human excellence, and from virtue to practical wisdom) the stakes are raised. If one gets one's virtue concepts wrong, it may plausibly have a negative impact on one's life. If one get's one's concept of practical rationality itself wrong, one may have many virtues but still, sadly, end up a fool. If one gets one's concept of happiness wrong, however, and *actually achieves that happiness* this would be even worse than being a fool. One would, after long years, and perhaps decades of effort, achieve one's goal, only to find that the goal is somehow flawed. One would be pursuing happiness all along and achieve only objective misery. This is even worse than being a fool, I say, since it might conceivably be possible that one could be a fool – practically irrational in many respects – who still by some confluence of lucky factors or benevolent friends, ends up enjoying well-being in some respects. But by definition one cannot be objectively happy and objectively miserable. This reflection upon the "raising stakes" makes sense of the importance of this chapter.
4. Objective List Theory of Well-being. We might *know* a series of good things as good for us, without knowing *why* they are so good (without reflection). We might even mistake what is good, and mistake why it is good or not.

## II. Introduction 2

## III. Objections and Details Part II: Telos

My aim is to discuss a bit more about the details of the human telos. I shall assume that Aristotle and Annas are right that happiness is a good enough name for that thing or set of things, whatever it is/they are, that constitute our telos. So this is a discussion of happiness.

### Is there telos like happiness for humanity? Destiny and destination

I would like to begin a discussion of happiness by distinguishing between two concepts: destiny and destination.

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

Roughly, a destiny is an inevitable end. A destination is an *avoidable* end; it is a *chosen* end. Destiny does not contain within it (at least not necessarily) any intentionality. An asteroid many light years away from the moon (let's say) has a destiny of hitting the moon in 180,000 years. It's trajectory, and the coincidental perfect timing of the absence of any intervening objects, makes contact inevitable.

A destination is different. When I told my mother I was moving to Kentucky *to get a PhD in philosophy* I was not describing my inevitable destiny, but describing my chosen destination. Many intervening factors could prevent me (car trouble, illness, etc.) – and what's more, many factors could *dissuade me* (lack of jobs, money trouble, etc.).

Happiness is our human destination. It is not, sadly, our human destiny.

There is no one factor that seems to capture our destiny except biological death. The major candidates for a hoped-for destiny are not universal: Health, reproduction, and survival. Not all living things are healthy, not all successfully reproduce, and in the end none survive.

But is there a universal human destination? If so, is it merely biological or something more – perhaps neurophysiological, psychological, or spiritual?

All living things *strive* for health, survival, reproduction and genetic propagation. But all living things, in the end, die. Individuals die when their metabolism stops, when if they have brains all brain functions stop, when they stop moving, and so on. Species "die" when they go extinct.

Socrates is mortal. All men are mortal, and Socrates is man. But so are you and I "men" (the species, not the sex). So our destiny is biological death.

What is our destination? Survival? The avoidance of death? Eternal life? Salvation? Evolution? Pleasure? "Permanent human happiness?"[12] Peace and nonviolence? Knowledge? The vision of God? Freedom from the wheel of reincarnation? Each of these guesses has something to commend it.

1. The avoidance of death by medical science and/or evolution. This is the transhumanist

12. The Dalai Lama proposed this formulation.

project of Ray Kurzweil, Google's Calico, and Nick Bostrom.
2. The avoidance of death by salvation from God as a free gift, or through faith or holiness or both. This is the Christian vision of
3. The achievement of pleasure while life lasts. This is formalized despair. There is no happiness, therefore eat drink and be "happy" with scare quotes in bold. Our destiny is all we have, so we have no destination. Enjoy the journey until the journey dumps you into the trash compactor.
4. The vision of God. This is the peculiarly Christian vision.
5. Freedom from the wheel of reincarnation.

One major distinction can be drawn between these various views along the question of how long human life lasts. Is human life (ideally) about 80 years, or more as medical science advances? Or is the human life countless millennia? This is a factual question that, of course, bears on the question of our telos.

Is there any one conception of happiness that can coordinate these two views? If not, then no discussion of happiness can proceed before either proving or assuming an answer about the length of human life.

Clearly, proving an answer to the satisfaction of all is a fool's errand. It is a massive, contentious question. One can formulate it in terms of human personhood, the "immortality of the soul," and so on. Andrew Bailey's recent paper calls this the "persistence question": Do human animals have strictly biological persistence conditions?

> Most contemporary animalists also say 'yes' to the persistence question. According to these animalists, a human animal lasts across an interval just in the case that its 'purely animal functions – metabolism, the capacity to breathe and circulate one's blood, and the like – continue' across that interval. We may, following Eric Olson, call this theory about the persistence of animals the 'Biological Approach'.

If so, what criteria would such a view have to satisfy?

Given that human beings are rational animals that live either approximately 80 years or forever, what is our destination? The disjunction embedded in the question opens up a discouragingly wide range of possible answers. Nevertheless, let us try to answer it

If there is any *one* thing that animals seek, it is determined by their nature. In my terms, their nature provides a "destiny". But our rational nature makes our way of life variable and hence pluralizes our destiny until death consolidates all those differences again. Hence if there is any *one* thing that rational animals seek, it is determined by the nature of rationality itself. Clearly, different people and cultures vary in believing and valuing particular objects. But variance is compatible with a single telos or single *plurality* of teloi.

Variance is compatible with error.

Is there anything rationality seeks by nature? Knowledge. What about practical rationality? Goodness. That is, knowing things *is what reason does*, and pursuing good things *is what practical reason does*; reason also avoid false things, and practical reason avoids evil.

Happiness, the destination of every human being, is to know truth and to attain as much goodness as possible – whether in the span of 80-90 years (barring illness, injury, and ) until biological death or for the rest of time.

That this is our telos is possible to know even without knowing whether, in fact, our existence persists beyond biological death.

According to Sartre, we must despair. According to Russel we must despair. According to these two, despair is the rational emotion, the emotion that makes most sense given the facts; the emotion that "fits" reality.

I think despair is a rational emotion if we are animals who amass goods for 80 years or so and then die, and if our species will eventually go extinct and all habitable planets in the cosmos will become uninhabitable. However, like Russel, the pursuit of knowledge is still worthwhile. It is our human "ideals of goodness and knowledge" (I paraphrase Russel) that remain worthwhile pursuits even under the shadow of despair cast by that great reality of death.

## Russell on Doom

## Objection: We don't know our nature

Someone might respond to the question of what is human nature by saying: we don't know. For all we can tell (without the benefit of divine revelation) humanity is an anomaly. Our origin is shrouded in mystery, our destiny undecided.

Above, I mentioned the worry that human nature is a fundamental mystery.

We do not know our origins or destiny. As far as we know, without the benefit of divine revelation, is the story we are told in biology and anthropology textbooks: 200,000 years ago, hominids somehow developed new cognitive abilities sufficient to justify calling one or a set of these creatures "the first humans." Our earliest direct, archaeological evidence of our ancestors is that they were artists: paintings adorn the caves of France.

The evidence of recorded histories from Babylon, China, and Egypt tell a story of humanity already busied with architecture, science, imperial politics, and bustling with trade, culture, language, and art. The student of human nature ought to be a historian. To pursue my theme, we must move on.

If our deep origins are shrouded in mystery, our future destiny is relatively clear. By any account, our species is doomed. The science fiction dream of off-world colonies is most likely just a dream: no livable other planet has been discovered within our solar system or any of the surrounding regions. Even if one were discovered further out, along concentric circles each light years in diameter, the practical limitations on space travel for large numbers across unimaginable distances render off-world colonization virtually impossible. The only possibility left, itself highly impracticable, seems to me that scientific technology advances to a point that we can conceivably *create* an atmosphere on a planet that does not currently have one.

Regardless of these dreams, if our current planet does not go into an ice age, or a dust bowl, or become a nuclear wasteland, or if a volcanic canopy does not eliminate conditions for organic

life, then *eventually* the running down of our sun will condemn our species to the same fate of 99% of all species that have existed up until now: extinction.

Bertrand Russell's famous essay "Free Man's Worship" poetically describes the cold, hard, reality of the natural destiny of the human species:

> That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins–all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

Russell sees two possible structure that can be built on the "firm foundation of unyielding despair." The first is to worship power (which is the choice of slaves) and the second is, even in the face of death and annihilation, to worship ideals of truth and goodness (which is the choice of the free). The freedom and nobility of humanity lies in our cognition, even our recognition that we are slaves. He continues:

> The life of Man, viewed outwardly, is but a small thing in comparison with the forces of Nature. The slave is doomed to worship Time and Fate and Death, because they are greater than anything he finds in himself, and because all his thoughts are of things which they devour. But, great as they are, to think of them greatly, to feel their passionless splendour, is greater still. And such thought makes us free men… To abandon the struggle for private happiness, to expel all eagerness of temporary desire, to burn with passion for eternal things–this is emancipation, and this is the free man's worship.

Russell points to the noble impulse to cultivate our rational capacities in the light of our impending doom.

# IV. Neo-Aristotelians on Eudaimonia

## Foot on Deep Happiness

Foot argues that happiness is "deep satisfaction." This is compatible with, say, an extremely uncomfortable and even tragic life, like Wittgenstein's. It is not compatible with superficial satisfaction, the froth of pleasure and tittering mirth that floats on a shallow waters. It must be "deep", by which I suppose she means that it stands up to our own reflections in a sober hour.

## Hursthouse

> But what could this fifth end be? Tradition offers us a few alternatives. We might say that the fifth end was the preparation of our souls for the life hereafter, or that it was contemplation—the good functioning of the theoretical intellect. But to adopt the first is to go beyond naturalism towards supernaturalism, and even philosophers have baulked at following Aristotle and endorsing the second. I am not in a position to assert that there is no fifth end peculiarly appropriate to our rationality, but no plausible candidate suggests itself and I will suggest instead that the genuinely transforming effect of our rationality on the basic structure adequately registers the 'huge gap' that exists between us and the other animals.[13]

## McDowell on Eudaimonia as the Noblest Life

McDowell takes the old Stoic line that virtues just *are* eudaimonia. There is nothing more "external" to it, certainly nothing external.

Eudaimonia is a finite good, it is not simply "well-being". It is the highest kind of well-being, a noble kind.

13. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 218.

## MacIntyre on Telos as becoming independent practical reasoners

### *After Virtue*

MacIntyre is retiring and coy about what he thinks our telos might be. All he will say is the minimal definition: we ought to be free to pursue our telos. Virtue enables this. What more our telos might consist in I do not know that he cares to speculate.

### *Dependent Rational Animals*

*Dependent Rational Animals* is a more ambitious book in some respects. MacIntyre aims to build a broader account of virtues by attending to not only our independence but our dependence. Much of our dependence on each other stems from our animality: periods of gestation, infancy, old age, and illness all make us dependent on our fellow creatures.

> Happiness" in this sense concerns what benefits a person, is good for her, makes her better off, serves her interests, or is desirable for her for her sake. To be high in well-being is to be faring well, doing well, fortunate, or in an enviable condition. Ill-being, or doing badly, may call for sympathy or pity, whereas we envy or rejoice in the good fortune of others, and feel gratitude for our own. Being good for someone differs from simply being good, period: perhaps it is always good, period, for you to be honest; yet it may not always be good for you, as when it entails self-sacrifice. Not coincidentally, the word 'happiness' derives from the term for good fortune, or "good hap," and indeed the terms used to translate it in other languages have similar roots. In this sense of the term—call it the "well-being sense"—happiness refers to a life of well-being or flourishing: a life that goes well for you.[14]

MacIntyre's provisional conception of our human telos is this: "The good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is."[15] Our telos is to be free to pursue our telos. MacIntyre is not a straightforward eudaemonist; this conception of the

14. Dan Haybron, "Happiness," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2011.

15. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 210.

human telos is more vague than Aristotle's. Whatever the human telos turns out to be, it minimally includes the freedom to explore "what else" the telos might be.

## V. Discussion: Our Natural Telos

## VI. Objections and Details Part II: Telos

My aim is to discuss a bit more about the details of the human telos. I shall assume that Aristotle and Annas are right that happiness is a good enough name for that thing or set of things, whatever it is/they are, that constitute our telos. So this is a discussion of happiness.

### Is there telos like happiness for humanity? Destiny and destination

I would like to begin a discussion of happiness by distinguishing between two concepts: destiny and destination.

Roughly, a destiny is an inevitable end. A destination is an *avoidable* end; it is a *chosen* end. Destiny does not contain within it (at least not necessarily) any intentionality. An asteroid many light years away from the moon (let's say) has a destiny of hitting the moon in 180,000 years. It's trajectory, and the coincidental perfect timing of the absence of any intervening objects, makes contact inevitable.

A destination is different. When I told my mother I was moving to Kentucky *to get a PhD in philosophy* I was not describing my inevitable destiny, but describing my chosen destination. Many intervening factors could prevent me (car trouble, illness, etc.) – and what's more, many factors could *dissuade me* (lack of jobs, money trouble, etc.).

Happiness is our human destination. It is not, sadly, our human destiny.

There is no one factor that seems to capture our destiny except biological death. The major candidates for a hoped-for destiny are not universal: Health, reproduction, and survival. Not all living things are healthy, not all successfully reproduce, and in the end none survive.

But is there a universal human destination? If so, is it merely biological or something more – perhaps neurophysiological, psychological, or spiritual?

All living things *strive* for health, survival, reproduction and genetic propagation. But all living things, in the end, die. Individuals die when their metabolism stops, when if they have brains all brain functions stop, when they stop moving, and so on. Species "die" when they go extinct.

Socrates is mortal. All men are mortal, and Socrates is man. But so are you and I "men" (the species, not the sex). So our destiny is biological death.

What is our destination? Survival? The avoidance of death? Eternal life? Salvation? Evolution? Pleasure? "Permanent human happiness?"[16] Peace and nonviolence? Knowledge? The vision of God? Freedom from the wheel of reincarnation? Each of these guesses has something to commend it.

1. The avoidance of death by medical science and/or evolution. This is the transhumanist project of Ray Kurzweil, Google's Calico, and Nick Bostrom.
2. The avoidance of death by salvation from God as a free gift, or through faith or holiness or both. This is the Christian vision of
3. The achievement of pleasure while life lasts. This is formalized despair. There is no happiness, therefore eat drink and be "happy" with scare quotes in bold. Our destiny is all we have, so we have no destination. Enjoy the journey until the journey dumps you into the trash compactor.
4. The vision of God. This is the peculiarly Christian vision.
5. Freedom from the wheel of reincarnation.

One major distinction can be drawn between these various views along the question of how long human life lasts. Is human life (ideally) about 80 years, or more as medical science advances? Or is the human life countless millennia? This is a factual question that, of course, bears on the question of our telos.

Is there any one conception of happiness that can coordinate these two views? If not, then no discussion of happiness can proceed before either proving or assuming an answer about the length of human life.

16. The Dalai Lama proposed this formulation.

Clearly, proving an answer to the satisfaction of all is a fool's errand. It is a massive, contentious question. One can formulate it in terms of human personhood, the "immortality of the soul," and so on. Andrew Bailey's recent paper calls this the "persistence question": Do human animals have strictly biological persistence conditions?

> Most contemporary animalists also say 'yes' to the persistence question. According to these animalists, a human animal lasts across an interval just in the case that its 'purely animal functions – metabolism, the capacity to breathe and circulate one's blood, and the like – continue' across that interval. We may, following Eric Olson, call this theory about the persistence of animals the 'Biological Approach'.

If so, what criteria would such a view have to satisfy?

Given that human beings are rational animals that live either approximately 80 years or forever, what is our destination? The disjunction embedded in the question opens up a discouragingly wide range of possible answers. Nevertheless, let us try to answer it

If there is any *one* thing that animals seek, it is determined by their nature. In my terms, their nature provides a "destiny". But our rational nature makes our way of life variable and hence pluralizes our destiny until death consolidates all those differences again. Hence if there is any *one* thing that rational animals seek, it is determined by the nature of rationality itself. Clearly, different people and cultures vary in believing and valuing particular objects. But variance is compatible with a single telos or single *plurality* of teloi.

Variance is compatible with error.

Is there anything rationality seeks by nature? Knowledge. What about practical rationality? Goodness. That is, knowing things *is what reason does*, and pursuing good things *is what practical reason does*; reason also avoid false things, and practical reason avoids evil.

Happiness, the destination of every human being, is to know truth and to attain as much goodness as possible – whether in the span of 80-90 years (barring illness, injury, and ) until biological death or for the rest of time.

That this is our telos is possible to know even without knowing whether, in fact, our existence persists beyond biological death.

According to Sartre, we must despair. According to Russel we must despair. According to these two, despair is the rational emotion, the emotion that makes most sense given the facts; the emotion that "fits" reality.

I think despair is a rational emotion if we are animals who amass goods for 80 years or so and then die, and if our species will eventually go extinct and all habitable planets in the cosmos will become uninhabitable. However, like Russel, the pursuit of knowledge is still worthwhile. It is our human "ideals of goodness and knowledge" (I paraphrase Russel) that remain worthwhile pursuits even under the shadow of despair cast by that great reality of death.

## My view Synthesize, Compare

## Some points

Flourishing– minimally, social and individual learning, knowledge, pleasure, survival, pleasure, and maximally eternal life and glory. It is not intolerant

Teleology– our natural end is flourishing. It is not supernatural. It is not merely animal. It is second natural.

## The importance of telos

That teleology is important has been one of the central contentions of this dissertation.

## Three characters, one successful, one virtuous, one both successful and virtuous

The first character I should like to keep before our imagination is the Successful Man: wealthy, powerful, influential, well-connected, owning lots of land, designer clothes, and jets. This is Bruce Wayne, Donald Trump, or Hilary Clinton. We can playfully imagine them furthermore in the peak

of life in beauty, health, and vigor. Whether or not this person is virtuous seems to be beside the point: they are Successful. They may not be wise but they enjoy the richness of the "aesthetic life."

The second character is the Scrappy Sage: even though these wise, unyielding in principle, scrupulous, discerning, practical, reliable, beneficent, large-minded, generous, unflappable, just, undeceived and undeceivable, undistracted by petty pleasures, and far-sighted regarding the affairs of this life. This is Diogenes, Symeon Stylites, or John the Baptist who were despised for their lack of Success but admired and sought out for their Sagacity. They are ascetic sages but rejecting the aesthetic and embracing the "ethical life."

The third is a combination of worldly success and virtuous sagacity: wealthy but wise, powerful but unyielding in principle, influential but scrupulous, well-connected by discerning, full of possessions but practical. This is King Solomon, Cato the Younger, or St. Katherine of Sienna.

The question 'why be good?' is asked by someone who is earnestly in doubt as to whether it is better to be more like Solomon or St. Katherine than like Donald Trump or Hilary Clinton. They might agree that virtue and success together are better than virtue and no success; they are earnestly in doubt as to whether it would be better to have success without virtue or virtue without success. So the question "why be good?" is not the question "Why be motivated at all?" but "why not be motivated, after all, by success with or without virtue?'.

This question is echoed by Eryxias: even supposing someone were as wise as Nestor, wouldn't such a person be miserable without food and drink and clothes and the like? What *advantage* is wisdom? The assumption here is that the meaning of "advantage" is advantage for *us* here and now, not just abstract admirable qualities.

If virtues is partly constitutive of flourishing (even "success"), then the question 'why be virtuous?' is close — if not identical — to the irrational question 'why do what is worth doing?'. It is a conceptual confusion. However, if virtue is not constitutive of flourishing, then the question of whether *I* really ought to let virtue be the over overriding practical consideration instead of the alluring temptations of wealth, riches, sex, and power in however great of quantities I can achieve.

So my first thesis in this chapter, is this: virtue causes human flourishing but also partly constitutes it. This is my first step toward solving the problem of why be good.

Many neo-Aristotelians use "flourishing" to translate the untranslatable "eudaimonia."

Eudaimonia is the human telos. telos is, of course, Greek for "end". The word is bursting with dizzying array of possible meanings, including "definite point", "goal", "purpose," "cessation," "order," "prize," "highest point", "realization", "decision", and "services."[17] There are at least two kinds of teleology we can distinguish between: natural and social.[18] Natural teleology is not *intentional*. Social teleology is. The type of teleology the Aristotelian tradition takes for granted is natural teleology, of which social teleology is an instance in human rational creatures.

So our telos is eudaimonia. What is eudaimonia? Answering this question is treacherously difficult. "Religious" pagans like Aristotle thought it was the intellectual life of an (Athenian) gentlemen. Christians like Aquinas think it is the beatific vision of God after this life is over, including the time after a bodily resurrection. Atheists and other noble secularists such as Russell and Murdoch think that eudaimonia is a particular kind of virtuous and wise life here and now, despite the coming darkness. (Less noble secularists opt for cocaine, sex, whisky, heroine.) These are different reactions, but both are reactions to formalized despair. On a happier note, or perhaps equally anxious note, Ray Kurzweil and other transhumanists think that even this life can be extended, perhaps a little, perhaps a lot, which would afford more time to explore just what eudaimonia might be. I do not here bother to mention theories of reincarnation Is there any way to coordinate these views?

Virtues play some important part in happiness, unless the immoralist consents to the despairing notion that if death ends all, then life is meaningless and so eat drink and be merry.

17. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon: Founded Upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Harper & Brothers, 1896) compare with Strong's 5056: "telos tel'-os from a primary *tello* (to set out for a definite point or goal); properly, the point aimed at as a limit, i.e. (by implication) the conclusion of an act or state (termination (literally, figuratively or indefinitely), result (immediate, ultimate or prophetic), purpose); specially, an impost or levy (as paid); continual, custom, end(-ing), finally, uttermost."

18. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology."

The old Stoic line was the noble belief that virtue is *all* of eudaimonia. There is nothing more to be desired but virtue; "virtue is it's own reward." The Aristotelian line was, not surprisingly, a bit more human. The life of virtuous activity is necessary but not sufficient for eudaimonia. Also needed are money, friends, and some good fortune. In a sense, the fully virtuous man or woman could be a victim to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and lose all. But this is just a way of saying that tragedies can indeed happen. Socrates would, with superhuman stubbornness, deny it. *Nothing* can harm the good man; and nothing save the bad one.

## Minimal and Maximal Conceptions

I would also like to distinguish between minimal conceptions and maximal conceptions of happiness. A minimal conception includes a necessary condition or set of necessary conditions the absence of which plausible constitutes *misery*. Peter Geach alludes to this kind of conception when he argues that only a broad basis of ethical agreement is needed for two groups to work together on building a hospital or running a university.[19] Alasdair MacIntyre's conception of telos in *After Virtue* is what I have called "minimal". A maximal conception of happiness is more imaginative, certainly, but more divisive. A maximal conception imagines what state of affairs or what human activity constitutes *full and completely satisfying human life* — fulfillment to the highest imaginable degree. Boethius pretty clearly aims for this kind of conception when he argues that the good of man is complete self-sufficiency and hence cannot but any "false happiness" such as wealth, power, or pleasure but must be participation in God himself.[20]

Natural law theorists like to talk about 'perfections' of nature, and happiness as 'perfect' or complete. I prefer the term 'maximal' to 'perfective' for two reasons. First, the concept of maximum is relative to circumstances; one should aim to be as happy as possible *given the limitations of time*. This clause includes theist and atheists in the conversation since they may disagree on just

19. Geach, *The Virtues*.
20. *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book III.

what the limitations of time are but agree that we should aim to be as happy as possible. Secondly, the notion of perfection implies that human nature has natural limits of happiness, a terminus. I'm not sure this is true. It might be that, so long as one lives well, and so long as the average lifespan of western industrial peoples continues to increase. Is there a natural limit, for instance, to how many languages one can learn? I know three languages. With enough time before my biological end, couldn't I learn ten? Someone more gifted with languages already knows ten and could learn twenty. If they lived 200 years, couldn't they learn thirty languages? Is there a natural limit to wisdom? Can one become fully wise and then stop? Continuing the discussion using the notion of relative maximum keeps the case open on this issue.

## Evolution and Telos

> For these reasons, a welfare-based conception of natural functions and ends is problematic. Suppose, as suggested above, that an organism's teleological profile is indeed shaped by the facts of the evolutionary history that ultimately explain how it was put together as the organized functional system it is. In that case, organisms will be teleologically organized ultimately and generally toward the end (roughly) of passing along germ-line copies of their genes as well as or better than rival conspecifics (this being the unifying effect non-incidentally promoted by all of the organism's proper-functional traits)—rather than toward the end of flourishing as such in any richer, intuitive sense. Since this has little to do with what we would think of as ultimately and generally relevant to ethical normativity when applied to the human case, it seems doubtful that the normative framework provided by natural teleology can be of any help in thinking about the normative framework of ethics (FitzPatrick 2000; on the other side, see Casebeer 2003 for a defense of such an approach, and Lott 2012 for a defense of Foot and Thomson against FitzPatrick's objections).