Chapter 1

Introduction: Virtue, Reason, Telos

Thesis

In this dissertation, I shall defend the thesis that:

Although it seems that the pursuit of virtues is optional, virtues (such as moderation, generosity, and especially practical wisdom) are acquired excellent character traits that all human beings as practical reasoners need, for virtues enable us to realize and themselves partly realize our natural human telos.

This thesis offers an account of the content of virtue and also the ground of virtue in human nature. The three clauses of the thesis provide an outline of the arguments that shall follow on its behalf: (a) virtues are acquired excellent traits all humans *need* ; (b) all human beings are practical reasoners and so especially need the virtue of practical wisdom; and (c) and such character traits partly (but not fully) constitute the realization of our natural human telos. In the process of clarifying key terms and defending these notions, I shall be obliged to take a stance on several important issues undergoing lively debate within philosophical ethics, especially the recently burgeoning field of virtue ethics:

- What exactly is a virtue? What is a vice?

- Is it really "necessary for" or "needed by" creatures like us?
- What is practical reason — what is the relation between rationality and morality? (Can the irrational person be moral, or the immoral person rational?)
- Does humanity have one telos, many, or none?

Put most broadly, the main problem to be addressed is: What is virtue in relation to practical reason and to our human telos?

Three key terms

The sense of 'virtue' employed throughout is a secondary, rarified, philosophical sense. As Copp and Sobol summarizes:

> It is widely agreed that a virtue is a trait of character. Michael Slote says that an individual virtue is conceived as "an inner trait or disposition of the individual."[1]

This philosophical sense of 'virtue' as a character trait builds on the primary sense; the primary sense of 'virtue' is simply 'excellence.' In this broader primary sense, many traits count as virtues: keen memory, or dexterity, or physical attractiveness are 'excellences'; and Homeric society might praise one as such who stands out from his peers in some respect, whether physical, mental, or moral. But however admirable excellences such as strength and beauty may be, and however socially useful, they are by and large not within one's control; they are "given" by fortune.

By contrast, some excellences are in one's control: those acquired by habit, reflection, intention, will, desire – in a word, those acquired by practically thinking it through. The thought that human beings are practical reasoners entails that we participate in controlling the direction of our own lives, if only to some small extent. Or rather, more strictly, the activity of practically reasoning *just is* the activity of participating in that control. 'Practical reason' is our name for activities such as

1. David Copp and David Sobel, "Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics*," *Ethics* 114, no. 3 (2004): 516.

deliberating, reflecting, judging, evaluating, planning, and executing plans. Practical reason makes all the difference in human life, and so plays a central role in neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics.

'Virtue' in the narrow, secondary sense denotes the excellent traits that are *acquired* – such as courage, justice, moderation, and especially practical wisdom. Such traits are human virtues for they are excellence of character. Copp and Sobol continue:

> Rosalind Hursthouse has attempted to articulate in detail what such a trait would consist in. The key point, in her view, seems to be that a virtue is not merely a disposition to act in certain characteristic ways. To be sure, a virtue does lead one to act in characteristic ways, but beyond this, it leads one to act in such ways for characteristic reasons and in a characteristic manner, to have certain characteristic attitudes and emotions, to be acute in detecting cases in which the virtue is at issue, and so on.[2]

These also are *necessary* to achieve one's natural telos. A telos is an end, whether set by intention, by one's culture, or by nature. I shall defend the view that virtues not only enable one to achieve one's goals, nor only to perform a social function, but to become maximally human in the normative sense.

The Neo-Aristotelians

I derive these themes especially from Philippa Foot, John McDowell, and Alasdair MacIntyre. My primary sources are the recent neo-Aristotelian virtue theorists, and It is from them that I draw my themes. It is by presenting, comparing, and critiquing their ethical views that I construct my own argument. For example, I take from them the conviction that the desirability of developing virtues such as courage and practical wisdom depends neither on purely relative cultural values nor on dogmatic conceptions of human nature. Suppose that all human beings are potentially rational animals. If all human beings are potentially rational animals (and many will dispute it), then an ethical theory grounded in human nature can hope for both objectivity (everyone needs to become virtuous, in one sense of 'need' that shall be explained) and a certain liberalism (people and cultures

2. Ibid., 516.

vary in their decisions about what is practically reasonable). Even admitting variance, it is plausible to defend the view that a virtuous person is truly admirable as an exemplary expression of human nature *as it is* in itself, not merely in our concepts and cultures.

The sub-set of recent virtue theorists I take up for my research are the neo-Aristotelians. Who are they? The neo-Aristotelians are a group of contemporary (mostly analytic) philosophers who have written on a set of ethical questions that represent some of the most significant and interesting work being done in English-speaking ethics. Rosalind Hursthouse provides a list: Anscombe,[3] Geach,[4] Foot,[5] McDowell,[6] MacIntyre,[7] Hursthouse,[8] Nussbaum,[9] Thompson.[10] I propose to add Annas[11] and Brown[12].

There are many other significant names from the last 100 years, besides the neo-Aristotelians, who shall appear as interlocutors or in footnotes; sadly, they may not receive herein the attention they clearly deserve.[13] One could certainly construct a worthwhile project by analyzing all (or a

3. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19; G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Harvard University Press, 1957).

4. Peter T Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1956.

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

6. John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Harvard University Press, 1998); John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996).

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

8. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics and Human Nature," *Hume Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 67–82.

9. Martha Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics," in *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, ed. J.E.J. Altham and Ross Harrison (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86–131 ; Martha C. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (September 1988): 32–53 ; nussbaum1999virtue

10. Michael Thompson, "The Representation of Life," in *Virtues and Reasons*, ed. Lawrence Hursthouse Rosalind and Warren Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 247–96.

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

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

13. They include Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts* (Mouette Press, 1998); Bernard Williams; Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Clarendon Press, 2003); Michael Slote, *From Morality to Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 1992); Paul Bloomfield, *Moral Reality* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Robert Adams, Gopal Sreenivasan, Rachana Kamtekar, Talbot

different sub-set of) these authors. Nevertheless, the smaller set of Neo-Aristotelians are my focus. Every project must cut off scope somewhere. I have limited my primary focus to MacIntyre, Foot, and McDowell. Not only does this limitation keep my scope realistic, but also it allows for a rich discussion of the illuminating comparisons and contrasts between their (often conflicting) views.

The Form

Much has been written about MacIntyre, Foot, and McDowell's views of virtue, practical reason, and eudaimonia.[14] However, not enough has yet been do on the dynamic relation between these three concepts.

All three of the above mentioned concepts are essential to developing a robust neo-Aristotelian naturalism. At the same time, moderns are likely to misunderstand all three concepts.[15] Hence, my project will defend not only each part but defend the formal schema as the best hope for developing a fully adequate ethical theory.[16] My my thesis hypothesizes a relation between all three elements. The success or failure of that defense will not become clear until the project is complete.

However, it is worthwhile here to make one analogy by way of justifying the inclusion of all three elements as an essential set. Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* argues persuasively that necessary conditions of an intelligible moral system include: (a) a conception of human nature – including human rationality – as it is prior to deep self-reflection or moral effort; (b) a conception

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Brewer, and R. Scott Smith.

14. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* gives a concise and clear account of all three.

15. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2013. "Three of virtue ethics' central concepts, virtue, practical wisdom and eudaimonia are often misunderstood. Once they are distinguished from related but distinct concepts peculiar to modern philosophy, various objections to virtue ethics can be better assessed."

16. For example, McDowell, Foot, and MacIntyre can be seen using this schema John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 331–50 and 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; Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2002) and Foot, *Natural Goodness*; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) and MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*

of some human telos or end we ought to realize; and (c) a conception of the qualities or actions that enable a human being to achieve his or her telos. Simply put, a moral theory needs a starting point, an ending point, and (in tandem with those two points) a set of appropriate means to that end. Just as one cannot leave for vacation without knowing (a) where that destination is, (b) where one is at the moment, and (c) the directions — on foot, by car, or plane, or boat or what have you — to the destination, any attempt to construct a moral theory without all three components (our human telos, our rational nature, and virtues needed to realize that telos) is bound to stultify.

The Rise of Virtue ethics

Virtue talk, once a normal part of western cultural and intellectual life, receded to the background or disappeared for about the last three centuries. Its resurgence in the last 60 years has been well documented.[17] Today, about one fifth of analytic philosophers self-identify as adhering to "virtue ethics."[18] Not everyone is impressed, of course, with the alleged benefits of virtue ethics; not everyone agrees that "virtue ethics" is a valid category anyhow.[19] Nevertheless, this figure is remarkably high, given the notorious difficulty of achieving ethical and metaethical consensus and given the long dominance, in academic philosophy at least, of Kantian and Utilitarian theories of morality (to say nothing of the various brands of moral skepticism).

Howe are we to explain the resurgence of virtue talk? One interpretation is that something is profoundly wrong with modern moral philosophy.[20] Modern philosophy's turn toward epistemol-

17. Cf. Roger Crisp, *How Should One Live?: Essays on the Virtues* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

18. David Bourget and David J Chalmers, "What Do Philosophers Believe?" *Philosophical Studies* 170, no. 3 (2014): 465–500.

19. Martha C Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?" *The Journal of Ethics* 3, no. 3 (1999): 163–201. Nussbaum argues that we should talk less about virtue ethicists and more about neo-Humeans, neo-Kantians, neo-Aristotelians; and talk more still about their substantive views about the role of reason in morality, the role of emotions and desires and other sub-rational psychological phenomena, and their moral views.

20. Cf. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy" diagnoses consequentialism as morally depraved, and categorizes all the "English-speaking ethicists" from Sidgwick to "the present day"

ogy and away from metaphysics was paralleled in a turn toward subjectivism and constructivism. As modern science turned away from the human toward the cosmic and natural, modern ethics (and politics) turned inward toward the human – often to the exclusion of the cosmic and natural. While each turn had its merits, each was also subject to excess. The resurgence of virtue talk can be explained in part, I think, by a desire (within ethics and elsewhere) to correct both of these excesses at once.

MacIntyre argues that the fracturing of social and political bonds deriving from a shared understanding of and pursuit of the good.[21]

Perhaps it was disastrously wrong for Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers to turn away from tradition and religion to attempt a universal, abstract, public, rational theory of morality. On this interpretation, the flexibility of Aristotle and the humanism of Confucius provide a refreshing alternative to the stolid rationalism of Kant or Mill.[22]

Rosalind Hursthouse disputes this interpretation. She thinks virtue ethicists presented their views as *rivals* to the dominant moral theories only because, in the early days, it needed to fight for a position at the table. Now that virtue ethics has a respectable place in our taxonomy of philosophical ethics, such rivalry is needlessly combative.

The second interpretation (which Hursthouse seems to favor) is that virtue talk can and does enrich Kantian and Utilitarian or more broadly consequentialist ethical theories. She expresses this interpretation: "On this assumption, 'virtue ethics' so-called does not figure as a normative rival to utilitarian and deontological ethics; rather, its (fairly) recent revival is seen as having served the useful purpose of reminding moral philosophers that the elaboration of a normative theory may fall short

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as being consequentialists.

21. Though he is classified as a "virtue ethicist", MacIntyre rejects the label insofar as it does not necessitate a real restoration of the Aristotelian tradition of virtue. Nevertheless, he has contributed to virtue ethics, as well as a surprising number of other fields: the history of philosophy, political science, epistemology, the philosophy of education, sociology, and more.

22. This interpretation, of course, is a substantive moral thesis couched in the language of a historical thesis. So it is debatable whether this story is even true *as history*. I shall try to remain neutral about the history and discuss the substantive theory.

of giving a full account of our moral life."[23] Kant himself had a theory of virtue. Some theorists have been working to articulate a theory they call "virtue consequentialism" or "character consequentialism."[24] In contrast to "act" or "rule" utilitarianisms, virtue consequentialism describes virtues as those traits whose possessors tend to bring about the most desirable consequences. Virtue concepts such as temperance and justice are both potent and flexible. They are potent enough to augment concepts of duty or pleasure; yet they are flexible enough to accommodate varying substantive views of what justice is and why it is morally admirable. Certainly, one useful way of distinguishing (say) the ethical theories of Elizabeth Anscombe and Christine Korsgaard would be to point out that Anscombe makes heavier use of the term 'virtue' while Korsgaard makes heavier use of the term 'duty' or 'imperative'; but their theories can be distinguished in more useful detail by contrasting (say) Anscombe's emphasis on the need for moral psychology and a theory of action with Korsgaard's argument that the need to be moral arises out of our reflective, practical identity.

My own view is that virtue ethicists such as Elizabeth Anscombe, Bernard Williams, Alasdair MacIntyre, Iris Murdoch and others have done a valuable service to modern philosophical ethics by correcting certain myopic tendencies. The "corrections" I have in mind correspond roughly with those "common ground" features that Martha Nussbaum argues exist between those ethicists who talk about virtue — including Kant and Mill and Sidgwick.

Nussbaum rightly observes that the three features of "common ground" between a wide variety of "virtue ethicists" also include Kant and Mill and Sidgwick. Her three features are the notions that moral philosophy is (a) about the agent (not just individual choices or actions), (b) about motives, emotions, and settled character traits, and (c) the whole of life.[25] "Even though a concern for motive, intention, character, and the whole course of life was not in principle alien to Kan-

23. Rosalind Hursthouse, "How Should One Live?: Essays on the Virtues," ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford University Press, 1996), 19–33.

24. Ben Bradley, "Virtue Consequentialism," *Utilitas* 17, no. 03 (2005): 282–98; Julia Driver, *Uneasy Virtue* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

25. Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics," 170.

tian and Utilitarian philosophy, it was certainly alien to most British and American Kantians and Utilitarians of the period."[26] Martha Nussbaum argues that the "common ground" between even diverging views is that we cannot construct a complete ethical theory by discussing only "isolated moments of choice."[27]

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

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

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

On the notion that values are plural, the anti-Utilitarians are united. Virtues are "an or-

26. Ibid., 173.
27. Ibid., 174.
28. Ibid., 176.
29. Ibid., 180.

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

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

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

about freely throughout the day, only imposing small pockets of rigid time (at meals, before bed, etc.). We might plausibly suppose that the role of reason is more like that of a parent managing sub-rational children than it is like that of a monarch ruling a polis.

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

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

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

Nussbaum summarizes Baier as an anti-theory theorist who "understands virtue ethics as an alternative to the 'rationalist, law-fixated tradition in moral philosophy", who praises the voice

32. Ibid., 192.

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

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

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

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

ground" is significant: but it can be pursued within Kantianism, within Utilitarianism, and within neo-Aristotelian and neo-Humean projects of many different sorts."[36]

Nussbaum's essay says that "virtue ethics" is a "misleading category", but still aims to capture a family resemblance (we might say) between virtue ethicists. Her three features are: (a) the notion that moral philosophy is about the agent (not just individual choices or actions); (b) moral philosophy is about motives, emotions, and settled character traits, and (c) it is about the whole of life.[37] "Even though a concern for motive, intention, character, and the whole course of life was not in principle alien to Kantian and Utilitarian philosophy, it was certainly alien to most British and American Kantians and Utilitarians of the period."[38] The "common ground" between even diverging views is that we cannot construct a complete ethical theory by discussing only "isolated moments of choice"[39]

So Anscombe et. al., have reminded us that the first question of philosophical ethics is "How am I to live?" This question is not an optional one for normal, reflective, adults. This question is not an avoidable one for those who face major problems in life. We need to refocus our arguments in philosophical ethics from looking just at individual choices or actions (viewed from the outside, like a moral critic) to looking at the whole of life (viewed from the inside, like a moral agent).

A second myopic tendency that these virtue ethicists have corrected, I think, is an *ahistorical* approach. Many neo-Aristotelians and others studied classics or history in addition to ethics, or prior to ethics. Long familiarity with cultures, places, and times other than one's own has a salubrious effect of helping one to see one's own culture and time. (I remember, after my first visit to Mongolia, whose capital city has only one department store, coming back to California and marveling at WalMart.) Likewise, philosophers who have spent long hours conversing with Aristotle or Aquinas are likely to notice more easily the assumptions, biases, strengths, and weaknesses of our

36. Ibid., 201.
37. Ibid., 170.
38. Ibid., 173.
39. Ibid., 174.

own modern context. Jack Weinstein observes that Alasdair Macintyre did for ethics what John Rawls did for political philosophy: where Rawls re-invigorated political philosophy, "inaugurating the dominance of late twentieth-century liberalism"[40], MacIntyre helped to re-invigorate analytic ethical philosophy (especially the ascendancy of late twentieth-century virtue ethics) by freshly examining ethical concepts in light of history.[41] MacIntyre argues that we can only responsibly use and evaluate practical concepts such as self, practice, telos, or virtue when we know our own history. Since *we ourselves* inhabit a tradition, we must know ourselves *as* inhabitants of a tradition with a past. We will return to these themes in later chapters.

A third myopic tendency is, as I have suggested above, the tendency to view morality as *either* a set of rules to be followed for their own sake (with no external "point" or purpose) *or* nothing but groundless social convention. Controversies play and re-play the tug-of-war between those who think these moral rules ought to be followed (no matter what!) and those who think these moral rules are mere conventions that may be safely ignored if stronger motives override them. If morality is one piece of a three-part form (mentioned above), then it is possible to see moral rules as neither arbitrary impositions nor bolts of lightning from a clear sky.

%**Transition or remove**. The metaphysical background of these neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists' project aims to avoid dualisms. It aims, rather, at a holistic picture of nature that includes humans and all living things within the cosmos and includes all parts of a human being (reason, emotion, desire, etc.). As Margaret Atkins eloquently summarizes the holistic vision of these thinkers: "Anglo-American moral philosophy [has moved] beyond the limitations not only of A.J. Ayer and C.L. Stevenson, but also of Hume's focus on sentiment, on the one hand, and Kant's focus on reason on the other. Contemporary ethics is about the whole human being, seen as biological, social and cultural, emotional and reflective."[42]

For Aristotle himself, humans were rational animals with a particular psychology and set

40. Jack Russell Weinstein, *On MacIntyre* (Wadsworth, 2003), 38.
41. Ibid., chap. 4.
42. Margaret Atkins, "Morality Without God?" *The Heythrop Journal* 46, no. 1 (2005): 65–71.

of potentialities, including the endowment of divine nous; our species-wide telos was happiness or eudaimonia. A life of virtuous activity was the means to eudaimonia, and detailed information about the virtues – both moral and intellectual – were knowable from tradition and ratified or modified by reflecting on the lives of virtuous Athenian citizens. Such was his view, but the message of the neo-Aristotelians is that we can pick and choose from Aristotle, discarding the bad but saving the good. And the good worth saving is quite a lot. It is not a foregone conclusion that contemporary virtue ethicist will *reject* widespread modern assumptions. Some, such as Murdoch and MacIntyre, did become staunch opponents of certain aspects of modernity. Others, such as McDowell and Hursthouse, become staunch defenders, even while working to enrich modernity with pre-modern tradition. We cannot presume his three-part schematic is *anti-modern* or intrinsically *pre-modern*.

Is neo-Aristotelian naturalism normative ethics or metaethics?

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to make explicit two assumptions that undergird this project. The first is that the neo-Aristotelians offer a theory of virtue that is a complete philosophical ethics, both its content and ground. Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is classified as *both* a normative theory *and* a position in metaethics. This may be worrisome; for example, consider the way professor James Lenman summarizes neo-Aristotelianism as a version of "moral naturalism":

> One important school of thought … [is] work is inspired by that of Aristotle. This view has its roots in the writings of G. E. M. Anscombe, P. T. Geach and the early Philippa Foot among others. Its contemporary representatives include the later Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse, Martha Nussbaum and Judith Jarvis Thomson. As this list makes clear, this is very much the official metaethical theory of the main current in contemporary virtue ethics.[43]

Lenman seems bemused with neo-Aristotelian naturalism. A metaphilosophical confusion lurks behind statements such as the one that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is "the official metaethical

43. James Lenman, "Moral Naturalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2014. Lenman acknowledges that Thomson might need to be subtracted from this list and that John McDowell might need to be added.

theory of the main current in contemporary virtue ethics." For when Foot, Hursthouse, McDowell are classified as virtue ethicists (a normative theory) *and* neo-Aristotelians (a metaethical theory), we might object. Aren't these two different projects?

One legacy of G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* has been the tendency to sharply distinguish primary ethical questions (about what things are good) from metaethical questions (about what 'good' as an evaluative predicate *means*). Of course, the questions that concern modern metaethicists were posed and discussed by prior thinkers. However, the *Principia* gave a distinctive form to these questions and suggested a distinctive range of possible answers. Moore argued that all previous ethical philosophers had failed to resolve their disputes for a failure to define their terms. The question of what the word 'good' *means* (and, possibly the same question, what 'good' *refers to*) is distinct from the question *which things are good?* The first question is a conceptual question that aims to define a category. The second question is a substantive or existential question that aims to bring other concepts within that category. Moore argued (or according to some critics, *assumed*) that 'goodness' was indefinable.[44] That is, the good could not be defined in terms of any other property. It is false that 'goodness is pleasure' or 'goodness is whatever is most real'. That we pursue pleasure is a psychological claim, not an ethical one; that we judge something to be real is a metaphysical claim, not an ethical one.

If the good is indefinable, then, necessarily, any attempt to define it will fail. Any attempt to reduce the concept to a concept of lesser intension, or to translate it it as a concept, commits the "naturalistic fallacy." Moore is clear that the naturalistic fallacy isn't *just* the error of defining the good as a natural property (such as the pleasant) but also the error of defining the good as a metaphysical or supernatural property (such as the Really Real, or the Divinely-Ordained).

The neo-Aristotelians are pretty universally critical of Moore's arguments here. Philippa Foot and others dispute his starting points, as we shall see.[45] So the first reply to Lenman as to

44. William K Frankena, "The Naturalistic Fallacy," *Mind*, 1939, 464–77.

45. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chap. 1, "A Fresh Start?"; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 2, "The Nature of Moral Disagreement Today and the Claims of Emotivism".

whether normative ethics and metaethics are two different projects is that they are not *necessarily* the same project. One's choice of philosophical taxonomy will reflect one's substantive views about ethics. Alan Gibbard, no opponent of metaethics, admits that one's substantive views largely determine one's view of the relation between questions of substance and those of meaning:

> Moore stressed the distinction in ethics between questions of meaning and questions of substance, and thereby gave rise to a tradition in analytic philosophy of separating the two parts of ethical theory: the metatheory and the substantive, normative part. Some philosophers have rejected the distinction; some Kantians, for instance, think that if you get the metatheory right, substantive ethical conclusions fall out as some kind of consequence, so that metaethics and substantive ethics are not really separate. Then too, anyone who rejects Sidgwick's and Moore's indefinability claim and thinks that ethical terms can be given analytic, naturalistic definitions thinks that the two putative subdivisions are not really separate. Those who reject any systematic distinction between questions of meaning and questions of substance might likewise reject a sharp, separate subject of metaethics.[46]

I think Gibbard is right, here. To allow the seemingly innocuous point that procedural and formal questions of meaning are separable from material and substantive questions is to beg the question – perhaps unwittingly – against a range of answers to those questions.

Two observations may serve as evidence. First, we may point out that even philosophers who maintain that (first order) ethics and (second order) metaethics are separate projects betray conspicuous connections between their first-order ethical and second-order metaethical views; advocates of a supposedly "neutral" metaethics often ally with first-order consequentialism: G.E. Moore, J.L. Mackie, Frank Jackson, Richard Boyd, Peter Railton, Simon Blackburn, and Alan Gibbard all endorse consequentialism. (We might even echo Lenman and call moral naturalism the "official theory of a main current in contemporary consequentialism.") Secondly, even if a procedural, non-substantive approach to metaethics can be made neutral with respect to normative ethics, it is still admirably ambitious to construct a theory that pays attention to both. Darwall agrees. He summarizes the history of analytic ethics since Moore, and persuasively argues "that although metaethics

46. Allan Gibbard, "Normative Properties," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41, no. S1 (2003): 320.

and normative ethics are properly focused on different issues, they need to be brought into dynamic relation with one another in order to produce a systematic and defensible philosophical ethics. This mutual dependence is owing to the fact that issues of normativity are at the center of the concerns of both metaethics and normative ethics."[47]

In sum, the answer to Lenman's confusion is that the ethical and metaethical dimensions of neo-Aristotelianism are inseparable. My thesis is squarely and ethical argument concerning what character traits are worth pursuing (e.g, intellectual and moral virtues) and what traits count as virtues (e.g., practical wisdom). However, an adequate defense of my thesis requires me to assess more broadly metaethical considerations such as status of human beings as normative creatures who evaluate themselves and others and who reflect upon what they have reason to do or to abstain from doing.

Is neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism naturalistic?

The second assumption undergirding this project is that neo-Aristotelian virtue theory is naturalistic. Hursthouse says that "Virtue ethics, or at least any form of it that takes its inspiration from Aristotle, is usually taken to be a form of ethical naturalism – broadly, the enterprise of basing ethics in some way on consideration of human nature, on what is involved with being good *qua* human being."[48] If we can say what a *good human being* is, we shall be well on the way to describing what kinds of actions are right and wrong, or what kind of character traits are admirable or blameworthy. Sociologist Amanda Maull summarizes this sort of naturalism well:

> "Drawing upon the works of philosophers such as Philippa Foot, Richard Kraut, and Martha Nussbaum, the claim is made that there are moral properties and facts that are natural (rather than occult or supernatural), which are derived from certain innate dispositions and capacities of living things (i.e., those associated with growth and self-maintenance as opposed to destruction or harm). Human beings have evolved

47. Stephen Darwall, "How Should Ethics Relate to (the Rest of) Philosophy?: Moore's Legacy," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41, no. S1 (2003): 1–20.

48. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 192.

> as social creatures with special capacities for speech and reason such that specification of "human flourishing" is more complex and problematic than it is for plants or animals. For the human being, the idea of the "good life" goes beyond biological survival and pertains to potentially ambiguous concepts such as virtue, happiness, and "well-being."[49]

The case for my thesis may be classified as sort of neo-Aristotelian naturalism. There are many types of ethical naturalism. Ask two naturalists what 'naturalism' means, and you'll hear three definitions. Mine is an ethical naturalism in the broadest sense, as defined by Hans Fink's admirable essay, which I shall refer to often: "An ethical naturalist is someone who insists on a fundamental continuity between the ethical and the natural."[50] It follows, on this view, that humans are continuous with nature.[51] Pretty clearly, one could explain this fundamental continuity in a variety of (perhaps conflict ways), depending on how one explicates the 'ethical' and the 'natural." I warmly welcome what Hans Fink calls an "unrestricted conception of nature."[52] This conception expresses the idea, he continues, that "there is one world only, and that that world is the realm of nature, which is taken to include the cultural, artificial, mental, abstract and whatever else there may prove to be." Throughout, I shall assume that 'nature' or 'natural' refer to familiar objects and properties that exist in the cosmos today: people, stars, trees, penguins, bacteria, and their properties, like 'being an animal', 'bright,' 'green', 'being countershaded for camouflage,' and so on. I do take my argument to be defending naturalism in the broad sense that I propose to use only philosophical and scientific methods to observe and explain natural phenomena; I bracket (but do not deny) the possibility of divine revelation or the existence of supernatural beings. I do accept the possibility – indeed I shall defend as essential – the notion that nature includes normativity. I am entitled to the label

49. Amanda Maull, "A Deweyan Defense of Ethical Naturalism," *Society* 50, no. 6 (2013): 577.

50. Hans Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (August 2006): 203 . Fink's is the best discussion I know of on all nine (or more!) varieties of the word "nature" as it occurs in philosophy. I summarize Fink more thoroughly in a later chapter.

51. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, 1–2.

52. Cf. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 210.

'naturalism' since (as I shall argue) the natural world itself contains facts and norms, descriptivity and normativity. By 'normativity', I mean 'ought' talk and facts to which 'ought' talk refers.[53]

Certainly, some critics will insist that normativity is not natural. I ask them to consider the alternative, as I shall consider both, and examine the case I make in chapters 2 and 5. We must aim first for clarity before agreement. It seems to me that the fault line between neo-Aristotelians and their critics is a line between two ways of understanding the difference between facts and values.[54] The assumption of Lenman (and others) is that nature is purely descriptive, with no "ought". But Aristotle and the broad Aristotelian tradition deny that the fact-value dichotomy is absolute. They conceive of *nature* as including everything that *is and ought to be.*[55] Briefly, for Moore nature as including everything that *is* but not what ought to be – all facts, no values. Moore and those influenced by him, both naturalists and non-naturalists, have agreed with the underlying assumption that "nature" is purely descriptive. But what if this assumption is mistaken? Surely we cannot let a deeply-held assumption stand without scrutiny. For Aristotle, nature is some facts, some values. So norms and prescriptions can be just as natural as facts and descriptions. If normativity (*what ought to be*) is natural too, then it might be possible that *human nature* grounds ethical facts. And this is just what virtue ethics says.

In the spirit of open inquiry, we must ask ourselves: what if metaphysical and biology facts are just as natural as some ethical facts? What if the fact/value dichotomy is not absolute and inviolable? Then there might be a tight fit – perhaps an inextricable tie – between Aristotelian virtue theory and the metaethical view labeled neo-Aristotelian naturalism. And neo-Aristotelian

53. Cf. Peter Schaber, "Normative Facts," *Studies into the Foundations of an Integral Theory of Practice and Cognition*, 2005, 107–22; Gibbard, "Normative Properties," 321: "[Part] of what's special about morality is that it operates in the 'space of reasons;' it concerns justification and oughts. The term 'normative' is central to much current philosophical discussion. There's no agreement on what this technical term in our discipline is to mean, but it involves, in a phrase drawn from Sellars, being somehow 'fraught with ought'."

54. Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact / Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Harvard University Press, 2002).

55. As I understand it, the paradoxical notion of "that which really is what ought to be" is a good way of summarizing the notion of a natural law.

naturalists argue that nature is or can be normative.

Now, those who think the fact/value dichotomy really is most accurate may squirm at this hypothesis. They might just double down and insist that metaethical theory is utterly procedural and not substantive – they might insist that it is utterly neutral with respect to normative ethical theories. I shall have to postpone the argument until a later chapter.

Relatedly, some critics of neo-Aristotelianism in particular exploit one or more horns of a dilemma,[56] questioning whether it is possible to construct a neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism that is both (a) actually *ethical*[57] and (b) actually *naturalistic*.[Cf. rehg2003conceptual . Rehg et. al., conclude that neo-Aristotelian naturalism is really ethical but not sufficiently naturalistic.] On the former horn, if ethics is naturalistic, then happiness seems to be simply a natural state, like health or pleasure, while the means to that end discernible through statistical analysis of causal relations between acts and their consequences. This seems hardly normative at all. On the latter horn, if ethics is really normative, then happiness is the kind of state we *ought* to pursue whether or not we actually reach it — whether or not, in fact *anyone* has actually reached it. Virtues are those qualities we *ought* to acquire, whether or not anyone does or ever has acquired them. This sounds hardly naturalistic at all.

This dilemma, I think explains the innocent confusion about who actually deserves the title of "naturalists". Lenman, among others, is not sure who counts, pointing out in a footnote that Thomson probably shouldn't be on this list and that John McDowell probably should. He says "McDowell is certainly pervasively inspired by Aristotle and he describes himself as a naturalist. See especially his 1995. But I suspect many philosophers would find his use of the term 'naturalist'

56. Cf. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism," *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2013; Bernard Mauser, "The Ontological Foundations for Natural Law Theory and Contemporary Ethical Naturalism" (PhD thesis, Marquette University, 2011). Mauser describes the dilemma excellently in chapter 5.

57. Stephen Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue," *Ethica* 4 (2005): 7–22 concludes that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is really naturalistic but is less ethical (i.e., normative) than might be wished.

here somewhat Pickwickian."[58] The confusion arises because Lenman and others[59] are not sure that neo-Aristotelian "naturalism" is "really *naturalism*" at all. I think this objection begs important questions, but I shall not attempt to unravel them now. That will be the task for a later chapter.

I contend an affirmative answer to both questions: neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is both ethical and naturalistic (in senses to be defined). I hope that by the end, some plausible picture will be painted of the relation of virtue to practical reason and happiness and so that this problem will come to light as difficult yet tractable.

The Centrality of Teleology

Arguably, the unifying concept of the schema is not virtue but telos. If we can't even create a shopping list of groceries we "should" buy without a clear conception of the dinner to be cooked, then *a fortiori* strict moral rules and virtues without any notion of the kind of life that is to be lived are bound to degenerate into a kind of pointless legalism. If natural human telos in particular is central to the project of virtue ethics, it would seem that developing a plausible modern virtue ethical theory would require rehabilitating a notion of natural teleology in general.

The Challenge of Teleology

However, the desire to rehabilitate natural teleology may seem overly optimistic. The idea of teleology is a major stumbling block.[60] One the one hand, supernatural teleology is felt to be "too religious" by those think any amount of religion is too much; on the other hand, natural teleology is commonly supposed to be somehow debunked by modern science. Francis Bacon and others

58. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism."

59. William Rehg and Darin Davis, "Conceptual Gerrymandering? The Alignment of Hursthouse's Naturalistic Virtue Ethics with Neo-Kantian Non-Naturalism," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41, no. 4 (2003): 583–600; John Hacker-Wright, "What Is Natural About Foot's Ethical Naturalism?" *Ratio* 22, no. 3 (2009): 308–21; John Hacker-Wright, "Human Nature, Personhood, and Ethical Naturalism," *Philosophy* 84, no. 03 (2009): 413–27.

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

intentionally excised "final causation" from natural science since they feared that empirical and theoretical investigation into final causes "defiled philosophy."[61] If teleological virtue ethics is somehow distinctive of pre-modern traditions, wouldn't virtue talk be simply outmoded? Wouldn't any attempt to revive such talk be antiquarian and nostalgic? Is there a third alternative to "religious" teleology and natural teleology? Or can one of these disjuncts be rehabilitated in order that teleology may serve its crucial purpose in ethics?

The skeptical worries must be taken seriously and addressed in detail. The modern world is not the ancient world. Modern science, philosophy, and culture are not the same as their pre-modern counterparts. It is imperative that contemporary virtue ethicists pay due respect to what *has* changed. It is imperative that contemporary virtue ethicists clarify the relationship of their theories to modern science.

Nevertheless, I think that the sort of realism about natural teleology requisite for neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics grounded on human nature is – and can be shown to be – perfectly respectable, modern, scientific, and naturalistic. I shall present the case for this optimistic conclusion in parts, first in a chapter on ethical naturalism and in a later chapter on telos itself. The conclusion I shall defend is a growing consensus that natural final causation is no more mysterious or magical than biological life, or consciousness, or rationality. And hence, the pursuit of virtues is no more obsolete than any other human activity, such as farming, or laughing, or studying astronomy.

Suspending Judgment about God

For this project, I set to one side the possibility of supernatural teleology. I do not wish to *deny* the possibility that a divine mind is organizing things; but I do not wish to *assume* it either. While the

61. Cf. Bacon, *New Organon*, Book I. XLVIII "Although the most general principles in nature ought to be held merely positive, as they are discovered, and cannot with truth be referred to a cause, nevertheless the human understanding being unable to rest still seeks something prior in the order of nature. And then it is that in struggling toward that which is further off it falls back upon that which is nearer at hand, namely, on final causes, which have relation clearly to the nature of man rather than to the nature of the universe; and from this source have strangely defiled philosophy."

conclusion of my arguments is that the imperative to become virtuous – to imitate the virtuous man or woman, to acquire virtues and grow intellectually – are (if you like) natural laws, I remain agnostic as to whether these norms come from any particular personal god.[62]

The first reason for suspending discussion of this possibility is simply that this inquiry would not afford the space. I hope in future research to analyze the relationship between virtue theories and Christianity, or between virtue theories and religion in general. Virtue ethics has a long history, much of which is embroiled with Greek, or Taoist, or Christian religion. Metaphysical naturalism, on the other hand, has only recently attained dominance. Metaphysical naturalist be a virtue ethicist? Some treat 'naturalist' as virtually synonymous for 'atheist.'[63] Others treat naturalism as merely a method.[64] Indeed, John McDowell is a "relaxed naturalist" yet a critic of "scientism". And Stephen R. Brown is more of a strict naturalist and concedes some normative ground, allowing that his ethics might amount to something more descriptive.

The second reason is that there is no consensus among neo-Aristotelians regarding the supernatural; some are atheists, some Platonists, others Christians, still others a different sort of theist. Despite this variety, they hold a broad consensus about the possibility of *somehow* grounding an ethical theory in human nature.[65] The "somehow" is my goal in this project.

The third reason is that natural teleology, if it can be defended, is *compatible with* the supernatural teleology. I do not believe natural teleology *necessitates* supernatural teleology, but it is compatible. It is possible that God is directing all natural affairs to his purposes, including guiding human beings by commands; it is possible that the entire orchestral cosmos is organized around God as the *arche* and telos, and that (to paraphrase St. Augustine) "our hearts are restless until they

62. Even supposing moral laws are supernatural laws, in the abstract such a belief is consonant with a variety of theistic views: Aristotle's god is neither Brahman nor Jehovah.

63. Alvin Plantinga, "Evolution Vs. Naturalism" (Web; Books; Culture, 2008).

64. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008); David Papineau, "Naturalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2015.

65. The recent neo-Aristotelians seem to be a representative sample of a broader historical population: a survey of the living and the dead would feature theists, atheists, humanists, pantheists, and so on.

rest in him". However, for this project, I wish to see how far one's ethical outlook can go while suspending judgment.[66]

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/// >ACCORDING TO a semi-established consensus among the intellectual elite in the West, t
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In this way, my project may be seen as building on Philippa Foot's work to advance a kind of secular natural law theory. Mark Murphy says that "the paradigmatic natural law view [i.e., Aquinas] holds that (1) the natural law is given by God; (2) it is naturally authoritative over all human beings; and (3) it is naturally knowable by all human beings… Recently there have been nontheistic writers in the natural law tradition, who deny (1): see, for example, the work of Michael Moore (1982, 1996) and Philippa Foot (2001)."[67] It may also be seen as a kind of neo-Stoicism, if we follow Elizabeth Anscombe: "One might be inclined to think that a law conception of ethics could arise only among people who accepted an allegedly divine positive law; that this is not so is shown by the example of the Stoics, who also thought that whatever was involved in conformity to human virtues was required by divine law."[68] While I shall vigorously deny that normative ethics can survive in an aggressively reductive environment such as eliminative physicalism, I shall for present purposes remain neutral as to whether the "natural norms"[69] discoverable in nature are divine. Some critics may wish to characterize my view of ethics as somehow "transcendent." I shall not waste any more space disputing labels.

66. Compare with H Tristram Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics* (Oxford University Press, 1996). Engelhardt is a religious philosopher exploring the scope and limits of secular philosophy. While I shall end up agreeing with Engelhardt that secular moral philosophy (in the form of virtue ethics) remains fundamentally — and perhaps dangerously — pluralistic, I am a bit more optimistic than he about how far natural morality can go. Noah was not a Christian or a Jew was nevertheless "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God." (Gen 6:9) Even Abel somehow knew what sacrifice would be acceptable.

67. Mark Murphy, "The Natural 'Law Tradition in Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2011, 2011.

68. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 5.

69. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chap. 2.

Why it matters

The rise of normative virtue ethics demands a corresponding rise in strong defenses of the philosophical foundation of virtue. My thesis bears obvious relevance to ongoing debates in metaethics over moral naturalism concern whether and how far moral properties can be identified with natural properties.

Furthermore, my thesis matters for human life. To see why, consider two questions: (1) Should I apply to graduate school? (2) Why did become a philosopher? The first question is the kind of question that reflects *on what one is about to do*, where one feels unsure. The second question is the kind of question the reflects on *what one is already doing*, where one already feels confident about doing it.

Likewise, philosophical ethics can help us to resolve intractable dilemmas we face when life is difficult (as when an elderly relative is surviving only because of extraordinary life support), or when new moral frontiers appear (as when biological immortality becomes a real possibility). These are important questions *because* we may not be confident about the answers, or because there may be as yet no confident public consensus.

But philosophical ethics can also help us to reflect on life even when it is going well. These reflections are important *because* we are confident about the answer and because we have as of now a strong social consensus.

Virtue ethicists are especially poised to lead reflections of this latter kind. Normative virtue ethics is, in spite of some prejudices, action guiding.[70] Furthermore, it is action guiding in the very way most of us need guidance in our actions: not only in tragic moral dilemmas but in the day-to-day humdrum business of living well. Bernard Williams has done as much as anyone to remind moral philosophers that questions of how to live are prior, and deeper, than questions of what is wrong. "Character ethics," rather than mere "quandary ethics" is what is really needed in the

70. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 1–3.

vast majority of circumstances.[71] That is not to say that moral quandaries are unimportant in life or unimportant in theory; quite the contrary, often times the moral quandary is the exceptional case that can provide a cutting counterexample to a nonsensical view. And moral dilemmas like those encountered in great works of fiction (*Othello*, *War and Peace*, *Gilead*) are real, if blessedly rare, occurrences in a normal human life. But for all this for ninety-nine parts of any given day I encounter very few temptations to do wrong; day by day and even hour by hour I encounter many competing or conflicting goods that seem worthwhile but cannot all be pursued. Check email or grade papers? Write more or spend more time with my kids? Pursue a teaching job in state or out of state? Invest in this friendship or spend much-needed time alone?

Virtue ethics is, on my view, a very useful guide to action, in personal life, political life, bioethics,[72] business,[73] and education.[74] It would be an improvement to almost any area of human life if we were aware of our own vices and worked to expunge them, and if we understood the virtues and pursued them. Yet obstacles stand in the way. My dissertation my be understood as an attempt to remove such obstacles and, in their absence, render not only palatable but desirable a pursuit of virtues.

Conclusion

As difficult as it is to consider seriously the project of restoring natural teleology to its proper place and using it as a basis for ethical theory that is tenable and useful, I am optimistic it can be done. Many are on the project — biologists, cosmologists, philosophers of science, mathematicians — but philosophers in the Aristotelian tradition are uniquely situated to do so. That tradition promises the resources with which to construct an ethical system including all three elements of MacIntyre's

71. Edmund Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," *Mind*, 1971, 552–71.

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

73. Ron Beadle, in *Handbook of Virtue Ethics in Business and Management* (Springer, Dordrecht, 2015), 1–9.

74. David Carr and Jan Steutel, *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education* (Routledge, 2005).

schema while rehabilitating a form of natural teleology that is not only tenable in light of modern beliefs, but rationally commends itself in light of all we now know. The case presented in these chapters aim to show how it might be done, and to begin doing it.

Chapter Outline

I shall defend my thesis by way of discussing the three mentioned themes in the recent neo-Aristotelians, especially Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre. The argument will unfold in the following chapters.

1. Introduction
2. Nature – Virtue in Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism
3. Human Nature – Virtues as Necessary for Rational Animals
4. Virtue – Virtue as Excellent Character Traits
5. Wisdom – Virtue as Excellent Practical Reasoning
6. Happiness – Virtue as Realizing our Natural Human Telos
7. Natural Teleology Revisited – Virtue and Nature as Unified
8. Conclusion

Apologia

Virtue, practical reason, and telos are age-old themes. Nevertheless, they are significant themes. Treating them adequately is too much for one dissertation. As Glaucon said to Socrates, "The measure of listening to such discussions is the whole of life."[75] But my hope is that even an unworthy treatment of a worthy topic will attain some value.

75. John Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato* (Hackett, 1997) *Republic* 450b.

Chapter 2

Nature: Virtue in Neo-Aristotelianism Ethical Naturalism

Quotation *"What a wise man knows, therefore, is how to construct a pattern that, given the human situation, is likely to lead to a good life."* (Keyes 1983, 280)

I. Introduction: Grounding Ethics

Methodology

How much evaluative truth can one learn (about virtues and vices, practical wisdom, etc.) by examining human nature, including our rationality and possibly our natural teleology? The neo-Aristotelians base their ethical theory on human nature.[1] This project may seem, on the face of it,

1. In general, I follow Julia Annas in dividing strategies for grounding ethics into roughly three: The first camp bases ethics on religious or metaphysical theories derived from or reflected in religions or social tradition (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes). The second camp grounds ethics on non-natural properties, such as the good, the beautiful, the sublime – (e.g., G. E. Moore, Russ Shafer-Landau, and very differently, Kant). The third camp grounds ethics on theories of some aspect of nature, such as one's sentiments and natural sympathies, or in human reason, or in human contracts, in pleasure and pain, and so on (e.g., a Richard Boyd, Peter Railton, Frank Jackson, or David Hume). Now, one can find virtue theories in each of these three camps. Indeed, some virtue ethical theories are based on religious or metaphysical theories (Christian ethics, Platonic ethics, etc.). Naturalistic neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics tend to ground ethics in human nature, conciously juxtaposing phrases like 'a good human' with 'a good plant' or 'a good deer.'

hopeless. Three reasons make it seem hopeless:

1. **Is-Ought Gap**: The first, and perhaps greatest, worry is the is-ought gap. The "gap" refers to the common notion that one cannot validly leap from descriptive statements such as "celebrities wear ties at the Oscars" to normative statements such as "celebrities ought to wear ties at the Oscars." Likewise, one cannot leap from "human beings wear clothes" to a normative statement like "human beings ought to wear clothes." Even if one the moral facts about good and bad or about virtues and vices could be shown to relate to descriptions something like "human nature", one could not validly derive normative conclusions from descriptive propositions. Even if some general truths about humans could be established on the basis of anthropological or philosophical reflection, it seems that the best neo-Aristotelians could do would be to describe how humans of such-and-such a culture approve of such-and-such a thing, or how people of such-and-such beliefs find worthless such-and-such pursuits, and so on.[2]
2. **No Human Nature**: A second worry is simply that there is no such thing as human nature. On the one hand, absent a platonic universal, 'human nature' appears as an abstract concept by which we gesture at the "mess" of humanity, irrational and variable, from which each of us must create our own nature, positing ourselves, defining our values, and charting our destiny. On the other hand, hypothesizing "human nature" seems more than a bit vague and mystical, like the notion of an essence or Platonic universal underlying all human beings. Bernard Williams summarizes the antiquated worldview that many moderns are suspicious of:

> The idea of a naturalistic ethics was born of a deeply teleological outlook, and its best expression, in many ways, is still to be found in Aristotle's philosophy, a philosophy according to which there is inherent in each natural kind of thing an appropriate way for things of that kind to behave.[3]

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2. A fourth objection from a quite different quarter is the worry that human nature is corrupted by ancestral sin. On this objection, even though human nature exists and even though a good person would be an exemplary human being as such, none of us actual human beings are situated appropriately to identify what is good or to become good. Our moral efforts, our natural inclinations, and even the very intellect by which we engage in moral reflection are co-opted by a deep brokenness of the heart – a depravity of spirit. All our natural inclinations and best efforts to arise above them are doomed from the start, which renders our moral efforts in need of outside assistance if they are to make any progress. This objection is a real one, but I must defer it, for two reasons: (1) Those readers of different theological positions or no theological position at all will not have this worry; (2) I hope to treat the relation of virtue ethics to religion in general in a later work which make this objection its main theme.

3. Cf. Bernard Williams, in *Making Sense of Humanity: And Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 109.

2. **Human Nature is Biology**: A third worry comes from naturalistic philosophers who do suppose there is such thing as "human nature" but they believe it can only be known by examining our biological make up in connection with psychology and anthropology: our "nature" is a complex configuration of our genetics, evolutionary history, physiology and neurophysiology, including perhaps our geographical and ecological setting, our social and anthropological milieu, and so on. The problem is that *this* scientific conception of human nature has nothing obviously to do with *ethics*. Thus, Rosalind Hursthouse: "Ethical naturalism is not to be construed as the attempt to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature."[4] Nevertheless, Hursthouse *does* endorse the project of grounding ethical evaluations in human nature, since evaluations can be made once we know the "characteristics" of a species. She continues: "ethical evaluations are disanalogous to non-ethical ones in various ways. Both depend upon our identifying what is characteristic of the species in question." If this grounding is not *scientific*, then how is a grounding of ethics going to work?

Outline & Thesis

These objections are formidable, but responses can be made. The first worry I shall tackle here. If a response is made to the first worry, this will lay a foundation for effective responses to the second two, which rest on misunderstandings of the neo-Aristotelian project.

In the latter case, what is required is to identify the legitimate limits of philosophical ethics, illuminate them, and show how much we may hope for within those limits.

In short, the is-ought gap (or fact-value gap) can be overcome by discovering natural teleological facts from which we can derive ethical or normative conclusions. As Stephen Brown puts it, "Human beings are a species of social animal for which there is a characteristic way of life. An individual human being may be evaluated as good or bad according to how well that individual realizes the human way of life."[5] To get here, Brown's thesis is simply put: "there is teleology in nature." And he is right.

There is teleology in nature – enough, at least, to ground an ethics of human nature. Not *all* of nature is teleological, of course; I do not wish to defend the notion that everything – including

4. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* especially chapter 10.
5. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, 1.

stars and rocks – "has a purpose", as if the cosmos were an orchestra being played. Rather, at least some natural entities – especially living organisms – have ineliminable, irreducible, normative properties.[6] For (1) some generic statements about natural kinds are true and (2) properties are both descriptive and fundamentally normative or teleological (for example, "penguins are birds", or "eyes are adapted for seeing"). If these premises are true, then nature is normative, and we can know as much with the same ease by which we know that penguins are birds. If we can infer some normative conclusions ethical from some normative natural facts, then a case needs to be made for that general point.

The facts of *the way we are* supply excellent (indeed, very often overriding) reason for *the way we ought to be*. And I shall argue that some evaluative judgments – such as that 'virtues are beneficial for humans' and that 'wisdom is a virtue' – true and can be known to be true by examining human nature. We are practical, rational animals.

To make this case, first, I shall examine our three key neo-Aristotelian for their accounts of 'natural normativity', which will set up the argument in a later chapter that ethics can be grounded in the facts of human nature.

Secondly, I shall offer a more rigorous argument for the fundamental premise that we can infer normative conclusions from natural facts since some natural facts are brutely normative facts.

Thirdly, I shall respond to objections.

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6. Compare with Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 117. The existence of life "give[2] rise to beings of the kind that have a good—-beings for which things can be good or bad."

II. Neo-Aristotelians on Natural Normativity

Foot on Natural Normativity

Let's begin with Philippa Foot. Foot argues that virtues are instances of 'natural goodness.'[7] Foot is aware that her offering is "crude" in that it is likely to offend the ears of some listeners. Her defense is the thought (drawn from Wittgenstein) that crude beginnings are often a necessary first step on the way something refined.

She calls her inquiry a "fresh start." By this she means to do without several shaky assumptions of Hume and Moore. For example, Moore assumed that "good" was the ultimate predicate under review in ethics; but this is false. Statements like "pleasure is good" are not good paradigms for philosophical reflection. Foot argues that we should instead expand our scope and pay strict attention to our status as natural entities. Evaluation of human creatures, she argues, follows the same logical pattern as evaluation of plants and animals. In such evaluations, good is good *for*. To see why, contrast 'good' with other predicates like 'red' or 'beautiful.' In a statement such as 'the house is beautiful', the predicate 'beautiful' doesn't need a complement. The house is *beautiful* – full stop. But 'good' (like 'useful') has a different logical function. 'The house is useful' does need a complement – the house is useful *for a mom of six, or useful for an artist,* or what have you. Similarly, 'good' always means *good for someone* or *for something.* 'Good' always needs a complement. If this crude beginning is anywhere near to correct, we can distance ourselves from Moore's starting point and build on another starting point: the life-form of human beings.

Humans are certainly a unique *kind* of living being with a unique life-form. For example, morality is (correctly) thought to be action-guiding. Hume and Moore (correctly) argue that moral principles cannot be merely descriptive; they must motivate us to act or refrain from acting. Likewise, moral theories must explain in retrospect *why* we acted or refrained from acting, and help us to evaluate actions or abstentions, in ourselves and others. But the action-guiding feature of morality

7. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

is not best captured by positing that morality is inextricably tied to conative psychological states. Rather, the action-guiding facts in the case of natural goodness are facts humans, facts about objects in the world, and facts about our relation to those objects.

Virtue ethicists like Philippa Foot, and Peter Geach before her, express their thesis in statements like "virtues are necessary for human beings."[8] The kind of necessity invoked here is not a sui generis *ethical necessity* (such as moral obligation) but a particular instantiation of a familiar kind of necessity. That is, virtues for humans are like stings for bees, swiftness for deer, solidarity for wolves; there is a fundamental parity between natural goodness in nonhumans and humans. They are necessary for us *qua human beings*. The parity between necessity for natural goodness in human beings and the same need for natural goodness in deer and wolves arise from a parity between the structures of all living things as such.

In this Foot agrees with Thompson's groundbreaking *Representation of Life*. There, he argues that the concept of "life" is not, as it may seem to some, a property of some beings where *being* is the fundamental concept; rather "life" is a fundamental concept.[9] Thompson reviews and refutes a variety of biological definitions of life such as reproduction, growth, metabolisis, etc., for these properties depend on a prior understanding of life. He says, "Vital description of individual organisms is itself the primitive expression of a conception of things in terms of 'life-form' or 'species', and if we want to understand these categories in philosophy we must bring them back to that form of description."[10] When we observe and examine living things we rightly employ some shared categories and our conclusions rightly share a logical structure. What is that common structure? Every individual living being is a member of a species or life-form. And different life-forms are subject to different normative appraisals.

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Consider Michael Thompson's philosophy of action or "practical philosophy".[@thompson2008
the irreducibly teleological or end-directed nature of individual and group human activities
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8. Geach, *The Virtues*.
9. Thompson, "The Representation of Life."
10. Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Harvard University Press, 2008), 57.

seems correct.

These appraisals, Foot continues, make available talk about "goodness and badness, and therefore about evaluation in its most general form; but we might equally have been thinking in terms of, say, strength and weakness or health and disease, or again about an individual plant or animal being or not being as it should be, or ought to be, in this respect or that. Let us call the conceptual patterns found there, patterns of natural normativity."[11]

I shall return to and defend the application of this "special logic" below. For now, it is enough to see in outline how Foot sees 'natural goodness' arising from the normative facts about the form of living things. I shall also explain she applies this to living *human* beings in a later chapter.

McDowell on Natural Normativity

McDowell's view contrasts sharply with Foot. The contrast, I shall argue, arises from a differing conception of the natural world and its relation to human rationality and culture.

His project in metaphysics as well as ethics is to dissolve worries about the mind's relation to the world, specifically those worries that arise from false dualisms. His writings on mind, value, and reality have been formed by two main influences: the "Socratic tradition" and Wittgenstein.[12] He follows the later Wittgenstein in doing "therapeutic" philosophy.[13] Philosophy 'leaves everything as it is'[14]. That is, McDowell believes many philosophical puzzles arise not from puzzling reality but from errors in *our own thinking*, so we need "therapy": bad ideas need to be *exorcized*.

Before detailing McDowell's ethical theory below, I think it helpful to say something about this theory of nature. His famous *Mind and World* begins with the observation that modern philosophers have labored under certain anxieties.[15] Particularly, in philosophy, we may wonder whether

11. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.
12. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* preface.
13. Cynthia Macdonald and Graham Macdonald, *McDowell and His Critics* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008).
14. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations.** Section 124
15. McDowell, *Mind and World*.

rational consciousness has any connection with nature at all — whether the mind is hooked in to the word. As Hilary Putnam says, "A disastrous idea … has haunted Western philosophy since the seventeenth century… that perception involves an interface between the mind and the 'external' objects we perceive."[16] Since Descartes, this philosophical problem has given rise to an anxiety that haunts modern philosophers: does the mind have any contact with the world such that the world impinges on the mind in its forming and combining of concepts? If not, then not only philosophy but the natural sciences become suspect. If so, then how are we to characterize this contact? The Myth of the Given says that the mind does have contact with the world through brute experiences—the world operating on the human sensibility. Quine and other empiricists posit experience as a sort of brute empirical given, but so conceived it cannot do the trick. The work experience has to do is conceptual work, that is, justificatory work. Experiences are either conceptually laden or they are non-conceptual, and Quine admits they are non-conceptual. How can a non-conceptual experience form the basis of a conceptual chain, or warrant a conceptual judgment? McDowell points out, "These supposed stopping points [empirical bits] cannot intelligibly serve as a subject's reasons for her judgments." Wilfred Sellars, for one, argues that they cannot. But if they cannot, then philosophy and natural science both come under aspersion, since (as Davidson is represented to believe) the human mind must then be 'spinning in a void.' Thus estranged from nature, the rational agent must settle for the consistency of its beliefs with its other beliefs, that is, for certain logical relations of concepts and judgments with other concepts and judgments. It cannot hope to ground any one of these concepts or judgments in the way the world actually is—no state of affairs not-P could possibly serve as a 'tribunal' against my belief that P. McDowell himself summarizes the intolerable 'oscillation' between these two poles: "I traced the oscillation between coherentism and the Myth of the Given to an ability to see how anything natural, as operations of sensibility would have to be, could be shaped by conceptual capacities conceived as sui generis."[17] Concept

16. Hilary Putnam, "Sense, Nonsense, and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1994, 465.

17. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 297.

formation, upon which our purportedly objective scientific theories and our philosophical systems cannot get off the ground in such a way that it remains rooted and grounded in the world as it is. Accepting the former horn leads to coherentism with no foundation; accepting the latter horn leads to an unjustified empirical foundation that, upon examination, also leads to a kind of coherentism with no foundation. Caught in this vicious dilemma, the modern mind feels a sinking anxiety that perhaps our knowledge is merely coherentist after all. This is the primary problem. The primary solution McDowell proposes is that our receptivity to the world inherently involves conceptual capacities. In *Mind and World* and elsewhere, McDowell appeals not only to Kantian notions of our "spontaneous conceptual capacity" but also to Aristotle. The Greeks had a world-view within which anxiety-inducing dualisms did not arise; so perhaps some of their conceptions can help us for whom such dualisms arise as a matter of course in many philosophical contexts.

A quotation from express his relation to Foot:

> Philippa Foot has long urged the attractions of ethical naturalism. I applaud the negative part of her point, which is to reject various sorts of subjectivism and supernaturalist rationalism. But I doubt whether we can understand a positive naturalism in the right way without first rectifying a constriction that the concept of nature is liable to undergo in our thinking. Without such preliminaries, what we make of ethical naturalism will not be the radical and satisfying alternative to Mrs Foot's targets that naturalism can be. Mrs Foot's writings do not pay much attention to the concept of nature in its own right, and this leaves a risk that her naturalism may seem to belong to this less satisfying variety. I hope an attempt to explain this will be an appropriate token of friendship and admiration.[18]

As we have seen, Foot finds a kind of normativity in the natural, biological facts themselves. For McDowell, normative facts are not "given". An evaluative judgment cannot be lifted, without intermediary, from a factual judgment. But then again, for McDowell not even *facts* are given. Not even propositions intended to describe natural facts (such as that penguins are birds and the sun is a star) can be lifted free from mediation by human consciousness. In making factual judgments such as that the penguin is black, McDowell argues that *factual judgments themselves* involve human

18. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 167.

consciousness. Unless consciousness has 'spontaneous' activity already active in its receptivity to empirical experience, there is no empirical experience of things *as* being this way rather than that.[19]

To see McDowell's view, we ought to step back and look at the central essay in which he presents his view as a middle way between projectivist subjectivism and Footian objectivism. "Values and Secondary Qualities" argues that values are like colors and unlike shapes.[20] That is, values are qualities in the world (not just in our heads) but they are not Lockean "primary qualities." They are Lockean secondary qualities.

How are we to make sense of this claim?

McDowell rejects both radical skepticism and transcendental idealism and labors toward an alternative that is, in some respects realist but in other respects idealist.

In ethics, he disagrees with Foot, but he also disagrees with the opposite extreme of Foot's view, as represented by those (such as J.L. Mackie, Alan Gibbard, and Simon Blackburn) who believe that normativity is "projected" by philosophers and scientists onto the natural facts. He is not a realist; he is an "anti-anti-realist". McDowell is always fighting on two fronts, attacking a position without thereby supporting its apparent opposite. (Similarly, in *Mind and World* he attempts to dissolve the "vacillation" between naive empirical realism and "Rampont Platonism".)

Here, McDowell sides with Mackie in affirming that moral values are not primary qualities of the world but sides *against* Mackie (and Blackburn) in denying the apparently opposite notion that values are *nothing but* subjective.

Mackie's error theory gets right the common sense view that "ordinary evaluative thought [is] a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world."[21] Ironically, the view that moral facts are real,

19. Cf. McDowell, *Mind and World* for McDowell's most thorough statement of this way of solving the anxiety-inducing mind-body problem.

20. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo, eds., "Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology" (Blackwell, 2007), 137–145. I shall cite this anthology. The essay is also printed in McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, chapter 7.

21. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo, eds., *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology* (Blackwell, 2007), 137.

objective facts has been both praised as "common sense" and alternately blamed as "platonism."[22] But Mackie presents as exhaustive disjuncts *either* moral realism *or* moral anti-realism. Mackie, of course, thinks we must deny the appearances, must contradict common sense, and so must embrace error theory. But McDowell denies Mackie's disjunction.

The naive realist view that moral values are response-independent McDowell judges "impossible – at least on reflection – to take seriously…"[23] The reason McDowell can't take naive realism seriously is that he finds one sort of internalism absurd. He points to a "worry about how something that is brutely *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility."[24] In this McDowell agrees with Mackie: the central doctrine of European moral philosophy is a mistake; it is wrong to think that some things *merit* certain responses by virtue of what they are and what we are. This doctrine certainly runs afoul of the modern doctrine that nature is a manifold of pure fact without any normativity 'built in', and without any internal relation to evaluators like ourselves; but, as I shall argue, the modern doctrine is the mistake.

Mackie thinks that conceiving of colors as primary qualities is a "common sense" notion that is false but at least *coherent*; McDowell questions this. If it were true that colors were qualities adequately conceived apart from their essentially phenomenal subjective aspects, then suddenly the concept of red becomes opaque. If we exclude the phenomenal aspect of redness and attempt to define 'red', we are at a loss. So it seems that redness is as a primary quality is not "common sense" and not even coherent.

Redness, rather, is an essentially phenomenal concept; its subjectivity is so to speak 'built in.' That is not to say all essentially phenomenal concepts are nonveridical; just that they are not

22. Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 155: "It might be thought ordinary conceptions of rationality Platonistic or intuitionistic. On the Platonistic Picture coma among the facts of the world are facts of what is rational and what is not. A person of normal mental powers can discern these facts. Judgments of nationality are thus straightforward apprehensions of fact, not through sense perception through a mental faculty analogous to sense perception…".

23. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, *Foundations of Ethics*, 2007, 137.

24. Ibid., 143.

'thoroughly objective.'[25]

Rather than embrace anti-realism, McDowell argues against the "projectivism" of Mackie (and Blackburn, and others). Why not treat redness and other secondary qualities as purely "projective"? Secondary qualities are "subjective" in that they cannot be adequately conceived "except in terms of certain subjective states"[26] but not in that they are therefore illusory. A secondary quality is not "a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it."[27]

McDowell defends the Lockean distinction against a different sort of schema that would categorize "shape and color" on one side (as objects, in the world, etc.) and "my experiences of shape and my experiences of color" on another side (as taking place in the subject, as phenomenal, experiential, etc.). Certainly there is a phenomenological bit to seeing shape just as there is of seeing color; but shape unlike color can be conceived without reference to the phenomenological bits.

McDowell thinks that Mackie's denial of realism is the denial that moral properties are *primary qualities*. Rather, the objective aspect to values that are *just there* must be a dispositional property, while the evaluable aspect is something we as perceivers or moral evaluators bring to the world. Value is not a Lockean primary quality of reality; value is not utterly unreal. The *via media* is that value is a secondary quality.

In short, McDowell's view of values is a "sensibility theory". Sensibility theories teach that moral properties are like colors. He says a secondary property ascription is true "in virtue of the object's disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance."[28] Experience of secondary qualities is a (sense) perceptual experience. This a Lockean doctrine. Redness is not *merely* a microscopic texture property (say, the texture that scatters all light waves except red ones) because microscopic textures don't *look red* and things that *look red* appear so to observers with no knowledge of such textures.

25. Ibid., 138, quoting Mackie.
26. Ibid., 139.
27. Ibid., 139.
28. Ibid., 138.

Colors are response-dependent, while other properties (say, 'squareness') are response-independent. Color-properties must be defined partly by their "objective" or response-independent aspects and partly phenomenologically. Shape-properties, by contrast, can be defined by their objective or mind-independent aspects. It makes no sense to speak of what *redness is* apart from perceptions of red *in perceivers*. Similarly, it makes no sense to speak of "dangerousness" apart from a subject who is potentially vulnerable. So, perhaps, it also makes no sense to speak of "rightness" apart from a subject who potentially judges the value of a thing.

Yet by the same token right and wrong are not *purely* invented. The property of "being such as to look red" may or may not be *have ever been perceived as red* by any observer (if, for example, the appropriate conditions have never obtained). So a Lockean secondary quality may be response-independent in some sense, but it is not *redness as such*. It is the dispositional property that is disposed to present us with a appearance of a particular phenomenal character. So values (like colors) are dispositional properties.

The theory of danger also helps McDowell in his conclusion deny that his view is a variant of "projectivism." The "epistemology of danger" that arises from McDowell's "theory of danger"[29] helps explain moral epistemology. There is *something* about red things *themselves* that makes them give us redness experiences; there is something about the dangerous animal itself that gives us fear experiences. That something is not *the form of red* or *the form of danger*, but it is also not *nothing*.

The "theory of danger" is intended to capture this "something" with the important notion of *merit*. Red objects *just appear as red* to us under the proper circumstances. They *just do* dispose us to have red experiences. But dangerous objects *merit* appearing fearful and dangerous. They *merit* that we have a fear experience.

Despite their differences, McDowell shares with Mackie and Blackburn a radically reductive, disenchanted, Laplacian picture[30] of material nature as a manifold of bald descriptive facts. There

29. Ibid., 142–3.

30. Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 84.

is a deeply-held assumption shared by McDowell and his interlocutors that minds are divorced from and must either interface with or remain utterly divided from the world. Treating values as secondary qualities captures the objective bit about color while also capturing the recalcitrant subjective bit. This picture of nature forces McDowell to hastily reject all forms of realism. However, if there is a way to resolve this dispute with Foot (where some normative facts are primary qualities), this resolution can guide the would-be realist in sculpting a more plausible account.

As I suggested above, McDowell's goal is not to *defend* an Aristotelian sort of realism in the place of subjectivism but (like Wittgenstein) to attack subjectivism and its opposite. His goal is, dissolving the philosophical worry, then to cease talking.

Some readers of McDowell are liable to become frustrated when they realize he is not offering a positive alternative to dualism of realism and anti-realism. Such frustration is not, by itself, a criticism; McDowell has simply chosen to refrain from advocating a positive metaphysical alternative to those views he takes to be unacceptable, and we cannot deny him his right to do so.

However, a criticism is in the offing: it would be a contradiction *in his own terms* if McDowell denied (several varieties) of dualism while advocating another kind of dualism. And that is a criticism that has been urged.[31] While *explicitly* rejecting dualism, McDowell can be read as positing a dualism of his own: the dualism between "primary" nature and "second nature".

Primary nature is the bald, disenchanted world of mindless matter and energy. Second nature is the partially re-enchanted human world of rationality, value, intentionality, social life, culture, and education. This criticism cuts more deeply since, if it can be made to stick, it accuses McDowell of failing to hit the bullseye on the target he explicitly wishes to hit.

I shall return to this point in a later chapter.

31. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism"; Christopher Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism: Requirements for a Successful Theory," *Metaphilosophy* 39, no. 2 (2008): 220–50.

MacIntyre: Social Teleology

Alasdair MacIntyre's position on natural normativity is closer to McDowell's in most ways. That said, has shifted over the decades.

I would like to mention both his earlier view and later view. His earlier view — in *After Virtue* — is closer to that of McDowell than that of Foot. There, he emphasizes "second nature" far more than primary nature. That is, he finds a ground of normativity not in our life-form but in us: in our social identities, our culture, our rationality. For example, he says his account of virtue "happily not Aristotelian" for "although this account of the virtues is teleological, it does not require any allegiance to Aristotle's metaphysical biology."[32] The "metaphysical biology" MacIntyre refers to here is that metaphysically realist view that formal and final causes inhere (and in fact constitute) biological species.[33]

That said, MacIntyre does most emphatically argue for a teleological form of ethics based on the normativity of *human* nature. He grounds teleology not in non-human nature but in human nature, specifically our practical, social nature. He calls this notion "social teleology." The notion of social teleology builds on the apparently obvious truth that *human society is teleological.* That is, we do not just act randomly. We do not only act according to the promptings of instinct (that too). Rather, we act *on reasons,* both individually and in groups. We act to achieve goals. Whether we arise from bed *in order to* give a talk, or drive to work *in order to* do a good job, or pursue a career *for*

32. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 197.

33. These causes may be understood by metaphysical realists as intelligible forms or universals which the intellect, by virtue of its intelligible powers, can be abstracted. As John Haldane says: content-determining principles of perception are one and the same as the character-determining principles of the objects of perception — the identity of act and object." Intellection, in turn, is a distinctly human (rational) activity. While animals can not only sense but *perceive*, humans have the capacity of intellection, the power of abstracting the forms themselves from percepts. An animal can sense an informed, organized object; an animal can be affected by the object. But the human animal can *acquire information* from the organized object. The ability to perceive something *as*, or even to perceive something big and brown with a smudge on its nose, does not imply the ability to perceive that thing as a cat. Cf. John Haldane, "On Coming Home to (Metaphysical) Realism," *Philosophy* 71, no. 276 (1996): 287–96

satisfaction and a profitable retirement, we are directing ourselves toward ends. In groups, too, we pursue shared goals, deliberate about *what is to be done*: Congress aims to pass just and beneficial laws. The school board aims to increase enrollment and balance the budget. Expanding our focus from individual actions or projects, we can put the point more strongly: all of human life is a practice. It can be brought under the concept of either one, unified, whole practice or pluralistic set of practices. Even when Iris Murdoch assumed[34] that human life has "no external point or τελος", she argues that it has a point *from within.* It is impossible, in other words, to bring our own human life under the concept of an *event.* Human life must be brought under the concept of a practice, which is teleological and essentially so.This insight has important implications for ethics, as well as other fields: action theory, sociology, anthropology, philosophy of mind, and so on.[35] But the point here is that, since we act in groups and for reasons, teleology is a real feature of our social nature. They cannot be understood without teleology. So if the critic of natural normativity rejects teleological realism (as did the early MacIntyre), it is enough if she accepts social teleology.

MacIntyre's later view is a bit more ambitious. While he does not go in for Foot's putative realism about "metaphysical biology", he does allow that the facts of our biological nature provide limits on what actions are ethical and what qualities count as virtues.

The project of *Dependent Rational Animals* is to insist that even if we are animals of a particular and unusual sort human beings are animals. This basic truth has significant implications. As animals, our dependence and vulnerability are as morally significant as our independence, autonomy, or self-sufficiency. Virtues of independence are, in the writings of Aristotle and others, related to our powers of rational reflection; we can rise above our animal nature, command, direct, and manage our bodies, our farms, our cities, and so on. But since we are *both* animals and *rational*, there are virtues of both autonomy *and* dependence. The book also contends that certain social arrangements are conducive to the transmission and sustenance of both kinds of virtue.

34. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts*.
35. Cf. Thompson, *Life and Action*.

Let's consider a key quotation on each of these themes. Regarding the notion that we are unusual animals, MacIntyre argues at length that the human differentia (be it language, reason, practical reason, self-consciousness, or what have you) does not eradicate the commonalities between us and other animals. He says:

> I shall contend that although our differences from all other species are certainly of crucial importance, it is also important that both initially in our earliest childhood activities and to some extent thereafter we comport ourselves towards the world in much the same way as other intelligent animals. Indeed our ability to transcend those limitations depends in part upon certain of those animal characteristics among them the nature of our identity.[36]

The point, I take it, is that rational animals is *what we are*. If we cannot escape our identity as animals who are (potentially) practically rational, then we cannot escape our need for certain virtues. Furthermore, some activities will militate against our growing up achieve full practical rationality; these are vices.

What *kind* of animal are we? We are by nature practical reasoners. As I argued above, social teleology is an essential element of practical reasoning. We can imagine any scenario of humans gathering and doing what comes naturally, and it will involve group deliberation about what to do: High school students debating about where to sit at lunch; couples arguing over the budget; political leaders proposing new laws; philosophy department meetings making hiring and admissions decisions. It is impossible (for fully functioning adults) to live life even for a full day without engaging in such reasoning.

A second point MacIntyre makes is that human life is not one continuous phase of adulthood; it begins with youth and ends with old age. So MacIntyre breaks important new ground in explaining the relation between virtues of independence and "virtues of acknowledged dependence." He argues that the vulnerability, fragility, and affliction characteristic especially of early childhood and old age are highly morally significant. As he says:

36. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 8.

> Virtues of independent rational agency need for their adequate exercise to be accompanied by what I shall call the virtues of acknowledge dependence and that a failure to understand this is apt to secure some features of rational agency. Moreover both sets of virtues are needed in order to actualize the distinctive potentialities that are specific to the human rational animal. Identifying how and why they are needed is a prerequisite for understanding their central place in the kind of human life through which human flourishing can be achieved.[37]

Many others in the Aristotelian tradition have noticed the significance that we have the potential to be rational, and the potential to be independent reasoners. Fewer, until recently, have noticed the significance of dependence. But the virtues of acknowledge dependence are not identical to the virtues (such as the empathy or patience) *of a care-giver*. Rather, they are virtues that arise in *relation* between the dependent and the care-giver.[38] Dependence is, after all, as close to any of use as sickness, injury, or misfortune. The dependent needs certain virtues (gratitude is perhaps a good example) that the care-giver does not need, or needs differently. Independent rationality is rather the exception than the rule. So it is simply wrong-headed to magnify the virtues of independence out of proportion of those that are needed, in individuals and in a community, at the beginning and end of life, and also any disabling portion of life.

The third point pertains to the social arrangements needed to inculcate and consistently exercise such virtues. To achieve the communal goal of producing independent reasoners requires a systemic web of virtues across the entire communal association. MacIntyre argues that "neither the modern state nor the modern family can supply that kind of political and social association that is needed."[39] Not only individual human beings, but entire communities, institutions, and nations need virtues to keep their integrity and to produce the next generation of independent, virtuous, rational animals.

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37. Ibid., 8.

38. There is an obvious – and I think exciting – connection here with some feminist ethics and with the ethics of care, and MacIntyre acknowledges his debt. Cf Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

39. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 9.

We can see how this renewed attention to our animal nature has implications for the normativity of nature. Certain social arrangements (features of "second nature") are liable to turn out to be conducive to the health and flourishing of creatures like us.

III. Discussion: Natural Normativity

What are we to make of the prospects for basing one's ethical theory on natural facts? Must one base the theory on the broadest class of natural facts – facts about biological life forms – or only on facts of human nature, if at all? Who has the upper hand between these three?

My view is that the kind of naturalism upon which neo-Aristotelian virtue concepts (such as will be explored in a later chapter) is best supplied by a synthesis of Foot's and McDowell's views. Before I defend the synthesis, however, I need to defend Foot's view against the McDowellian worry that "given" natural facts can be normative and teleological.

My thesis is that some natural facts are normative; some normative truths are brute normative truths. Hence, the is-ought gap does not arise. The neo-Aristotelian theorist need not argue directly from statements about what human beings *do* to conclusions about what human beings *ought to do*, but from statements about what *human beings are in a normative sense* to conclusions about *ought to do*.

To prove this conclusion I shall adopt a premise that is both uncontroversially true and – as it seems to me – that pretty clearly entails the conclusion. It is no secret in philosophy that to prove one's thesis one must begin by assuming a premise which necessarily entails one's conclusion. *Why should I grant your first premise?* the reader might ask. But it is not necessarily viciously circular. For any case intended to establish the propposition that P must postulate some premise Q as a hypothesis. Even if one tries to establish that Q, one will do so by assuming P, and the problem reiterates. If nothing can be postulated, nothing can be proven. The only thing for it is to adopt postulates that all parties can (hopefully) accept.

My postulate builds on a little utilized linguistic and conceptual feature of human thought

that, I suggest, cuts up nature at the joints. Michael Thompson is one of the first to work out "the special logic of judgments we make about living things, and then to indicate its application to ethics." That 'special logic' is variously called "Aristotelian categoricals"[40], "natural-historical judgements"[41] "norms"[42] "bare plurals"[43]. I prefer the shorter and less adorned term 'generic'.

My postulate is this: **some generics about human beings are true.**[44] What is a generic? Andrew Bailey's recent paper arguing for animalism defines the thesis "we are animals" as a generic. His summary is this:

> What are generics? A fine question, but a difficult one. Start with this sentence: [all ducks lay eggs.] This first sentence is, let us suppose, true. So far so good. But is it equivalent to 'for every x, if x is a [duck], x [lays eggs]? 'ducks lay eggs' may be true even if not all ducks lay eggs, 'mosquitos carry dengue fever' may be true even if only a very few mosquitos carry that virus, and so on). We are now positioned to observe one curious property of generics: they admit of exceptions.[45]

Generics are statements of the form "S is F" or "S has or does F" where S is not an individual but a class. Generics refer not to all members of a category distributively nor about merely *some* but to the category itself; they are statements about natural kinds. As Leslie says:

40. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

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

42. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 14–15. Anscombe is not very optimistic about the project Thompson, Foot, and I are undertaking.

43. Greg N Carlson, "A Unified Analysis of the English Bare Plural," *Linguistics and Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (1977): 413–57.

44. Cf. ibid., . Carlson's essay is an early attempt to account for a variety of linguistic forms under one concept of reference to kinds; Francis Jeffry Pelletier and Greg N Carlson, *The Generic Book* (University of Chicago Press, 1995); Sarah-Jane Leslie, "Generics: Cognition and Acquisition," *Philosophical Review* 117, no. 1 (2008): 1–47; Andrew M Bailey, "Animalism," *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 12 (2015): 867–83 for a discussion of a specific generic: "we are animals" in metaphysics and philosophical anthropology; cimpian2010generic for an experiment in cognitive psychology that seeks to quantify the prevalence levels at which subjects tend to agree to generics, i.e., how many birds have to lay eggs before we agree to the assertion that "birds lay eggs"? Manfred Krifka, "Bare NPs: Kind-Referring, Indefinites, Both, or Neither?" in *Semantics and Linguistic Theory*, vol. 13, 2003, 180–203; Ariel Cohen, "On the Generic Use of Indefinite Singulars," *Journal of Semantics* 18, no. 3 (2001): 183–209.

45. Bailey, "Animalism," 869.

> It is widely accepted that [definite] generics are singular statements which predicate properties directly of kinds. For example, "tigers are extinct" predicates the property of being extinct directly of the kind Panthera tigris, and would be true just in case Panthera tigris had the property of being extinct (Krifka et al. 1995).

They are not true universals that can be translated rigorously as "for any x, if x is an S, then S is F" nor are they mere existentials that can be translated as "for some x, if x is S, then S is F."

As Bailey notes, an exception to a universal judgment proves the judgment false. If a geometrician were to discover an exception to the proposition "All squares have four right angles", then the statement would be simply false. By contrast, exceptions do not disprove generics. But if a biologist discovers an exception to the proposition "All reptiles lay eggs", then either the statement is false or she has discovered a new species of reptile that does not lay eggs. Confining ourselves to particular judgments like "Some reptiles lay eggs" would be radically unambitious science.

Consider the statement "all wolves hunt in packs." Logically, the proposition expressed in this statement is neither strictly universal nor strictly particular. It is not a strictly true universal judgment (for some wolves hunt alone, and some don't hunt at all). Furthermore, it is true but trivial that *some wolves hunt in packs*. The logical form of "all S's ϕ" does not predicate ϕ-ing to all members of the category S without exception, nor does it simply assert that some S's ϕ, which is true but uninteresting. The statement that "wolves hunt in packs" is only interesting if it is an item of conceptual knowledge about wolves as a *kind*. Particular or existential statements like the latter are true but uninteresting. A generic is interesting because it is, or we treat it as, a truth about forms, or species. The subject of the statement is not all S's nor merely some S's, but the "infama species."[46]

A few examples:

1. Penguins are birds.
2. Penguins feathers are countershaded (black on top, white on bottom) to help helps them hide from predators.
3. Penguins can swim up to 4 miles per hour.
4. Reptiles lay eggs.

46. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 222, quoting Thompson.

5. Eyes are for seeing.
6. Curious people like to travel.
7. Corn farmers produce edible crops.

Different kinds of generics

How are generics acquired?

Generic truths are acquired via familiar means of empirical observation, rational reflection, and discussion. So for example, I observe that the penguins appear to be birds (they have beaks, feathers, lay eggs, emit squawks, etc.). I reflect that most – if not all birds – have many of these macro features. I consult my encyclopedias, biology or zoology textbooks, or friends who are zoologists, and ask them whether penguins indeed are birds. They all confirm the categorization. From observations and reflections such as these, penguins earned an entry in the annals of scientific knowledge. The biological community gives them a scientific name ('spheniscifor mes'), a more or less speculative evolutionary history is written, and research provides an increasingly detailed descriptions of their characteristics, genetics, environments, diet, predators, and so on. The scientific conclusion, upon initial observation, bolstered by reflection, is the statement that: penguins are birds.

Are they all true?

Although there certainly remain interesting and important details of generics to be worked out, to deny that generics are true and a significant bulk of our conceptual knowledge renders one unable to say much at all.

Suppose for *reductio* that no generic statements are true. Then eyes are not for seeing, penguins' countershading does not help them avoid predators, and we must deny that normal penguins can swim up to 4 miles per hour. Such denials are, I think, absurdities.[47]

47. That is not to say that the denial is not worth considering. It might well be true. My point in calling the denial 'absurd' is to say that if it is true, an absurdity is true. If it is true, then the truth is absurd. And reality itself might well be absurd. I don't think it is, but there have been

Much of our indispensable knowledge is generics

Much of our conceptual knowledge consists in generics.[48] Generics are not, strictly speaking, universal statements (since they admit of exceptions without falsification). They are not merely statistical regularities: suppose it is true that California condors can fly for hours without resting.[49] Nevertheless, in 1987 there were only 27 known living condors; one could easily imagine a scenario in which every single remaining member of an endangered species are injured, old, or diseased and so none of them exemplify this attribute. It would be strictly true of the individuals of the species that *none* can fly for hours; nevertheless it would still true conceptually that "condors" can fly for hours.

2. They are normative

Such judgments "admit of combination into teleological judgments" such as *penguins are countershaded in order to avoid predators from above and below.* Thompson insists that judgments about natural teleology are made true from the form of life under question, not from "hypotheses about the past" (and Toner adds "whether about creation or natural selection").[50] Since an individual penguin may fail to be countershaded in the way that expresses its form, it would be defective. This defect is not a judgment made by scientists and "imposed" as it were, from the outside, on the penguin; but a normative fact about the penguin. "Wolves hunt in packs; a 'free-rider' wolf that doesn't join in the hunt fails to act well and is thereby defective."[51]

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many philosophers who have thought so, and such thoughts cannot be justly dismissed without consideration. The absurdist (let us call her) who thinks all such scientific statements are systematically false would cheerfully deny that "penguins are birds", that "eyes are for seeing" and that "humans are mammals." She would renounce the bizarre belief that the earth orbits the sun or the unconscionable faith that earthquakes are caused by tectonic plate shifts. She is free to deny my thesis.

48. Sandeep Prasada et al., "Conceptual Distinctions Amongst Generics," *Cognition* 126, no. 3 (2013): 405–22.

49. Jeffrey P. Cohn, "Saving the California Condor," *BioScience* 49, no. 11 (1999): 864–68.

50. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 223. Cf. (Thompson 1995, 293).

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

The notion that **generics are fundamentally normative** needs some arguing. Examples: "a penguin that cannot swim up to 4 miles per hour is either immature, injured, or defective"; "a lone wolf is not a normal wolf"; "eyes that do not see are either not fully developed, or injured, or ill. Since we know that"eyes are for seeing" we know that eyeballs that cannot see are *defective*.

A few examples: 1. Penguins are birds. (There are no exceptions.) 2. Penguins feathers are countershaded (black on top, white on bottom) to help helps them hide from predators. (Possible exceptions in defective penguins.) 3. Penguins can swim up to 4 miles per hour. (Exceptions include children, infirm, elderly, etc.) 4. Reptiles lay eggs (Exceptions include male reptiles.) 5. Eyes are for seeing. (Exceptions include light-sensitive patches that might be classified as "eyes", and defective eyes.) 6. Curious people like to travel. 7. Corn farmers produce edible crops. (Exceptions include bad farmers, good farmers with bad luck or laboring with bad weather, etc.)

A critic who wants to affirm that some generics are true must, I believe, affirm that some true generics are normative. We cannot say that *all* generics are not normative without simply saying all generics are false. But neither can we rationally say that all generics are false. For generics constitute an astonishingly high percentage of our conceptual knowledge. No sooner have I been told that penguins are birds than I am told "All penguins are countershaded for camouflage – that is, they have black backs and wings with white fronts." Talk of being shaded *for camouflage* is, of course, normative talk. Such talk is, more specifically, teleological talk.

I see two paths forward: denial and acceptance. The first path would be to deny that generics capture the truth about nature and attempt to explain their ubiquity in another way, or to deny that statements about human nature are analogous to generic statements about plants and animals.[52]

52. See Ernst Mayr, "The Idea of Teleology," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 1 (1992): pp. 117–35 for an attempt to disambiguate the term "teleology"; see Frank Jackson, "From Metaphysics to Ethics," 1998 for an attempt to render reduction of normative to non-normative facts at least conceivable; see Ruth Garrett Millikan, "In Defense of Proper Functions," *Philosophy of Science*, 1989, 288–302 for an attempt to reduce the kind of teleological functions we seem to "read off" natural entities to an empirical history; and see James Barham, *PhD Dissertation: Teleological Realism in Biology* (Web; University of Notre Dame, 2011) for a counterargument to Millikan.

For instance, John McDowell defends a view that humans partake in morality (and rationality) by their "second nature" rather than primary, bald nature. Alternatively, one could attempt to reduce natural normativity to some other, broader, non-normative category. But McDowell is also far more comfortable than I am in denying that natural facts such as "penguins are birds" are "given" truths of nature available to the human mind without an idealist interpolation.

The second would be to accept that much of our conceptual and scientific knowledge of nature takes the form of generic knowledge: knowledge about kinds, categories, properties, and patterns that are neither universal nor merely statistical regularities. Some take this path. For instance, he small but intrepid group of philosophers currently carrying this banner are *moral naturalists* of the neo-Aristotelian variety, like Peter Geach[53] and Foot[54], and.[55] Their work is so momentous because their ethical conclusions demand the maintenance of metaphysical premises, or at any rate because their metaphysical doctrines virtually emit ethical significance.

The reader who is following the argument thus far and sees where it is heading may have more or less strenuous objections. In order to do some justice to these readers, I shall be obliged to return to the subject of natural teleology in a later chapter. But for now, I must proceed to explain how the normativity of nature can and ought to serve as an ethical basis by showing how human beings, too, have a normative nature.

The full argument

1. Some generic statements about human beings are true.
2. Generic statements are normative/teleological.
3. Hence, some normative/teleological statements about human beings are true.
4. If there are normative truths about human beings, then generic truths about human beings can provide premises for arguments with genuinely normative conclusions.
5. Therefore, generic truths about human beings can provide premises for arguments with genuinely normative conclusions.

53. Geach, *The Virtues*.
54. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.
55. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*.

Objections

1. **No Human Nature**
2. **Human Nature is Biology**
3. **Is-Ought Gap**

Conclusion

All I have tried to show is that *some* of these generics are true. To those who disagree about the *nature* of generics, I have tried to urge them to feel free to do so, but to count the cost. The great cost of throwing out generics *as a class* threatens to throw out a huge percentage of scientific statements in biology, organic chemistry, anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics, anatomy, and medicine.

I have not yet tried to show which true generics about humans can serve as the basis for an ethical theory. The first step to that end would be to apply the above argument to human beings.

Human beings are natural entities importantly similar to animals and plants, though importantly different in exhibiting rational activity. By calling humans 'natural' here I only wish to present an innocent truism: we are here, in nature. We are material. Not necessarily *wholly* material, but are we *at least* material at all? Yes. Do we eat food grown on earth, drink water from the earth, are we born from fellow humans and do we die and disintegrate into the earth like every other living thing? Yes. So we are natural. Again, I do not mean to prejudge the question of whether we are *also more than natural.* I simply mean to invoke the obvious that the *we are at least natural.* Since we are (at least) natural entities, and since scientific statements are about natural entities, then it is possible (and indeed quite common) to make scientific statements about us. 'Humans emigrated from Africa about 200,000 years ago' is a statement about a natural species group, namely *homo sapiens sapiens*, the only extant members of the hominin clade.

So, for example, 'Humans are language users' is a generic scientific statement. Since some such statements are generic, teleological statements, and since some such statement can be used

as the basis of evaluative truths, some such statements about human can be used as the basis of evaluative truths.

That shall be the task in a later chapter.

Chapter 3

Human Nature: Virtues as Necessary Traits for Rational Animals

Quotation *"Man alone of the animals possesses speech."* (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.1253a)

"Now I come face to face with an apparently unanswerable objection, which is that human beings as rational creatures can ask why what has so far been said should have any effect on their conduct. For let us suppose that the normative pattern that I called 'natural normativity' does govern our evaluations of human beings as human beings. Suppose that human beings are defective as human beings unless they do what is needed for human good, including such things as refraining from murder and keeping promises. The sceptic will surely ask 'But what if I do not care about being a good human being?'" Foot,

I. Introduction: Human Generics

Peter Geach says "Men need virtues as bees need stings."[1] Philippa Foot echoes Geach's statement about "need" and "necessity" as well. Alasdair MacIntyre subtitled his most recent monograph: "human beings need the virtues."[2] What kind of necessity is being predicated here? And for *whom* are virtues necessary? In brief, we shall argue that virtues are those acquired traits needed for human

1. Geach, *The Virtues*, 17.
2. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

beings as such to develop in humanity. Virtues are those qualities needed by us as members of the human species, each member of which exemplifies human nature.

Applying Generics to Humans

We saw above how, in outline, an ethical theory might ground normative facts in natural, teleological facts. Against the alleged impossibility of deriving an ought from an is, we saw how we can derive an ought from a functional or teleology 'is'. And, we argued, some natural facts are not purely descriptive. This strategy will be used to ground ethical facts in human nature. Now we must go further and specify what kind of life it is we as human beings live arising from what kind of creatures we are. Of course, the difficulty comes in attempting to move from such vague statements to particular moral statements: 'Human beings make and keep promises.' This will give us initial insight into the concept of virtue, which is our main theme. The subsequent chapters will provide more detail into the nature of virtue.

So let us apply the conceptual structure we outlined in the previous chapter to human beings. Since abstract generic truths about the nature of a class of living thing, from which we can evaluate individual members of the class, individual living things, are there any such statements we can make about humans. Here is one: 'Human beings are practically rational animals'. This is a generic, hence it is both descriptive and normative; it is a "thick" term. Initially, we can conclude that if human beings *really are* rational animals that an *irrational* human is ipso facto defective.[3] I do not here intend to discuss mental illness, disability, birth defect, chromosomal disorders, and other such exceptions to 'normal' functional humans.

3. To call a human 'defective' sounds like a schoolyard insult; but it is a straightforward, evaluative description of some people.

Initial Objections: No Human Nature; Human nature is a mess?

One worry mentioned above is that human nature is a mess. Bernard Williams expresses the worry that human nature is an "ill-sorted bricolage of powers and instincts":

> The second and more general reason lies not in the particular ways in which human beings may have evolved, but simply in the fact that they have evolved, and by natural selection. The idea of a naturalistic ethics was born of a deeply teleological outlook, and its best expression, in many ways, is still to be found in Aristotle's philosophy, a philosophy according to which there is inherent in each natural kind of thing an appropriate way for things of that kind to behave. On that view it must be the deepest desire—need?—purpose?—satisfaction?—of human beings to live in the way that is in this objective sense appropriate to them (the fact that modern words break up into these alternatives expresses the modern break-up of Aristotle's view). Other naturalistic views, Marxist and some which indeed call themselves 'evolutionary', have often proclaimed themselves free from any such picture, but it is basically very hard for them to avoid some appeal to an implicit teleology, an order in relation to which there could be an existence which would satisfy all the most basic human needs at once. The first and hardest lesson of Darwinism, that there is no such teleology at all, and that there is no orchestral score provided from anywhere according to which human beings have a special part to play, still has to find its way into ethical thought.[4]

The response of Hursthouse, Foot, Brown, and Nagel, is that natural teleology is indeed compatible with Darwinism and does indeed provide a "an appropriate way to behave" (or we might add, *ways*) that is "inherent in each natural kind of thing." Natural teleology is only incompatible with a teleological nihilism distinctive of (certain brands) of metaphysical reductionism. Strictly speaking, evolutionary theory may be summarized in five theses explaining the current multiplicity and shape of terrestrial life.[Cf. Plantinga[5] 8-9. 1. The earth is very old; 2. Life has progressed from relatively simple to relatively complex forms; 3. Through slow and gradual changes, all the modern forms of live have appeared; 4. All of life originated from one original place and species; 5. Some mechanism such as natural selection drives the process of descent with modification.] Each separately and all together they explain biological processes of genetic mutation, reproduction, preservation, and

4. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Taylor & Francis, 2011), 44.
5. *Where the Conflict Really Lies*.

proliferation. A sixth, not *necessarily* related Strictly speaking, about teleology, it says absolutely nothing.[6] As for those brands of metaphysical reductionism that are incompatible with natural teleology, if our knowledge of natural teleology is well-grounded enough then so much the worse for metaphysical reductionism.

While Hursthouse is quick to assure the reader that her goal is not the production of a "scientific" ethics, by this she means only that ethical evaluations cannot be made from "outside" the ethical outlook itself: ethics is not to become a branch of biology. She emphatically *does* mean to make evaluations of human beings can be made in a way analogous to the way we evaluate cacti or deer.

In each case we rely on the notion of natural kinds and their appropriate way of behaving:

> [I]n relation to which they are evaluated as good or defective. The evaluations do not—as they might in a post-Darwinian age—evaluate members of species of living things simply as good, or not so good, or downright defective, as replicators of their genes.[7]

Hursthouse's primary response to Williams is that his worry is not actually rooted in the progress of modern science. He himself admits that "many of course have come to that conclusion before" (the conclusion that "human beings are to some degree a mess… for whom no form of life is likely to prove entirely satisfactory, either individually or socially.")[8] Rather, Hursthouse points out, his worry is an expression of moral nihilism and despair.[9] Williams believes human nature is a mess *because* he believes no form of life is completely satisfactory for everyone. But that blade cuts the other way. If one has hope that some form of life is or may be at least mostly satisfactory for at least some people, it makes sense to believe human nature is not completely a mess. And Hursthouse movingly praises hope as a virtue.

6. Cf. ibid., 8–10. A sixth thesis, often appended to the first five, is that the process of natural selection is unguided. But regardless of its popularity among biologists this is, strictly speaking, a philosophical claim, not a biological one.

7. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 257–8.

8. Ibid., 261, quoting from Williams.

9. I shall take up the topic of rational despair again in a later chapter.

> Alternatively (or perhaps as well) we could stick with what we have—those facts about human nature and the way human life goes that support the claim that the virtues on the standard list benefit their possessor, and the reading of human history that ascribes our persisting failure to achieve *eudaimonia* in anything but very small patches to our vices. True, it is not easy to hold on to them sometimes; despair and misanthropy are temptations. But we should.[10]

I should not like to deny that human society and many, many human individuals are "a mess" in the sense that corruption is a real feature of human life. A selected list of the dark side of our species: War, oppression, disease, genetic defect, injury, hatred, vice, a large and growing list of different kinds of injustice. These, also, are empirical facts of anthropology and psychology. I should not like to deny that *things are bad*. I should only like to make space for the possibility that things *are not all bad*. The universal optimist is obliged unrealistically to deny all the dark side of our existence. But the universal pessimist is obliged unrealistically to deny all the light side: peace and freedom, glowing health, genetic order, beauty that persists into old age, love, virtue, and the halting but admirable efforts toward justice and social harmony.

Below I shall make the case that ethical conclusions can be derived from natural facts about human beings. Here I only wish to make room for the possibility that our data set of such facts cannot with integrity include all light and sweetness nor all dank and dark cynicism.

Human nature is biology; it's is merely a biological concept

As for the second worry, some will say that humans are mere mammals, and that is the end of it. As Andrew Bailey says, "we are animals."[11] Stephen Brown argues that ethics is a descriptive discipline in the end; even virtue ethics, after being appropriately "naturalized", does not *commend* the virtues so much as *detail* the traits which happen to be adaptive for creatures like us to survive and propagate our genotype.[12] Although the "characteristic form of life" of human beings involves

10. Ibid., 265.
11. Bailey, "Animalism."
12. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*; Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue."

highly rarified neurological and cognitive processes we do not observe in other animals, nevertheless, nature only reveals one kind of biological concept of nature: a species. And species aim to survive and reproduce.

My reply is that to say that humans are mammals is an empirical assertion; we exhibit quite a sufficient number of tell-tale properties shared by other mammals: a neocortex, hair, mammary glands, and hearts of a particular form and function. But to say that humans are *merely* mammals is a profoundly anti-empirical assertion. I even would tendentiously label it profoundly *anti-scientific*. For what we observe of ourselves both "from inside" and "from outside" we exhibit a range of properties not shared by other mammals: grammar and language, fire-making, cooking, sex for pleasure, abstract reasoning, science, philosophy, religion, mythology, agriculture. Of course, slippery spatial analogies like "inside" and "outside" admit of multiple senses: "inside" can and often does mean what can be known via introspection (e.g., the way I know what it feels like to be slighted or to be praised, the way I remember the color of my grandmother's house) and what can be known from accepting limitations of a first-personal or second-personal human point of view more generally (e.g., it appears that the sun orbits the earth rather than the other way around; and I know when my mother is upset because I just "know" that look). Looking at things from the "outside" might mean what can be known via sensory perception or what can be known – if anything – by pretending to a neutral, objective, third-person, God's eye view.[13] We can posit counterfactuals, as for example when we speculate what intelligent extraterrestrials would think of humans if they observed and studied our species, with fresh eyes, alongside every other. All that matters for my purposes now is that our species exhibits a range of peculiar activities that distinguish us from mammals, from animals more broadly, and from any other known natural entity in the cosmos – and that recognizing as much is an *empirical* matter. To deny our uniqueness is possible, after a long inquiry. But to be blind to our uniqueness from the outset is to be subject, in all likelihood, to philistine reductionism

13. Whether we can know anything outside of time and space (such as platonic universals) is of course a large question I don't wish to enter into here.

that has no more to do with genuine science than does belief in extraterrestrial life.

II. Neo-Aristotelians on Human Nature

Foot on Applying Generics to Human Nature

Foot is well aware that the imposition of normativity onto brute nature, or the derivation of normativity from brute nature, is likely to seem absurd:

> The idea that any features and operations of humans could be evaluated in the same way as those of plants and animals may provoke instant opposition. For to say that this is possible is to imply that some at least of our judgements of goodness and badness in human beings are given truth or falsity by the conditions of human life. And even if it is allowed that certain evaluations of this kind are possible—those vaguely thought of perhaps as 'merely biological'—there is bound to be scepticism about the possibility that 'moral evaluation' could be like this.[14]

However, she has tried to earn a hearing for this notion by arguing that the "meaning of 'good' in so-called 'moral contexts' " does not have a special logic of its own. Rather, as she insists, "no change in the meaning of 'good' between the word as it appears in 'good roots' and as it appears in 'good dispositions of the human will.'[15]

As Hursthouse says:

> The starting point is an idea that she has never lost sight of, and which figures in her early attack on Hare. It is the idea that 'good', like 'small', is an attributive adjective.4 What that entails is that, although you can evaluate and choose things according to almost any criteria you like, you must select the noun or noun phrase you use to describe the thing you are calling good advisedly, for it determines the criteria of goodness that are appropriate. Hare can call a cactus a good one on the grounds that it is diseased and dying, and choose it for that reason, but what he must not do is describe it as a good cactus, for a cactus is a living thing. He can describe it as a good 'decorative object for my windowsill' or 'present to give my detestable mother-in-law', but not as a good cactus.[16]

14. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.
15. Ibid., 39.
16. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 195.

Michael Thompson summarizes:

> "…we may view this line of thought as beginning with the idea… that will and practical reason are on the face of it just two more faculties or powers a living being may bear, on a level with the powers of sight and hearing an memory. The second crucial thought is that an individual instance of any of the latter powers — sight, hearing, memory — is intuitively to be judged as defective or sound, good or bad, well-working or ill-working, by reference to its bearer's life-form or kind or species."[17]

Something changes when we examine human beings compared to all other animals or all other natural kinds.[18] We continue to evaluate humans on the basis of their species, but we evaluate not just their health and normal developmental stages, and their maturity, but their *actions*.

So, summing up, a good social animal (of one of the more sophisticated species) is one that is well fitted or endowed with respect to (i) its parts, (ii) its operations, (iii) its actions, and (iv) its desires and emotions; whether it is thus well fitted or endowed is determined by whether these four aspects well serve (1) its individual survival, (2) the continuance of its species, (3) its characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic enjoyment, and (4) the good functioning of its social group—in the ways characteristic of the species.[19]

Brown, good people

Hursthouse's application

Rosalind Hursthouse says that: "The concept of a virtue is the concept of something that makes its possessor good: a virtuous person is a morally good, excellent or admirable person who acts and feels well, rightly, as she should. These are commonly accepted truisms."[20] These truisms encompass our everyday moral judgments about who is admirable much more broadly than our judgments about who is morally upstanding or who avoids being morally despicable. There is more

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

18. Katherine Hawley and Alexander Bird, "What Are Natural Kinds?" *Philosophical Perspectives* 25, no. 1 (2011): 205–21.

19. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 202.

20. Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics."

to being an admirable person than *avoiding* transgressions. Nicholas Gier's memorable image of the "couch potato" illustrates this point. The Couch Potato works a mindless job which he is able adequately to perform while watching television (and today we can add, checking his Facebook and Twitter feeds); he rarely rises except to receive himself and microwave his dinners; he is even religious, watching his favorite preachers on Sunday morning television and tithing regularly. Yet the couch potato is by my standards living a wasted life and pitiable life. (I am counting on your similar intuition.) We do not want to imprison him for being such a failure; but we certainly do not admire how he lives. By contrast, admirable people command our respect for being morally upstanding, and so much more. We admire them for their brains, their guts, their strength, their rare talents, their outstanding achievements, their unimaginable creativity, their wit and eloquence. Some people are remarkable for *what they are given* (great beauty, great intelligence, and so on). But the admirable person is remarkable not just for good fortune. In fact, admirable people are often admirable for overcoming extraordinarily bad fortune. We truly admire *what they do* with *what they are given*. In a word, we admire how they live.

> When we moved from the evaluations of other social animals to ethical evaluations of ourselves, there was an obvious addition to the list of aspects which are evaluated. The other animals act. So do we occasionally, but mostly we act from reason, as they do not, and it is primarily in virtue of our actions from reason that we are ethically good or bad human beings. So that is one difference that our being rational makes.[21]

> This is a major part of the genuinely transforming effect the fact of our rationality has on the basic naturalistic structure. But has it transformed the structure beyond recognition? I said that ethical naturalism looks to be doomed to failure if it depends on identifying what is characteristic of human beings as a species, in the way their pleasures and pains and ways of going on are characteristic of the other species. By and large we can't identify what is characteristic of human beings as a species in this way—there is too much variety. And even if we could, it looks as though we would not allow anything we identified to carry any normative weight if we thought it was something we could change. So is ethical naturalism, after all, a non-starter?[22]

21. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 217.
22. Ibid., 222.

McDowell on second nature and *Bildung*

1. **First attempt**. McDowell argues that humans are different from other (physical) natural objects in that we inhabit "second nature" – the space of reasons. The realm of normativity, for McDowell, is not the realm of "bald nature" but the realm of reason. As I have tried to argue in the previous chapter, the realm of normativity *is* the realm of … McDowell would accuse me of trying to "re-enchant" nature; if I deny anything, I deny the quasi-magical aesthetic of the word "enchant." Normativity is, I have been at pains to insist, scientific; judging that an organism fails to exemplify its life-form well is both a normative and scientific judgment. So the question McDowell and others ought to be asking is not whether the thought that nature is normative is enchanting but whether it is *true*.
2. **Second attempt**. McDowell's fundamental solution, then, to the problem of mind and world is that the world given in experience is fundamentally given as to us conceptual, since the mind is both spontaneous and receptive at the same moment. The primary problem is resolved, but more work remains. For, if human capacity is like this, we have to wonder about the implications of the "new interpretation of human experience"—and the location of the rational being within nature. McDowell does wonder about this, introducing the concept of second nature.

Nature (we presume) is disenchanted. Human beings are natural—they exist within the disenchanted space of law. Yet, ex hypothesi the human being has (simultaneously) the capacity for spontaneous answerability to rational relations, which exist in a sui generis space of reason. These seem irreconcilable. McDowell here invokes Aristotle's notion of ethics, by which he hopes to rethink our conception of human nature and nature as a whole. He says, "the rethinking requires a different conception of actualizations of our nature."[23] Second nature is that space in which human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing.

Practical wisdom is a virtue that the young human being does not have, and the ethical demands of practical wisdom are not even perceptible to her. But she has the potential (within her nature) to develop the answerability to them. And ethical thinking is inculcated in a young person, and then later examined, but only examined from within ethical thinking. Human beings are intelligibly initiated into this stretch of the space of reasons by ethical upbringing (Bildung)

23. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 77.

which instills the appropriate shape in their lives. So initiated, practically wise behavior is not just a new kind of behavior but the maturation and development of a new kind of faculty in the human animal. The circularity of this inculcation and new second natural faculty is not accidental: Since practical wisdom is responsive to reasons, it becomes a prototype "for the…faculty that enables us to recognize and create … intelligibility."[24] [The ethical demands of reason] are essentially within reach of human beings. So practical wisdom is second nature to its possessors."[25]

MacIntyre on Dependent Rational Animals

For MacIntyre, who is allergic to metaphysics, he does not give a robust account of nature. He seems to assume a Laplacian picture of disenchanted nature in *Dependent Rational Animals*: nature which is a somewhat random bricolage of matter, energy, constants, wave functions, and so on, and somehow produces living organisms which through mutation and natural selection become creatures like us.

III. Discussion: Human Nature

Compare, Contrast, Synthesize:

Argue that Virtues are needed by human beings as practical reasoners

Virtues would be those character traits that rational animals *need*, tout court. They need them to *become* fully rational animals. While I will discuss in detail the natural human telos in a later chapter, here I only assert that actualizing the potential latent in human nature is necessarily good for us.[26] All of the good things of human life enable the realization of a fully human life. Not all good things are subject to our control. The virtues are among those good things under our control – good dispositions we each choose to cultivate or fail to cultivate. Unlike other goods (say, wealth), virtues become *what we are*.

24. Ibid., 79.
25. Ibid., 84.
26. Paul Bloomfield, "Virtue and Happiness," ed. Rachana Kamtekar, 2012.

Human nature is to be a rational animal. In the old classificatory schemes, philosophers provided a genus and a differentia. In contemporary classificatory scheme, we can locate ourselves as animals in the phylum chordata, the class mammalia, the order of primates, the suborder haplorhini, the familiy hominidae, the genus homo, the species homo sapiens. What is our differentia? In a word, reason, or rationality.

What are our rational capacities? First, speech.[27] We are speaking animals. But through speech comes a whole second cosmos of culture. Through speech comes intentionality in all its forms. Through speech comes communication ("pass the salt"), distinct languages and cultures (about 5,000 distinct languages), self-consciousness ("who am I?"), abstraction ("all grass is green"), science, philosophy, religion, mythology, technology and more. Perhaps even art and music arise from the rational capacity to direct our actions to create not only what instinct demands but whatever the imagination can invent.[28]

Rationality is also the capacity to judge true and false, to affirm and deny. This is the view of Aristotle and the neo-Aristotelians (among others). Rational capacities are identified by the actions of rational creatures. As Haldane says, quoting the medieval scholastics, "acting follows being" and "things are specified by their power."[29] We just do deliberate, explain, propose theories, judge truth and falsity, wonder, inquire, and so on. As far as *recorded* history goes (which isn't very far), we have always done these things.

While I shall have to say more about practical rationality in a later chapter, here I need only to specify that our nature as rational animals *includes* the notion that we are practically rational animals. Practical rationality is the capacity to judge what is good or bad, what is to-be-pursued or to-be-avoided. It is still *rationality* since the questions of what is good admit of true and false

27. Terrence W Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain* (WW Norton & Company, 1998).

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

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

answers. They often require reflecting on what was is will be might be or must be best. Humean psychology paints human psychology as two non-overlapping magisteria, an entirely non-rational set of passions and an entirely non-passional rationality. Reason is not impractical, it is not merely theoretical. Reason can be and is also practical; thought results in practice. Practical rationality is not merely irrational. Some emotions "make sense" given the situation. John McDowell argues that, for example, danger makes sense to feel in the presence of a wild bear in the woods.[30] Disgust in response to some human bodily functions is apt; awe and wonder in response to viewing the starry heavens is apt.[31] Pain is not only painful but *bad*; pleasure is, in moderation, not only pleasant but *good*.[32] To borrow Gibbard's phrase, practical rationality is a capacity for *thinking what to do*. Motivation, most broadly, is necessarily related to reasons one discovers and endorses, especially reasons that count in favor of an action or attitude, all things considered.

Objection: There is no single human nature

Perhaps there is no single nature shared by all humans. Perhaps Stephen Brown's paradox is true: "Human nature is variability itself."[33] The variability of human lives, cultures, and beliefs is due to our freedom from the tyranny of genetics and environment. In other words, the major difference between humans as natural entities and other natural entities is our set of rational capacities. Unlike any other creature in the physical cosmos, we demonstrate the ability to speak, to think, reason, deliberate, judge, set projects, pursue goals, reflect, communicate, form societies, create cultures, and so on.

30. John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," in *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. Ted Honderich (Routledge, 1985), 110–29.

31. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*.

32. Thomas Nagel, "Ethics as an Autonomous Theoretical Subject," in *Morality as a Biological Phenomenon: The Pre-Suppositions of Sociobiological Research*, ed. Gunther S. (ed.) Stent (University of California Press, 1980), 196–205.

33. Donald E. Brown, "Human Nature and History," *History and Theory* 38, no. 4 (1999): 138–57, `http://www.jstor.org/stable/2678062`.

Objection: There are no "natures" or inherent forms

A powerful (if vague) Darwinian objection from metaphysics that there is no such thing as a biological "nature" anyway.[34] Bertrand Russell playfully jabs this definition thusly: "Man is a rational animal — so at least I have been told. Throughout a long life I have been looked diligently for evidence in favour of this statement, but so far I have not had the good fortune to come across it."[35] Part of the skepticism from analytic philosophers to the neo-Aristotelian project stems, I think, from this worry. Nevertheless, the concept of nature being deployed here is of the appeal of the neo-Aristotelian project is a clear concept of nature that applies to both humans and other animals.

A nature is an abstract property. It is a set of capacities delimiting the range of potentialities of a given object or living being. The concrete blue-footed boobie is not a nature, but exemplifies the nature of blue-footed boobies.

Natures, as we shall see, is an empirically discovered and inductively generalized set of potentialities latent in a species. Human nature is a set of potentialities to realize our animal and intellectual activities, including reproduction, metabolisis, rational choice, abstract reflection, and so on.

This is the solution to Russell's playful jab. Not all people — not most, perhaps not even many people — fulfill their rational potential by becoming thoroughly rational people, free of the banes of intellectual life: ignorance, intellectual laziness, illogical inferences, the distractions of irrational psychological factors, attachment to prejudice and bias, informal fallacies, and so on. Rather, overcoming all these banes would exemplify the fulfillment of human nature.

34. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 10; Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, chap. 5; Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory."

35. Bertrand Russell, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell* (2009), p. 45 %%

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. The story we are told in biology and anthropology textbooks is that 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. I shall return to this theme in a later chapter.

Objection: Why is it "necessary" to be virtuous?

So virtues are the acquired traits needed by creatures like us, by social rational animals. There are a couple of objections in this connection I would like to address here. The first is the objection that the acquisition of virtues is morally optional. Not all theorists are virtue theorists; not all moral agents are theorists. But all moral agents (we can here assume) have the obligation to be moral.

This objection, as stated, misses the point. By arguing that virtues – whatever they may turn out to be – are those qualities needed by practical reasoners, we are not arguing about the *concept* of virtue but that *very qualities themselves*. Any culture, business, family, civilization, will thrive insofar as it is virtuous and disintegrate insofar as it fails. Virtue is necessary because it is human. Justice, prudence, and courage are "needed in any human-scale enterprise"[36], from motherhood, to a successful career, to farming.

Put negatively, the thesis of this chapter is that vices necessarily contribute to misery, unhappiness, and human stultification and stagnation. Human nature is the starting point, flourishing is the goal, and the moral and intellectual virtues are the means by which we move from start to goal. Vices are those qualities that partly constitute human misery. Many kinds of living conditions are miserable; excessive cold or heat; starvation; illness; mental handicap; injury; extreme isolation and loneliness, and so on. But these kinds of circumstances are not *always* and *necessarily* miserable. Rather, being a lying, treacherous, scheming, envious, whining, daydreaming moral agent is truly miserable, even such happens to have a comfortable bed to sleep in and enough money to get through life. Such a person is despicable, a worthy specimen of human failure.

Some vices, especially intellectual vices, are especially despicable. Not everyone has equal amounts of intelligence conceived as raw mental horsepower. Some children even at a young age excel at doing "mental math" or memorizing geographical names, while others never acquire the knack for it. However, not all unintelligent people are stupid in the deplorable sense: stubborn, unteachable, slow to learn and resenting every bit, arrogant, smug, self-satisfied, and willfully ignorant. Such persons demonstrate intellectual vices noxious to all their fellows except those equally debased, and especially noxious to those unfortunate enough to be their teachers, parents, or guardians. And such intellectual vices are in a special way exemplary of human failing.

36. Geach, *The Virtues* .

Another answer: deontic necessity

'Telos' picks out the Greek concept of an end, purpose, direction, limit, fulfillment, destination. It is pretty clear that human beings set ends for themselves, undertake projects, chart courses in a particular direction, and so on. To say that there is a "given" telos for humanity is to suggest that there is at least one or a set of ends "built in."[37] Put crudely, there are some goals we *ought* to have regardless of our other goals; or perhaps more accurately, the concept of inbuilt teleology suggests that there are some ends we *simply have* by virtue of being human. The question then becomes how to coordinate our chosen ends and our "given" ends. This question is by no means easy. However, I shall take a stab at it.

One way that moral philosophers (divine command theorists and Kantians, for instance) answer the question of the relation between our inbuilt ends and our chosen ends is to suggest that our inbuilt ends are "categorical imperatives" — that is, imperatives that are obligatory and authoritatively binding regardless of our chosen ends. The divine command theorist sees laws of God being objectively binding on all human beings. The Kantian substitutes a divine law for an autonomous, self-given law that each rational agent necessarily imposes upon oneself. However, each of these theories makes the law a brute obligation, a necessity without further conditions.

The virtue theorists I am discussing — and in some cases defending — take a different approach. Rather than treating the moral law as a divine "positive law" or a law of practical reason as such, they treat moral laws such as they are as laws of nature. Of course, these are not "descriptive" laws of nature, like the law of universal gravitation. It is a brute prescriptive law arising from the nature of humans as such. Now, since humans are (as I shall argue) rational animals, my view aligns rather closely with Kant's. However, I take a different line of argument on the controversy Kant had with Reinhold and others about whether or not one can freely choose to disobey the moral law. Kant thought one could not, since he defined "freedom" as conformity to the moral law (rather

37. Ibid., chap. 1.

than conformity to natural, selfish, law of inclination or egoism). My view is closer to Reinhold's on this point, in that I think that our natural law is objectively prescriptive and binding, and in some sense defines who we *already are*, but that it is given to us to fulfill. We must align our chosen end with our given end. Failing to achieve our given end is, by definition, human misery. So even if I am "successful" in achieving my chosen ends, I shall be necessarily miserable if my chosen ends are radically opposed to my given ends.

Objection: Beneficial by definition?

The second objection, building on the above response, is about the very definition of virtue as a *beneficial* or "positive" character trait. To see the problem, suppose we define "boldness" as *doing hard things* and "courage" as doing hard things when it is good. Boldness is, so to speak, value neutral. One can be bold in wrongdoing or bold in doing well. If courage is just boldness in doing good, is this a trivial truth? An analytic truth? The affirmation that 'courage (doing hard things when it is good) is good' would appear to amount to the life-altering revelation that 'good things are good'.

This is an important objection but also misses the point. It is a synthetic truth discoverable only by reflection that humans have a nature, a telos, and that some character traits are conducive to the realization of our telos while others are conducive to our stultification. Peter Geach argues that just because an ethical conclusion is virtually un-revisable doesn't mean it is content-less.[38] All truths are true, in part, in virtue of the words used. But not all truths by definition are empty and content-less; rather, the stuff of life from which we derive our conceptual definitions or which we must fit into our conceptual definitions is a contentfull task. Let's consider this objection in another way.

Some ethical propositions are thought to be self-evidently true: it is good to be good. This is a tautology. And most (if not all) tautologies are trivial. Other ethical propositions are not tautologous

38. Ibid., Chapter 1.

but are so widely and commonly accepted as to be easily mistaken for tautologies: it is good to be kind; cruelty is bad. Pleasure is good. Wise people make good leaders. I ought to keep my promises. A just society is desirable. Fools are ridiculous and the wise are admirable. "Do good and avoid evil" (called the first principles of practical reason). Moderation is good (called the foundation of all ethics). "Drunkenness" or alcoholism are shameful. The Golden Rule (called the only objective rule in both religious and atheistic moralities). Injustice is bad. We ought to care for children and respect elders. Generosity is admirable.

Of course, if we define "kindness" simply as "a good disposition to treat others well" then it appears that "it is good to be kind" amounts to the same tautologous proposition "it is good to be good." But kindness is *not* best defined simply as *something good*. Kindness, it seems to me, and to many others upon reflection, is a special sort of quality we can recognize and name but not ultimately define. Cruelty, likewise, we "know it when we see it." There is more to our recognition of cruelty than the arbitrary application of "a bad disposition to hurt others." We know that children who tortures animals for fun is acting cruelly. We try to help him or her to satisfy curiosity or get parental attention through other means. We help them stop nursing a disposition to cruelty.

These ethical propositions do not seem to me tautologies. Call these non-tautologous but basic ethical propositions Platitudes. Some Platitudes are small, others great. "It is polite to say please" is a Platitude. But "treat others as you would wish to be treated" is a Great Platitude.

Some philosophers take their task to be to debunk the Great Platitudes. They wish to explain them away, to explain *why* they are false and *how so many people fall in for them*. The platitudes are either *false* ("know your place" taken as a justification of socio-economic or gender inequality is false) or as trivial; *of course* "murder is unjust" is true because, 'murder' is defined as 'unjust killing.'

Other philosophers take their task to be to *underwrite* the great platitudes. They wish to explain them, to explain why they are true and how it is we learn them, preserve them, and (most crucially) live well by taking them as sound practical advice. Both philosophers are sophisticated; but one is sophisticated in attacking and explaining away the Great Platitudes while the other is

sophisticated in defending and explaining them.

As examples of the Debunkers, consider J. L. Mackie and Alan Gibbard. Mackie claims to be running counter to the great tradition of European moral philosophy.[39] Gibbard's metaethical works aim to capture our common sense belief that morality is objective but without the Platonism. He says, "It might be thought ordinary conceptions of rationality Platonistic or intuitionistic. On the Platonistic Picture coma among the facts of the world are facts of what is rational and what is not. A person of normal mental powers can discern these facts. Judgments of nationality are thus straightforward apprehensions of fact, not through sense perception through a mental faculty analogous to sense perception…"[40]

As examples of Defenders, consider G. E. Moore, Robert Adams, and Frank Jackson. Moore's grandiloquent denouncements of moral philosophy are not, as one might expect, the harbingers of a revolutionary transvaluation of values; by the end of *Principia Ethica* he has given a sophisticated 300 page articulation of the yawningly common judgment that beauty, friendship, and knowledge are goods. Robert Adams' metaethical work aims to capture the common sense belief that morality is objective… by providing a systematic defense of Platonism. Plato sees goodness as becoming like god: "Fleeing [evil] is becoming like god so far as one can, and to become like god is to become just and pious with wisdom.[41] And Adams defends this resemblance relation as well. But not all Defenders are non-naturalists. Frank Jackson's influential account of functionalism[42] aims to naturalize "mature folk morality" without necessarily invalidating all of it.

It does no good to object that the Great Platitudes are *evil* or *oppressive*, binding women to social subjugation or condemning the poor to poverty. Rather, the corrections to the errors of European (and more broadly, western) moral philosophy are contained *within the resources* of western moral philosophy. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" tells more powerfully

39. John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin UK, 1977).

40. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 155.

41. Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato Statesman* 176a5-b2; John M Armstrong, "After the Ascent: Plato on Becoming Like God," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 26 (2004): 171–83.

42. Jackson, "From Metaphysics to Ethics."

against sexism or classism than any revolutionary ideal.

Objection: aren't we social animals?

Another interlocutor might object to the narrowly *rational* description of human nature. Aren't we social animals? Or practical animals? Or symbolic animals? Why not describe human nature as social, practical, symbolic, rational animals?

This is an excellent objection. However, sociality and practicality are subsumed under the concept of rationality. To think is to think in words learned from one's parents or guardians. To think is also, in some respects and at some times, to think how to live. To think and even to imagine is to think in symbols and words derived from our culture and our family. So we do not need to multiply words; we simply need to properly define rationality.

There are two corollaries to this initial, formal definition of virtues as those traits human beings as practical reasoners need. Our rationality depends upon our education; If human nature is as "rational animals" then the unity of virtues as each depending on practical reason.[43]

The first corollary is the importance of moral and intellectual education. The beginning of human life, like the beginning of any organic life, is the foundation for all that follows. When a mother drinks heavily or uses cocaine while pregnant, the child is going to suffer the negative consequences for the remainder of his life. When a child is abused – emotionally, verbally, physically, or sexually – by her parents, the psychological cost is meted out across the entire life and across generations. By the same token, when a mother eats healthily and takes her vitamins while pregnant, the child is going to reap the positive consequences for the remainder of his life. When a child is given love, approval, empowerment, discipline, by her parents, the psychological gains are meted out across the entire life and across generations. The original source of most people's life maxims are not their ethics professors, favorite novels, Holy Bibles, or therapists, but their parents or other

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

guardians.

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

The second corollary is a partial solution to the conundrum about the unity of virtues. Are there many virtues or just one? And if there are many, are they unified or a fundamental plurality? We should expect, on the basis of our nature as rational animals, that all virtues will be united in our rationality, and that our various concepts of virtue will be united in an appropriate concept of rationality. This is just what we will defend in a later chapter.

Conclusion

Chapter 4

Excellence: Virtues as Acquired Excellent Character Traits

Quotation *"[Wisdom] teaches temperance and prudence, justice, and courage."* Wisdom 8:7.

Introduction

Above, I have argued that human nature is fixed enough to provide the grounding for an account of human virtues. We are *rational* animals. Three criteria determine our goals for this chapter.

Firstly, as we saw, rationality is intrinsically social; we learn a set of verbal and symbolic vocabularies – we learn to speak, to think, and to interpret – from our family and community and culture. Being rational animals entails that we are social and practical animals. So already we can predict, at an abstract level, what our account of the virtues will have to be like: it will have to show which traits make a human being excellent at social, practical, and rational activities.

Secondly, we are rational *animals*. So our account will have to show how our extraordinary rational capacities condition the other aspects of our psychology – physical, chemical, emotional, etc. Our account will show how, by reflection and deliberation, the virtuous person takes up his own biology and psychology into a space of reasons and construct a "pattern that, given the human situation, is likely to lead a good life." (Keyes 1983, 280%)

Thirdly, our account must distinguish between various kinds of excellence. The Greek word

usually translated 'virtue' (*αρετή*) can also be translated 'excellence'. But not all excellence is *moral* excellence. Foot cautions against several species of terminological misunderstanding: *αρετή* for the Greeks refers "also to arts, and even to excellences of the speculative intellect whose domain is theory rather than practice"[1]. We should like to distinguish beauty, raw talent, strength, and other excellences that are not at all under our control from virtues – which are under our control, either partially or completely. Furthermore, even their list of "moral virtues" (*arete ethikai* or *virtues morales*) do not correspond precisely to *our* "moral virtues". The traditional list of cardinal "moral virtues" (including courage, moderation, practical wisdom, and justice) includes positive traits we might classify as "self-regarding" (e.g., moderation) as well as "other-regarding" (e.g., justice), and includes practical wisdom (*phronesis/prudentia*) which, if we mentioned it all, we would be inclined to classify as an intellectual virtue. Finally, not all of the items on our list of positive qualities (e.g., unselfishness) obviously correspond to one of the classical virtues. So, we ought not to assume that the terms 'excellence' or even 'moral excellence' can be a short-cut for understanding the concept of virtue. We must, instead, construct our account with care and attention.

In order to construct this account, I shall first work through the virtue accounts of Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre. Secondly, I shall attempt to point out the discrepancies, harmonize the commonalities, and synthesize what is good in each. In short, my thesis in this chapter is the thesis of the dissertation as a whole: **virtues are acquired character traits (such as moderation, generosity, and especially practical wisdom) that practical reasoners need, for virtues partly constitute the realization of the natural telos of human nature.** This builds on the thesis of the last chapter – that humans need virtues – and shows how, as humans mature, the need for particular virtues and for virtue in general increases, especially for traits that enable one to engage in successful practical reasoning. Such acquired character traits dispose us to do well at accomplishing the universal projects of human life (such as sustaining friendships) and to react well to the universal challenges of human life, such as the death of loved ones. The absence of virtues,

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

and the presence of vices, corrupt practical reasoning and stultify the realization of our natural telos. Vices dispose us to succomb to common temptations and to fail at universal projects. Thirdly, and finally, I shall defend the resulting synthesis against various objections.

I. Neo-Aristotelians on Virtue

Philippa Foot on Virtue: Excellence of the Rational Will

Foot argues that virtue is excellence of the rational will.[2] 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 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.[3] Let's examine each of these propositions in turn.

2. 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.

3. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*.

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."[4]

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."[5] Even so, she finds the alleged paradox between what we might wish to call "selfish" and "altruistic" virtues overblown. Certainly, sometimes life presents us with the opportunity to pursue only one of two contradicting or apparently irreconciliable 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."[6] Geach further points out that the clear contrast between my "inclinations" (e.g., to self preservation) is largely an

4. Ibid., 2–3.
5. Ibid., 3.
6. Geach, *The Virtues*, 17.

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."[7] We cannot ignore the notorious tensions between altruism and egoism, but we must move on in the purstuit 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.[8] 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¿"[9] And moral philosophers have continued to try to answer for the last 2,400 years. A recent volume edited by Mark Alfano[10] 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."[11] Intentions are not the *only* thing

7. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 4.
8. Ibid., 4.
9. Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato*, *Meno* 70a.
10. Mark Alfano, *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, ed. Mark Alfano (Routledge, 2015).
11. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 5.

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 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.[12]

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.[13]

If virtuous dispositions are "multi-track,"[14] 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

12. Ibid., 5.

13. 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.

14. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*: "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

with strength, there seems to be something flat about calling the virtuous person *merely* skillful.[15] 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 error, while in the matter of virtues… it is the reverse."[16] 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."[17] 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

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.)".

15. Julia Annas's argument that virtues are skills of a particular type takes advantage of the intuitive similarity between virtue and skill. Cf. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*.

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

17. Ibid., 8.

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."[18] So the solution to the happy philanthropist problem is that if he really does have such a character as to be delighted helping others, he is morally praiseworthy *because he has worked to achieve that character*. As 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

18. Ibid., 13.

> 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."[19] 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.[20]

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 "com-

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

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

monsense" 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:

> 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.[21]

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.

John McDowell on Virtue: 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?' "[22]; (2) Virtues are kinds of knowledge and *virtue* is a kind of

21. Ibid., 17.
22. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 331.

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."[23] 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?"[24] 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 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."[25]

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.[26] 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

23. Ibid., 331.
24. Ibid., 331.
25. *Hamlet* III.1
26. Ibid., 331.

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."[27] 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.[28] 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 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."[29] 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.

27. Ibid., 332.
28. Ibid., 332.
29. Ibid., 332.

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."[30]

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. 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.[31] 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."[32] 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.[33]

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

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

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.[34] The merely continent person has to "weigh" reasons; the virtuous person fluently and instantly *acts* on the best reason.

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."[35] 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

34. Ibid., 335.
35. Ibid., 336.

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 formulable universal principle."[36] This common belief McDowell wishes to refute.[37]

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."[38] The "ground and nature of our confidence" that

36. Ibid., 337.

37. 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.

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

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."[39] 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 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.

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."[40]

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."[41] 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 logger-

39. Ibid., 339.
40. Ibid., 331.
41. Ibid., 341.

heads, 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."[42] 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 way to handle a given situation."[43]

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

42. Ibid., 342.
43. Ibid., 342.

conception of how to live… [namely] the *virtuous person's conception* of the sort of life a human being should lead."[44] 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."[45] Furthermore, "Any attempt to capture it in words will recapitulate the character of the teaching whereby it might be instilled: generalizations will be approximate at best…"[46] 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."[47] 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."[48]

44. Ibid., 343. Emphasis added.
45. Ibid., 343.
46. Ibid., 343.
47. Ibid., 342. Verbatim, he says: "The explanations, so far treated as explanations of judgments about what to do, are equally explanations of actions."
48. Ibid., 346.

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 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."[49] 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 straightforward desire as much as "a conception of how to live."

Although McDowell sees another more "subtle non-cognitivism" arising from the ashes, he

49. Ibid., 346.

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."[50]

Summary

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Alasdair 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.[51]

50. Ibid., 346.

51. 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.

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."[52] 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 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

52. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191.

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.[53]

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.[54] 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 (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

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

54. 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.

"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 *necessary* for achieving the end of that practice: high pay, an excellent teacher lounge, a short commute to work, and so on. Mere efficiency in attaining such external goods does not entail the presence of a virtue. In fact, the desire to pursue such goods *instead of* the goods of excellence is not a neutral desire — it is a *temptation.* Virtues are needed to overcome those temptations and to succeed according to the standards of the practice itself.[55]

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.[56] 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."[57] The example given shows how justice demands an ordering of the various goods of

55. 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.

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

57. Ibid., 202.

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."[58]

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."[59] Just as the temporal segments of life are fragmented into bits (one thinks of the inherently patronizing talk of "senior citizens" compared from the older, inherently reverent talk of "elders"), so also the various projects and pursuits of life are partitioned, 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."[60] 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.'[61]

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

58. Ibid., 204.
59. Ibid., 204.
60. Ibid., 204.
61. Ibid., 206.

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.[62] 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."[63] MacIntyre's astonishing conclusion from these innocuous premises is this: "there is no such thing as 'behavior', to be identified prior to and independently of intentions, beliefs and settings… Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions."[64] 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."[65]

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.[66]

62. Ibid., 207.
63. Ibid., 208.
64. Ibid., 208.
65. Ibid., 209.
66. Ibid., 211.

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.[67]

Clearly these are weighty matters. MacIntyre's discussion of narrative is highly interesting but can be left aside.[68] For we have arrived at a the supports needed for building the second stage of his account of virtue: the unity of many practices into a single whole. He says: "The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest."[69]

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.[70]

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,

67. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre," *First Things*, 2007.

68. 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?' "

69. Ibid., 219.

70. Ibid., 220.

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."[71] 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 which derive their life from the traditions of which they are the contemporary embodiments.[72]

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

71. Ibid., 222.
72. Ibid., 223.

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.[73] 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 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.[74]

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

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

74. Ibid.

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. 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.

Firstly, a tradition is not mere conservatism. 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.[75]

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

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

75. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

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.[76]

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.

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76. Ibid., 223.

II. Discussion: Virtue

Recall the criteria that are guiding our construction of an account of the excellence of rational animals: (1) Rationality is social, verbal, and symbolic (we learn to speak, to think, and to interpret from our family and community and culture). (2) Animality is social, physical, chemical, embodied (we must always care for the needs of nutrition, exercise, sleep, and our sexual nature). (3) Practical rationality is our active and proactive self-governance, including over all our thoughts and actions (we can affect but not change our appearance, strength, size, etc.),

So those traits that are excellences for creatures like us would (1) enable us to excel in social, practical, and rational activities that express our unique human nature; and (2) would enable us to take up all the disparate elements of human physiology and psychology into a rational pattern; (3) would be different from those excellences (such as strength and beauty) that are not under our control.

How do our three neo-Aristotelians satisfy, or fail to satisfy, these criteria? 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 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.

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."[77] 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 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*

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

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."[78] 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…[79]

Virtues as acquired excellent human traits

The definition of virtue I am defending in this dissertation is my core thesis: **Although it seems that the pursuit of virtues is optional, virtues (such as moderation, generosity, and especially practical wisdom) are acquired excellent character traits that all human beings as practical reasoners need, for virtues enable us to realize and themselves partly realize our natural human telos.**

It is now time to provide more detail about the content of virtues.

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

79. Ibid.

Excellence

The concept of 'excellence' is relative to an object's nature and function; an excellent knife is one that *cuts well*; but an excellent guard dog is one that barks loudly, is hostile to strangers, and so on. Artifacts receive their function by design, and even natural entities (such as dogs) have artificial functions insofar a they are trained by human users. It is tempting to assume that all functions are imposed on objects and that natural organisms (trees, dogs, humans) have no *inherent* function. Nevertheless, natural entities such as organisms have natural functions as well, as we have argued above. And, we argued, the 'function' of organisms can be 'read off' its activity and its development from embryonic stages to maturity, even remaining agnostic about its mechanistic empirical origin and/or its origin in a divine design.

In this part of the argument, we can see how the definition of virtues as excellent character traits follows from what has come before. 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" 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)?

Excellence is relative to generic truths about the nature and potential of natural kinds. We have argued that human beings, too, have a nature and have argued that it is our nature to be rational animals. Even in extreme cases when a person's set of potentialities for rational activity such as speech and abstract thought is not realized because of genetic disorder, injury, or mental or physical illness, they are *a human being* by virtue of having a *human nature*, tragically unrealized or unrealizable.

Human being as rational *animals* by nature need to breathe, eat, sleep, and stay warm, deal with the urgings of our sexual nature, and so on. Human beings as *rational* animals need to live and make decisions. We need to plan, think, deliberate, reflect, assume identities, pursue projects, and so on. It is undeniable that we *act* and we sometimes *act for an end*. Unlike animals who *act* and even *pursue* objects like food and safety, we pursue ends *as ends*. So, we may tentatively hypothesize that the qualities that enable us to pursue our ends *well* would be excellent qualities. The practical, rational agents who consistently succeed at pursuing and achieving their ends would be models of virtue. I shall have much more to say below about what ends people *have* or *ought to have* and about the indeterminate concept of a human telos.[80]

Objections: How many virtues?

Virtues are those excellent traits that humans as practical reasoners need to realize our natural telos. And, we have argued, human nature is an intelligibly determinate concept: rational animals. Still, we might wonder how many virtues there are? It seems that our neo-Aristotelian writers vary widely on this point, from one, to a limited set, to a virtually unlimited set.

Foot and Geach use as examples the four "cardinal" virtues which are delivered by tradition. (Hursthouse also defends the "theological virtue" of hope and Geach defends even a kind of faith

80. Eudaimonists believe our telos to be human flourishing or happiness. Others believe it is something else, such as genetic proliferation, the creation of the self, or what have you. We shall return to this in a later chapter

as non-theological virtues. Nevertheless, Geach argues that love can only be a religious virtue.)[81]

McDowell's account makes it seem like there is only one virtue (knowledge). Each individual virtue is "a sort of perceptual capacity", a "specialized sensitivity" to a particular range of reasons for action (say, the feelings of others), and all virtue is sensitivity to reasons. There is only one "moral outlook."[82]

MacIntyre, by contrast, not only includes in his broad historical list the virtues of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, the Greek tragic poets, the New Testament, Aquinas, Jane Austen, Benjamin Franklin, and Jane Austin, but he adds (apparently ad lib) new virtues like "integrity or constancy"[83] and "an adequate sense of tradition"[84]

Aristotle's list of virtues includes twelve moral virtues, each of which is defined by a moderate state between two possible extremes with respect to a given feature of human life, such as fear, pleasure, or wealth.[85] He builds into the definition of some of the virtues (e.g., magnanimity) the notion that not *all* human beings as such require it (since not all are extremely wealthy public servants).

Is there any sense to be made here? If human nature is stable, yet human reason is flexible enough to admit of variation (both progressive and regressive), then we ought to expect a stable set of qualities that count as virtues that is flexible enough to admit of variation.

The 'cardinal' or classical virtues to which those in the Aristotelian tradition (including recent neo-Aristotelians) give preeminent place are courage, justice, moderation, and practical wis-

81. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 11; Geach, *The Virtues*, chap. 4.

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

83. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 203. "There is at least one virtue recognized by the [Aristotelian] tradition which cannot be specified at all except with reference to the wholeness of a human life – the virtue of integrity or constancy."

84. Ibid., 223.

85. 1. Courage in the face of fear; 2. Temperance in the face of pleasure and pain; 3. Liberality with wealth and possessions; 4. Magnificence with great wealth and possessions; 5. Magnanimity with great honor; 6. Proper ambition with normal honors; 7. Patience in the face of irritation; 8. Truthfulness with self-expression; 9. Wittiness in conversation; 10. Friendliness in social conduct; 11. Modesty in the face of shame or shamelessness; 12. Righteous indignation. He adds five intellectual virtues.

dom. The four cardinal virtues are not only "delivered by tradition" but can be most easily ratified by anyone willing to do the critical analysis.

Roughly, justice is every member of the community doing their business and each person giving and receiving his due. Since every human being exists in society, the presence or absence of justice in the members of the community will sustain or destroy that community.

Courage is the proper boldness in doing the right thing despite opposition. Courage is not simply a military virtue appropriate to police officers, firefighters, telephone wire repairmen, etc.

Moderation is pursuing the right amount of pleasure in the right way at the right time, and avoiding the wrong amount and the wrong way and the wrong time. The dangers to health and happiness of excessive pleasure are obvious to anyone who has had the (mis)fortune to earn or inherit enough time and money to overindulge. Many celebrities who have worked their way to the top of the entertainment industry find that they lack the moderation by which to successful navigate the temptations associated with wealth and time.

Practical wisdom is excellence in knowing what to do in a given situation. Practical wisdom is I think rightly the most important virtue in the sense that it is a hub from which the other virtues emerge as spokes. Even the theoretical or intellectual virtues Zagzebski writes about depend for their cultivation on a person willing to invest the time and energy into theoretical learning.[86] But I shall return to this theme in a later chapter.

Beyond these, our definition of virtue is flexible enough to include a variety of positive character traits. Strictly speaking, however, the core virtues are those *all human beings need* since they benefit people along the lowest common denominator. We might call 'virtues' those positive traits that are appropriate for various life stations, ages, genders, professions, social roles, and so on. But if we are being strict such traits (regardless of how we label them) will be sharply distinguished from the cardinal virtues. They are the base of a triangle.

86. Cf. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry Into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Objection: Are virtues inborn?

I have emphasized throughout that virtues are acquired. I would like to state an objection to this part of the thesis. My response will be to concede some ground before holding the line.

To state the objection, first distinguish between what is "given" and what is under the control of a normal, functional, adult human being. Simply put, one's nature is given, and one's choices throughout life are controllable. But what is given in the life of a child includes (at least) one's genetic identity, one's time and place in history, one's culture and tradition, one's parents or guardians. If virtues are first inculcated in a child by tradition and only later acquired by an individual's own initiative, then it seems the dichotomy breaks down. It seems, in short, that the virtues one acquires or fails to acquire are part of the Given. For example, suppose Chivo grows up on a poor farm in rural Mexico in a large, Catholic household with pious parents. He learns not to lie, not to steal, to work hard on the farm, to be kind to his siblings and to have a good time with them. He is inculcated with honesty, respect for property, industry, gentleness, and affability. Perhaps Krishna does not attend school, or only does for a few years. But he learns from his famiily the social and trade skills needed to become a fully functioning member of his rural community. What effect would practical reasoning have on Krishna's life? It seems the answer is 'not much'. Socially, he is poor enough that he is not obligated to make many decisions about travel or entertainment. Religiously, he cannot choose (for many years at least) whether or not to join in the religious rituals of his family. Intellectually, he cannot choose to read many books or write ethical treatises, for farming occupies him for virtually all the daylight hours.

Compare Chivo with June. June grows up in a wealthy urban skyrise in Los Angeles with two secular parents and no siblings. She is taught not to lie, not to steal, and to do well in school, to respect her parents and friends but not to be too frivolous. She is inculcated with honesty, respect for property, studiousness, seriousness, and dignity. She becomes successful in grade school, high school, and college, and becomes a successful lawyer with enough disposable income to travel the

world, enjoy aesthetic pleasures and a thriving social life. What effect would practical reasoning have on June's life? It seems the answer is 'a great deal.' She is a member of the "creative class" who earns her wages with her expertise in legal history, ratiocination, and rhetoric.

The moral differences between Chivo and June, such as they are, are given by their parents and cultures and socio-economic statuses and genders, etc. It seems that virtues can be defined as qualities that are not acquired *by the individual*'s effort but are *inculcated* by the individual's tradition.

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

These traits are indeed acquirable and obligatory. Not everyone has equal opportunity to acquire them — moral education is helpful; virtuous parents and teachers are helpful; social conditions wherein vice will not be gratuitously rewarded or virtues gratuitously punished are helpful. Yet every human being has equal responsibility to acquire them.

One of the points we must concede is that farmers, socialites, and lawyers etc. need different levels of theoretical knowledge. Not everyone needs to be "learned." But the concession proves a deeper point: It takes practical wisdom to decide whether or not one can and should – in one's own circumstances – pursue theoretical knowledge. I shall return to this below.

Objection: Is the pursuit of virtue egoistic?

Supposing that virtues *benefit their possessor*, is it then egoistic or selfish to pursue virtue? Although it seems we only need virtue if we want to be happy, everyone has an obligation to develop virtuous traits because virtues help us become who we are. Such a pursuit is not selfish in the pejorative

sense of the word; it is not 'egoism' for the charge of egoism assumes that the good for men is not *the good* per se. But we need not assume this. It may be that the good for men is the good. Pleasure is not the good, though it is *a* good. Moderation is a good as well, and a person who enjoys both the moderate pleasures of life and the moderation of pleasure and pain

Conclusion

Virtues are excellent character traits all rational animals need. The virtuous person takes up all that is given and puts it to good use in the resistance to evils and the pursuit of and sustainance of goods, both in individual life and communal life. The virtuous person discriminates between what is morally significant and insignificant, discriminating in what is significant between what is beneficial and harmful to the actualization of rational animals like us.

Vices are corruptions of life that are all-too-common. They are negative or destructive traits to which one is tempted somewhere in the common course of human life. Pleasures tempt us to immoderation; the urges to do favors for friends or to slight enemies tempt us to injustice; danger, difficulty, and other kinds of resistance tempt us to cowardice and *acedia*; laziness, arrogance, and culpable ignorance tempt us to practical foolishness.

Even if this account of neo-Aristotelian virtue is plausible, several questions remain. Let us to queue up the questions to be addressed in a later chapter.

Setting up Remaining Chapters

1. **What is our telos?**. The first point is that virtues bring about (and partly constitute a "pre-payment" on) eudaimonia. So we would need to say more about our telos and what it would be like to have it realized. Although it seems to be merely pleasure or worldly success, and though I shall define it more later, I mean generally "well-being", true happiness, human success as such.
2. **Can virtues be put to bad use?** Virtues are necessarily good for human beings as such. But some of the qualities the moral tradition picks out as virtues can be conceived as being put to bad use. So can virtues remain virtues while in bad use? Although it seems that virtuous traits cannot be put to bad use, some virtues admit of misuse since the absence

of practical wisdom renders traits (like moderation) that really are virtues ineffective at the realization of our human telos. This will require a discussion of practical wisdom.

3. **Are the virtues human or cultural?** Virtues must be derived from human nature and exemplify excellence in human nature. But still must all such human actions and excellence be mediated by culture, by "second nature"? Although it seems they are cultural, they are 'human traits' in that they express human nature. MacIntyre does not basis virtue enough in metaphysical biology; Foot bases it too much in metaphysical biology; McDowell bases virtue in reason but does not explain the relation of reason to metaphysical biology. Foot is closest to my view, but I supplement her view with arguments to the effect that normativity (including teleology) is built-in to nature as a whole, not just humanity.
4. **Can the virtuous person be irrational?** Relatedly, virtues are supposed to be actions "in accord" with reason and in accord with human nature. This suggests that the virtuous person cannot be irrational. Although it seems that the virtuous person can be irrational, the virtuous person is by definition rational either (in the primary sense) by reflectively endorsing their own reasons for action in every or almost every significant life pursuit or (in a derivative but no less real sense) by acting in accordance with good reasons, either on good advice from another or on their own, unreflective, habitual, reasons. Practical wisdom, then, has pride of place. There are other virtues besides practical wisdom; Socrates was wrong there. And Maggie Little is wrong to suggest that virtue is knowledge *and nothing more*.[87] But it is correct that wisdom has pride of place. Courage without wisdom ceases even to be courage. This will also require a discussion of practical wisdom. And to that task we now turn.

87. Margaret Olivia Little, "Virtue as Knowledge: Objections from the Philosophy of Mind," in *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*, ed. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo (Blackwell, 2007), 252–64 It is not totally clear to me from this essay whether she means to suggest this point or not; but the suggestion is there and she does nothing to counteract it.

Chapter 5

Wisdom: Virtue in Excellent, Practically Reasoning, Social Animals

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

I. Introduction

The theme of this dissertation is virtue in relation to practical reason and natural teleology. But my thesis throughout has depended on the *formal* requirement that any account of one of these three must be presented in terms of the other two. 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 presents a theory of practical reason – what it is, what it's worth, and whether it is objective and significant, and what this all implies about nature as a whole.

Questions in Brief

Three sets of questions will occupy us:

I. What is practical reason?

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

II. What is the excellence of practical reason?

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

III. Is practical reason and value objective?

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

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 ϕ or not to ϕ.
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-Aristotelian

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."[3]

The difficulty in defining practical reason is an iteration of the difficulty which I have stated

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

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"[4] or "psychological animals."[5]

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)?[6] 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.

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

5. Bailey, "Animalism."

6. 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.

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.[7]

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:

> …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.[8]

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

7. Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," 552. Cf. MacIntyre, "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?.

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

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."[9]

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.[10]

There is a powerful social and psychological force to the distinction between moral and prudential, other-regarding and self-regarding,[11] altruistic and egoistic[12], benevolent and selfish, conscience and self-love.[13] 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:

9. Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics," 174.

10. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

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

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

13. 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; Bloomfield, "Virtue and Happiness"; Yong Huang, "The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2010): 651–92.

> 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.'[14]

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'."[15]

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."[16]

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

14. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.
15. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 38.
16. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.

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."[17] 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 actions--but also some of the contexts that he would call "intellectual."[18]

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."[19]

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."[20]. What she calls the "skill analogy" might be taken as

17. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 39.
18. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy."
19. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 57.
20. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 3.

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 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."[21] 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

21. 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*.

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."[22]

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

22. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.

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.[23]

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."[24] If we take philosophical ethics to be reflection on morality as a whole then, on this view, philosophical ethics is reflection on practical rationality. Practical rationality is simply the process of deciding what to do. It is the process of thinking through what to do. Or, in Gibbard's unforgettable phrasing, it is "thinking how to live."[25]

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"

23. 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.

24. Weinstein, *On MacIntyre*, 60–61.

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

with politics, family life, education, and so on. However, it paints in bright and burning colors the distinction between morality as a part of practical reason and practice itself. We are, first, and foremost, practical creatures, not merely moral or moralizing ones.

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

Can practical reasons motivate?

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

Apparent counterexamples that one might furnish to disprove the point actually serve, with sufficient clarification, to reinforce it. For example, someone might say, "It's ridiculous to think that

I always pursue the good, because I sometimes do wrong." Of course, sometimes we do the wrong thing. The proper response is that we perceive the bad as the good. Someone might say, "But sometimes I perceive the bad *as bad* and pursue it anyway." The response is that we sometimes take a bad or dismotivating reason into an overall reason to do something, all things considered.

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

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

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

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

There are many reasons for action. But the concept of a reason for action is the concept of

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

> I entertain the unfriendly suspicion that those who feel they *must* seek more than [the Aristotelian view of practical reason] provides want a scientific theory of rationality not so much for a passion for science, even where there can be no science, but because they hope and desire, by some conceptual alchemy, to turn such a theory into a regulative or normative discipline, or into a system of rules by which to spare themselves some of the agony of thinking and all the torment of feeling and understanding that is actually involved in reasoned deliberation.[26]

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,

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

economic, social, and biological reasons to keep such a powerful force within safe bounds. Morally, moral authorities from Moses, Cicero, Socrates, St. Paul, Confucius, Epicurus, Thomas Aquinas, and many more urge chastity and conjugal fidelity. The Mosaic law condemns adulterers to death but if an unmarried man sleeps with an unmarried woman they are not to be punished; they are to marry.

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

David Enoch's recent volume *Taking Morality Seriously* builds a case for moral realism on the basis that moral realism is the best explanation for the moral earnestness which most of us *cannot but help feel*.[27] 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?[28]

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

28. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 63.

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."'[29] The trouble, Foot says, is that we *cannot consistently believe this view.*

> He pointed out that by this account, practical reason, which would concern only the relation of means to ends, would therefore be indifferent to nastiness or even disgracefulness in an agent's purposes. And Quinn asked, in the crucial sentence of the article, *what then would be so important about practical rationality?* In effect he is pointing to our taken-for-granted, barely noticed assumption that practical rationality has the status of a kind of master virtue, in order to show that we cannot in consistency with ourselves think that the Humean account of it is true.[30]

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

29. Quinn, "Rationality and the Human Good," from the abstract.%.
30. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 62.

> 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.[31]

As for John McDowell, we saw in the last chapter his view of practical reason. He agrees that it is really a mode of *reason* (though neither reason nor practical reason are "objective" in the sense that they can hope for a sideways-on view of ourselves or a truly universal "view from nowhere" of the world). Furthermore, the judgments about what to do in this or that particular situation are inseparable from the overall "moral outlook" by which one lives and reflects upon the all-important question of "Character Ethics": "How should one live?"[32] 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.[33]

III. Wisdom: The Excellence of Practical Reasoning

Is practical wisdom the excellence of practical reason?

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

31. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 6.
32. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 331.
33. Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," sec. 2.

us are *excellent* human beings.

The virtue of practical reason is, not surprisingly, practical wisdom. *Yet practical wisdom is strange and likely to be misunderstand: it is both theoretical (aiming at knowing what's true) and practical (aiming at what to do). To co-opt a phrase from Alan Gibbard:*[34] *our activity of practical reasoning is "thinking how to live."*[35] *So practical wisdom is knowing how to live, and* really knowing* it. Stated this way, it is easy to see why some have argued that practical wisdom is the *only* virtue. If one knows exactly how to live, in each circumstance, in each challenge, according to proper reasons, and for proper motives, what more to virtue could there be? Maggie Little[36] argues that virtue is a species of knowledge; John McDowell[37] argues something similar.* So why bother dividing up various virtues?

I do not think Aristotle himself was perfectly clear on this point. Though he divides up intellectual virtues into prudence, science, intellect, judgment, understanding, deliberation, and so on (Greek: phronesis, sophia, nous, gnome, sunesis, eubolia respectively), and though he says that prudence (knowledge about changing particulars) is inferior to wisdom (science about unchanging universals), nevertheless he says the absence of prudence ruins all other aspiring virtues.[38]

Our human nature as dependent practical reasoners demonstrates why prudence or *phronesis* is the master virtue. For *Phronesis* complements every other moral virtue. MacIntyre defends Aristotle's conception of the practical syllogism. For example, *I ought to do (the courageous thing of) resisting a student's attempt to bribe me for a higher grade. This student is attempting to bribe me for a higher grade. Therefore,*

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

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

36. Little, "Virtue as Knowledge."

37. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason."

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

in this case, I ought to do (the courageous thing of) resisting this student's attempt to bribe me. The major premise here is an evaluative judgment about a virtue or action-type; the minor premise is a factuaion judgment about a situation or action-token; the conclusion is a *maxim*. It is a judgment but not merely a judgment; it is *an action*. Each piece of the practical syllogism is needed for the whole to function in practice. For without moral virtues, prudence may be knowledge of what one ought to do but it does not entail that one is in the habit of actually doing it. And, more crucially, without prudence, the moral virtues are simply skills – skills that might be serviceable to bad ends. Without prudence, one might be skilled in achieving *what is not to be done*.

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

Is practical wisdom a moral virtue or intellectual virtue?

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

A fourth, and potentially confusing, reason is that practical wisdom is both a "moral virtue" and an "intellectual virtue". As Foot points out, out of the four Greek cardinal virtues (moderation, courage, justice, practical wisdom) only justice is obviously "moral" in our usual sense of "other-regarding" traits. Moderation, courage, and practical wisdom more smoothly fit into the "self-regarding" category; practical wisdom fits most smoothly of all into the category of virtues of mind. While there is a growing branch of intellectual virtue ethics within the budding virtue ethics tree, practical wisdom seems to partake of both qualities. The dual nature of practical wisdom is likely to be even easier to misunderstand than other traditional virtues.

Furthermore, practical wisdom is both an intellectual and moral virtue; it is admirable as a

means to further virtues and other kinds of goods but also admirable in and of itself; an essential part of other moral virtues and a gateway to other intellectual virtues.

As Rosalind Hursthouse says:

> Aristotle makes a number of specific remarks about phronesis that are the subject of much scholarly debate, but the (related) modern concept is best understood by thinking of what the virtuous morally mature adult has that nice children, including nice adolescents, lack. Both the virtuous adult and the nice child have good intentions, but the child is much more prone to mess things up because he is ignorant of what he needs to know in order to do what he intends.[39]

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

> Amongst the morally relevant features of a situation may be the likely consequences, for the people involved, of a certain action, and this is something that adolescents are notoriously clueless about precisely because they are inexperienced. It is part of practical wisdom to be wise about human beings and human life. (It should go without saying that the virtuous are mindful of the consequences of possible actions. How could they fail to be reckless, thoughtless and short-sighted if they were not?)[40]

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

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

Kant admits the apparent inconsistency in radically dividing speculative or theoretical reason from practical reason: >Here first is explained the enigma of the critical philosophy, viz. :how we deny objective reality to the supersensible use of the categories in speculation and yet admit this

39. Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," sec. 2.
40. Ibid., sec. 2.

reality with respect to the objects of pure practical reason. This must at first seem inconsistent as long as this practical use is only nominally known.[41]

Is practical wisdom the only virtue?

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

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

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

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

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

Is practical reason subjective or expressivistic, like taste?

Can moral reasons satisfy the "practical requirement" with regard to morality? Expressivism is motivated in large part by the attempt to satisfy the *practical* dimension of practical reason (at the

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

cost of the "rational" part).

> Expressivism in this form suggests a naturalistic interpretation of practical reason, one that may seem appropriate to the enlightened commitments of the modern scientific world view. It is naturalistic metaphysically, insofar as it makes no commitment to the objective existence in the world of such allegedly questionable entities as values, norms, or reasons for action.[42]

> The basic commitment of realism in this domain is the idea that there are facts of the matter about what we have reason to do that are prior to and independent of our deliberations, to which those deliberations are ultimately answerable. Realists picture practical reason as a capacity for reflection about an objective body of normative truths regarding action (Parfit 2011, Scanlon 2014).[43]

Thomas Nagel takes "the realist position… that our responses try to reflect the evaluative truth and can be correct or incorrect by reference to it."[44] The case for the objectivity of practical reason is one Nagel has been polishing for decades.

It begans by observing that moral realism is our default view. Pre-reflectiviely, most of us have no objection to the seeming fact that some reasons for acting are good reasons, and others bad. Some primary normative facts, such as that is wrong torture animals have a very strong, "quasi-analytic" force to them.[45] If moral realism is a "defeasible presumption"[46] then the burden of proof lies with its opponents.

The alternative to moral realism is "subjectivism,"[47] which is placeholder term for expressivisms, quasi-realism, moral nihilism, constructivism, and any view that makes "evaluative and

42. Wallace, "Practical Reason."

43. Ibid., sec. 2.

44. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 98–99; cf. Nagel, "Ethics as an Autonomous Theoretical Subject."

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

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

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

moral truth depend on our motivational dispositions and responses."[48]

Mackie value is subjective

John Mackie's classic essay argues that "there are no objective values" (13).[49] Mackie admits that "the main tradition of European moral philosophy" accepts objective moral values. He admits that moral thought and language assumes it. Appearances suggest that values are indeed part of the "fabric of the world"; that they are categorically obligating and motivating; and that being a moral person in part is constituted by the recognition and proper response to such values. The objectivity of (some) moral values is, in short, a "defeasible presumption."[50] In spite of all this, Mackie thinks it is possible and needful to debunk objective morality and to show that values are subjective. His two arguments aim to bear the burdon of proof on subjectivism. Values like goodness, rightness, wrongness, and also beauty or ugliness are "not part of the fabric of the world" (13). This claim has two parts. The ontological part is that objective values simply do not exist. Put differently, there is no "categorically imperative element" to moral oughts (15). There are no entities in the world such that I ought to do X or not do Y regardless of my desires, contingent wants and needs. The epistemological part is that, even if they did, our epistemic access to them would require the existence of a *sui generis* mysterious faculty of moral perception. Since no such faculty exists, we are justified in rejection the existence of objective values. Furthermore, disagreement about objective value and "queerness" of putatively objective values renders their existence less likely. It is more likely that *we* "objectify" our valuings onto the world by our thought and language. Hence, right and wrong are invented.

The first positive argument for Mackie's thesis is the argument from relativity (which I shall call the argument from disagreement). The argument from relativity or disagreement is this: moral

48. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 98–99.

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

50. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*.

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

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

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

Mackie is seriously misguided here. The argument from disagreement has been so often deployed and so widely misunderstood it is hard to know where to start.[51] There are two possible

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

challenges, and I think both are justified.[52] The first is to deny that disagreement is so widespread as to be a massive problem for moral realism. The second is that even if there *were* widespread variation in moral codes between people and societies, that we should not necessarily take that as reason to be skeptical about moral values.

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

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

The case of philosophical disagreement is even more clear. Some philosophical disputes certainly will never be resolved by adequate empirical evidence: Is idealism or empiricism or platonism true, or something else? The persistance of adherents to all three schools of thought for the last 2000 years (at least) shows that such disputes are ongoing and not likely to be resolved. The dilemma is that if ideological disagreement is evidence that there is no fact of the matter — no objective truth — then perhaps Mackie can use moral disagreement as evidence that there is no objective value. But if he allows, say, that platonism is false and empiricism true (despite the enduring existence of platonists), then he has to allow that (say) societies that endorse slavery are morally mistaken while those who reject it are accurately assessing the relevant objective values.

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

A further buttress to this reply is that moral disagreement is evidence that some values are objective. People don't argue over what is truly subjective and known to be so ("I feel sick." "No, you feel don't, you feel quite well!").[53] People only argue over what is objective and difficult to answer (like is the center of the earth liquid or solid?)

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

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

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

Thankfully, Mackie does not spend too much time elaborating on this paper thin reply and

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

moves on to the argument from queerness. We can concede the point. It is true that we make immediate responses more often than thoughtful moral judgments. What is that supposed to prove? For example, perhaps we hear a news story about a woman beating, scalding, suffocating, and finally murdering her children before storing their corpses in a freezer.[^3] That immediately strikes us as cruel, sick, degraded, disgusting, and wrong. Whether this response is the logical extension of a moral principle I reflectively endorse (such as "parents should care for their children") or merely a pre-reflectively, visceral attitude is irrelevant to whether the moral judgment accurately reflects the objective value of parental love.

A third point that makes the Moral Agreement Reply even stronger: Some moral codes (both general and specific) are well-nigh universal. For instance, the universal prohibition on incestuous relationships, the universal censure on immoderation (drunkenness or alcoholism are condemned in every society in the world), the universal approbation of justice and compassion, specifically caring for the poor, the abandoned, the orphans, and many more.[54] These moral laws are not general but rather specific; they are not parochial but appear in dramatically different cultures at all known historical periods. The best explanation for such widespread, profound moral agreement is that all parties are apprised of the same objective values.

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

Anyone who has long engaged in dialectical disputes over the various answer to the normative question of how to live well eventually comes to ask a secondary question: is there even any truth to be found? Are there any 'right answers' in ethics? Is there anything to all this discussion

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

besides gas? Some worry that ethics has no 'right answers' because it is all just intuition-pumping. Some people view ethics as too easy because it is only a discussion of one's opinion.

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

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

The second is Aristotle's, that ethics is *a different sort of science* because it has a *different subject matter* to which it must correspond. He says, "For a well schooled man is wanting searches for that degree of precision in each kind of study which the nature of the subject at hand admits: is obviously just as foolish to accept arguments of probability from a mathematician has to demand strict demonstrations from an orator."[55]

By the traditional classification, ethics is a form of philosophy. Russ Shafer-Landau persuasively argues this simple equation in defense of moral realism[56] but the point has broader import. If ethics is *not* a species of philosophy, it is something else entirely. Perhaps it is a species of psychology, politics, or evolutionary anthrpology. Such a categorization assumes, at the outset, that power prevails over truth. But to concede that there are no right answers in ethics, that ethical philosophers have no hope of finding any ethical truth is to give up on ethics as a discipline.

So suppose ethics is a species of philosophy. The indirect answer is another question: Are there 'right answers' in philosophy? Isn't the relation of philosophy in general to ethics in particular the relation of genus to species? This is the relation Russ Shafer-Landau argues for.[57] So the fate of

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

56. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, *Foundations of Ethics*, 2007 ethics.

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

ethical claims or ethical theories hangs on the fate of philosophical claims and theories as a whole. If we are philosophical optimists at all — if we are not total skeptics or nihilists — then we can be ethical optimists.

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

The second positive argument is the argument from queerness. The argument from queerness builds on the sense that "if there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe" (19). Objective values would be esoterica, akin to non-natural qualities, Plato's transcendent Form of Good. They would be (like divine commands from heaven) authoritatively prescriptive yet empirically unverifiable. (Mackie is as poetic as possible in making the descriptive seem mundane and the prescriptive seem mystical.) What's more, their power of categorical commendation, of obligating us to act in certain ways irrespective of our desires, is utterly unique. The reasoning seems to be that we assume the world is a unified whole, and we know a lot about spatio-temporal, physical entities, include evolved animals like ourselves who are language-users, concept-users, and evaluators. We know that we are motivated by our desires, preferences, by the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. So it seems more reasonable "To ask no more of the world than we already know is there—the ordinary features of things on the basis of which we make decisions about them, like or dislike them, fear them and avoid them, desire them and seek them out. It asks no more than this: a natural world, and patterns of reaction to it."[58] It does not seem necessary to posit abstract, non-physical entities that have no intrinsic relation to our other psychological states such as our desires and approvals.

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

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

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

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

The success of the objection that objective values are not saliently different from other unobjectionable abstract entities or concepts like necessity or causation depends on the details. Russ Shafer-Landau[59], Terence Cuneo[60], David Enoch[61] have each recently provided these details and shown (though I shall not try to show it here) that indeed objective values are not any more objectionable than other kinds of abstract objects. For example, Cuneo argues that whatever "objectionable features" moral norms display are also displayed *inter alia* by epistemic norms. If Mackie is an 'epistemic skeptic' then he must deny the intrinsic, categorical, reason-giving force of such epistemic value judgments as *you ought to believe whatever proposition is supported by the best evidence.* But to deny such epistemic reasons is absurd.

The epistemological part of the argument from queerness is that objective values, if they existed, would be known through an utterly unique and correspondingly queer faculty (19). He doesn't just mean they would be unverifiable empirically (that too). He means that it is difficult to imagine how something like Plato's Form of the Good could be such that "knowledge of it provides

59. Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*, 4 (Oxford University Press, 2003).
60. Terence Cuneo, *The Normative Web* (Oxford University Press, 2007).
61. Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*.

the knower with both a direction and an overriding motive; something's being good both tells the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it… the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it" (20). But, Mackie thinks, Hume has successfully argued that reasons (instances of knowing that p) cannot be "reasons" (instances of motivating to act). The notion that values and disvalues intrinsically influence the will to pursue and avoid them postulates "value-features of quite a different order from anything else with which we are acquainted, and of a corresponding faculty with which to detect them" (20).

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

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

Now this reply is certainly too pugnacious. Mackie's argument is influential and expresses, in compressed form, some widespread beliefs that he defends at greater length elsewhere, and that others defended. But it is true that objective values seem incommensurate with metaphysical naturalism, or physicalism, or scientism. My point is that if both parties express personal incredulity, the result is a philosophical stalemate. One who is firmly convinced of scientism might express (as

Mackie does) a dismay at the possibility of objective value; but one who is firmly convinced of objective value might express dismay at the hypothesis of scientism. Absent further support for the belief that all of the universe is *nothing more* than a manifold of physical objects, these two are expressions of dismay are equally valid and therefore equally useless.

Christine Korsgaard offers a different substantive reply to the argument from queerness. She concedes that categorically-obligating entities are *different* from other entities, but denies the suggestion that they therefore do not exist. She says: "It's true that they are queer sorts of entities and that knowing them isn't like anything else. But that doesn't mean that they don't exist…. For it is the most familiar fact of human life that the world contains entities that can tell us what to do and make us do it. They are people, and the other animals."[62] This reply seems to me right.

Finally, Mark Timmons has clarified one part of Mackie's argument to be the worry that the supervenience of moral properties on non-moral properties (such as biological or psychological ones) is somehow mysterious.[63] In response, Russ Shafer-Landau has offered compelling arguments that such supervenience is no more or less objectionable than the supervenience of higher-order natural properties (like life) on lower-order natural properties (like certain cellular or molecular structures).[64] (Shafer-Landau also critiques the Humean theory of psychology that underlies part of Mackie's worry about queerness.[65])

In short, though the argument from queerness raises interesting and important questions, these questions do not amount to objections to the existence of objective value but rather they are invitations to investigate questions in metaphysics, psychology, and epistemology surrounding objective value.

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

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

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

65. ibid., , chapter 5.

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

Mackie clarifies that all the psychological activities of wanting, preferring, valuing, praising, blaming and so on are *subjective* in the sense that *subjects* perform them, but that to concede this is not does not entail that there are no objective values. Rather, even though *subjects* want, prefer, value, praise, and blame, it has been thought that subjects attempt to do so *in appropriate response to* objective values. Objective values so to speak obligate* certain responses (such as respect for elders, and hatred of evil) and categorically provide reason for certain actions (such as doing your duty or avoiding cruelty). It has been the "main tradition of European moral philosophy includes [the claim] that there are objective values of just the sort I have denied" (15).[66] These values are assumed or argued to exist as part of the "fabric of the world" and to be knowable.

Surprisingly, Mackie sets himself to subvert not only the "main tradition" of moral philosophy but to subvert that which has "a firm basis in ordinary thought, and even in the meanings of moral terms" (16). He admits that ordinary moral judgments and ordinary moral emotions (we might simply call them *ordinary emotions*) are only intelligible on the assumption that objective moral values exist. Confirmation comes from the admitted psychological cost of the denial of objective values, which is "an extreme emotional reaction, a feeling that nothing matters at all, that life has lost its purpose" (17). And confirmation seems to come from the cost of denying that our moral terms

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

refer, which is the need to provide a comprehensive non-cognitivist or non-descriptivist theory of the pragmatics of moral talk (16). Mackie thinks the cost of these subversions, though high, ought to be paid.

Response from Nagel

According to Nagel, subjectivism derives what plausibility it has from two contentions, neither of which is enough to render it more plausible than realism: first, subjectivists contend that value judgments with objective purport are *really* just masks for subjective psychological states. Nagel concedes that some "pockets of… subjectivity" seem objective but can be "unmasked", such as grammar and etiquette.[67] However, we cannot justifiably explain these unmaskings by assuming that *all* seemingly objective judgments are *really* subjective. Instead, such unmaskings ought to be accommodated within an overall view of objectivity.

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

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

> I remain convinced that pain is really bad, and not just something we hate, and that pleasure is really good, and not just something we like. That is just how they glaringly seem to me, however hard I try to imagine the contrary, and I suspect the same is true of most people… the scientific credentials of Darwinism… are not enough to dislodge the immediate conviction that objectivity is not an illusion with respect to basic judgments of value.[68]

67. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 155.
68. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 110.

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

> … No more of the world than we already know is there—the ordinary features of things on the basis of which we make decisions about them, like or dislike them, fear them and avoid them, desire them and seek them out. It asks no more than this: a natural world, and patterns of reaction to it.[69]

I shall return to this objection below.

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

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

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

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

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

> constructivism (Korsgaard 1997, Street 2008, Street 2010). This approach denies that practical reason is a capacity for reflection about an objective domain of independent normative facts; but it equally rejects the expressivist's naturalistic suspicion of normativity. According to the constructivist, practical reason is governed by genuine normative constraints, but what makes these constraints normative is precisely their relation to the will of the agents whose decisions they govern. The principles of practical reason are constitutive principles of rational agency, binding on us insofar as we necessarily commit ourselves to complying with them in willing anything at all. The realm of the normative, on this approach, is not pictured as a body of truths or facts that are prior to and independent of the will; rather, it is taken to be 'constructed' by agents through their own volitional activity.[70]

69. Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*.
70. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 2.

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

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

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

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

Tradition-constituted rationality was supposed to explain why practices can vary between people and traditions that both claim to be rational and believe the rival to be irrational; the process of switching between traditions explains, from within a tradition, one can rationally adjudicate these disagreements. This is why *practical rationality* is so important for MacIntyre's theory of *virtue.*[71]

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

MacIntyre on Tradition-Constituted Reason

To solve the problem at the center of this labrynth, we shall turn to MacIntyre. Arguably, the primary theme of MacIntyre's work has not been virtue but practical rationality.[72] For MacIntyre

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

72. Weinstein, *On MacIntyre*, 60.

– as for Bernard Williams[73] – morality should not be seen as a special domain of practical life but the whole practical domain.[74] But 'rationality' is something we are raised in, and is constituted by our tradition.

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

More interestingly, it means that each of us (intellectuals at least) owe our conceptual resources to a tradition. What is a tradition? "A living tradition . . . is an historically extended, socially embodied argument…"[75]. The content of a tradition is partly self-reflexive: it is "… an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition." Traditions derive from a source text and continue across generations via normal sociological channels (schools, friendships, political institutions, etc.). So, by MacIntyre's lights, history-writing is a tradition. It is rooted in source texts such as Herodotus, Thucydides, and Gibbon and extending through Europe and the western world, consisting of a series of historical and historiographical arguments over not just "what happened" but how to conduct historical enquiry.

As MacIntyre says, "We, whoever we are, can only begin enquiry from the vantage point afforded by our relationship to some specific social and intellectual past through which we have affiliated ourselves to some particular tradition of enquiry, extending the history of that enquiry into the present …"[76] The tradition of enquiry we inhabit gives us not only abstract standards of reasoning but also facts, connections, concepts, and the very language we speak. Rationality,

73. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* Chater 1.

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

75. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

76. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 401.

for MacIntyre, is inclusive of all the resources by which we judge true and false. Rationality itself as tradition-constituted and tradition-constituting. The resources I receive from my tradition are resources I may prune, discard, modify, or add to. What tradition we are a part of makes a great deal of difference to how we conduct moral inquiry.

Tradition and rationality are bound up together. He discovered this partially through his study of ethics. As a young philosopher, he was troubled about emotivism in particular and modern metaethics in general. Emotivists, intuitionists, naturalists, and error theorists all seemed to assume that moral terms are *referential.* If moral terms within moral judgments are supposed to pick out a property in the world, then either we must identify that property or (if we cannot) conclude that moral terms are literally meaningless. He argued that this assumption is a mistake. Instead, he concluded that the significance of moral judgments is that "they enable us to solve problems of appraisal and of action."[77] Instead of referring (or failing to refer) to a special 'moral property', all evaluative reasoning is practical reasoning. We employ moral judgments when we must evaluate something or when we must reason about what to do. Moral reasoning is not a special, mystical discipline divorced from prudential, instrumental, and other kinds of practical reasoning. Hence, there can be no adequate theory of ethics apart from a theory of (practical) rationality.

In regards to relativism, tradition-constituted rationality was supposed to explain why practices can vary between people and traditions that both claim to be rational and believe the rival to be irrational; the process of switching between traditions explains, from within a tradition, one can rationally adjudicate these disagreements. This is why *practical rationality* is so important for MacIntyre's theory of *virtue.* For MacIntyre, virtues are relative to practices; practices are relative to traditions; traditions are relative to conceptions of rationality. His answer to this worry is, I believe, the crux of his whole theory of ethics.

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

Rival traditions, rival rationalities

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

MacIntyre's answer is that we can rationally adjudicate between traditions (from within a tradition). We can justify or "switch" from our primary tradition. The means we have of "switching" traditions are these: first, one undergoes an epistemological crisis in which one identifies the inadequacies of a primary tradition; and secondly, to "exercise… a capacity for philosophical imagination"[78] and identify the resources of a rival tradition. We must empathetically engage with our rivals as if we are learning a "second first language." He says:

> For each of us, therefore, the question now is: To what issues does that particular history bring us in contemporary debate? What resources does our particular tradition afford in this situation? Can we by means of those resources understand the achievements and successes, and the failures and sterilities, of rival traditions more adequately than their own adherents can? More adequately by our own standards? More adequately also by theirs? It is insofar as the histories narrated in this book lead on to answers to these questions that they also hold promise of answering the questions: Whose justice? Which rationality?"[79]

Three rival versions

MacIntyre picks up the theme of tradition-constituted rationality. His most thorough treatment of the theme of rival traditions is the (1990) Gifford Lectures.[80] There he presents 'genealogy,' 'encyclopedia', and a third version he simply calls 'tradition' but I will call 'Thomism.' These three rivals are defined by their respective attitudes toward the past. Genealogists (such as Nietzsche and

78. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* .

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

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

Foucault) use the past to subvert and "debunk" the present. Stephen Lutz summarizes the three uses the "Nietzschean research program" has for history:

> (1) to reduce academic history to a projection of the concerns of modern historians, (2) to dissipate the identity of the historian into a collection of inherited cultural influences, and (3) to undermine the notion of "progress towards truth and reason" (3RV, pp. 49-50). In short, genealogy denies the teleology of human enquiry by denying (1) that historical enquiry has been fruitful, (2) that the enquiring person has a real identity, and (3) that enquiry has a real goal. MacIntyre finds this mode of enquiry incoherent.[81]

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

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

Genealogists think, in advance, that no one in the future will use the present as a foundation.Encyclopedists think, in advance, that no one in the future will ever be able to transcend the present; they think we have *arrived*. Now, modernity is an encyclopedic tradition. It was the tradition MacIntyre was raised in. It is the tradition I was raised in, as (I presume) were my readers. So, by MacIntyre's lights, we are "encyclopedists." Our source texts are Hume, Kant, Newton, Locke, and others. Ours is an argument extended through time and socially embedded in the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and parts of western Europe.[82]

81. Lutz, "Alasdair MacIntyre."

82. Modernity has political, scientific, religious, and philosophical aspects; it is indeed *encyclopedic*. The intellectual tradition of modernity arises alongside the rise of the modern state. We do well to remember that almost all the luminaries of Enlightenment philosophy also wrote on politics: Mill's ethical writings are almost always written with an eye to reforming civil law; Kant wrote the three *Critiques* but also the *Perpetual Peace*; John Locke wrote about perception and understanding but also treatises on government.

MacIntyre followed his own advice. As a member of the modern tradition, he reflected on it. He gradually discovered its inadequacies and searched for resources from his rivals. His attempt to trace the root of the mistake about moral judgments lead him to a mistake at the heart of Enlightenment modernity. As a social, political, and moral project, the Enlightenment has been, MacIntyre argues, a failure by its own standards. Not only is moral discourse largely devoted to moral disagreement, but it is largely soaked in despair of ever reaching agreement. Moral discourse with its interminable moral disagreement retains the rhetorical *trappings* of rationality and objectivity while denying rationality and objectivity. Neither side wants to give up the *appearance* of having a dialectical case for its value theory. One of his most memorable and oft-cited images compares modern moral discourse to the hypothetical state of scientific discourse in a post-apocalyptic catastrophe. Only decaying fragments of intelligible moral discourse survive.[83] The picture here captures the state of moral discourse. But an obvious symptom of the decay of moral discourse and social unity is interminable ethical disagreement.[84] An explanation of this disagreement is that we are trying to get by using the scraps of a previous and whole moral tradition. MacIntyre thinks this version of rational enquiry, like genealogy, incoherent by its own standards. Nevertheless "it still exercises an extraordinary influence on contemporary thought and on university curricula."[85] The problem

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

84. Ibid., 6.

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

with modernity is not merely academic. The social and political fabric is woven from the thread of morality, so many of the ills of modern life can be traced to our inability to share a substantive conception of the good and the good life.

There are many modern philosophers who have gone into similar crises and become distrustful thought, language, and rationality itself; they join the "masters of suspicion."[86] MacIntyre took a surprising course. Moved by Thomas Kuhn's influential work on the structure of revolution between various paradigms in the natural sciences[87] he speculated that a similar structure might obtain in moral revolutions?[88] This in turn lead MacIntyre to recover the tradition of virtues. But virtues are not free-floating moral concepts; they are embedded in a specific, living, moral tradition – the Aristotelian tradition. And the Aristotelian tradition includes a particular notion of practical rationality.

Is tradition-constituted rationality coherent?

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

MacIntyre would have us believe that 'rationality' is not a disembodied set of timeless and universal procedures of thinking. My rationality includes whatever standards of reasoning I accept, and all the other resources (facts, authorities, memories) I use to judge true and false. I already

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

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

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

responded to worries presented above about whether rationalities are ultimately incommensurable. The fact that people can, and do, identify inconsistencies with their own tradition, identify the resources of rival traditions, and switch traditions.

Even after clarifying MacIntyre's optimism about the possibility of ethical truth, his answer to relativism is sufficient but still somehow indeterminate. This indeterminacy is partly due, as I have suggested, to his appeal to practical rationality. While this appeal seems to me to solve some problems, there is one lingering problem it does not solve. From my perspective (or my tradition), *every legitimate tradition* affirms the law of non-contradiction. But that is just to say that if Walt Whitman or Nagarjuna denies the law of non contradiction, then I will necessarily judge them to be irrational.[89] But I wish to go further and say that this strand of Buddhism *really is irrational*. That is, I wish to affirm that they are irrational – full stop. I am not sure MacIntyre's theory allows me to affirm that. Unless I am missing something crucial here, this seems to me a limitation of the theory.

Perhaps a qualified acceptance of MacIntyre's claim about tradition-constituted rationality is that when a tradition does not *seem* share this standard of rationality (the value of logical consistency) I should not be too quick to judge that I have really understood their meaning. Perhaps when I ask them if they affirm (S is P and S is not P) they have a slightly different concept in mind for "not" or for "and." Or perhaps they are speaking of an entity instantiating a property and not instantiating that same property at the same time but in ever so slightly different respects. Walt Whitman may be saying he contradicts himself in ever so slightly different respects in order to grasp apparently paradoxical truths that can be predicated of a transcendental modern man. Or perhaps they are denying both P and not P in favor of some other, different articulation of the predicates a given subject instantiates. In the case of any of these alternatives, the principle of charity recom-

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

mends I extend my interlocutor the benefit of the doubt before concluding that the appearance of irrationality reflects real irrationality.

Is tradition-constituted rationality clear?

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

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

MacIntyre's definition makes answering these questions difficult. He characterizes a tradition as "separate and unified when its members or texts have a core set of shared commitments to beliefs, when the tradition is situated in a particular context in a particular set of institutions and when the tradition has an identifiable linguistic difference when compared to other traditions."[90] But is there any universal procedure for identifying such linguistic and institutional differences?

The right response to this call for clarification, I think, comes from Weinstein. We should not expect, by MacIntyre's lights, that there is an automatically objective, view-from-nowhere by which we can define tradition itself. Rather, MacIntyre concludes that "the concept of a tradition, together with the criteria for its use and application, is itself one developed from within one particular tradition-based standpoint. This does not preclude its application to the very tradition within which

90. Weinstein, *On MacIntyre*, 83.

it was developed."[91] MacIntyre grants that his self-definition of his own tradition arises, in part, from his criteria of that tradition. Traditions change over time. They progress (according to their own unchanging standards) toward unchanging goals or else they abandon old standards. This is liable to frustrate some readers. But the alternative is worse. The alternative is a denial of pluralism that liberalism holds dear. For it is intellectual imperialism to assume that I have the *real* scoop on every other tradition. It assumes I have the right to define and critique all other traditions *in my own terms.* Even though MacIntyre thinks his own tradition correct, and others incorrect, this is not imperialistic. For he is willing to reflect on his own tradition, examine its resources and inadequacies, and engage through philosophical imagination with rivals.

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

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

Some of the errors MacIntyre diagnoses in thinkers who belong to encyclopedic tradition

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

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

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

Is tradition-constituted rationality relativistic?

Once the concept of tradition is clarified, how can MacIntyre avoid the charge of relativism at this level? According to MacIntyre's account, members of traditions can leave their primary tradition

after undergoing an epistemological crisis. Remember that varying traditions can disagree about a proposition P. Perhaps tradition A finds P true and B finds it false, on best evidence and sufficient reflection. But incommensurable traditions disagree about the standards (say, S1 and S2) by which to judge the truth and even the rationality of other traditions. So A finds P true and rational (by S1) while B finds P false and irrational (by S2). They genuinely disagree. And A judges B to be irrational (since they deny that P) while B returns the favor (since A affirms that P).

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

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

The odd conclusion of this thought experiment is a dilemma: either such nonsense is possible, or embracing the law of non-contradiction is a universal standard of rationality in every tradition. The latter option seems to indicate that traditions A and B are *not* actually incommensurable,

since they share one rather substantial presupposition. The flow of members from one to the other is intelligible. The former option allows A and B to be incommensurable, but seems to freeze members in their own tradition. Members of A would have no (rational) justification for joining B, while members of B would have no (rational) justification for leaving B. So either all traditions are the same (in which case MacIntyre's definition is unclear) or some people are in principle locked in their own tradition (in which case one kind of relativism is final).

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

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

MacIntyre accepts – indeed, argues for – a certain truth within relativism. That truth is that every enquirer seeks the conclusion of the enquiry at a particular time and place, within a particular social setting, within a language, and within a tradition. Following Lutz, we can say that MacIntyre accepts "relativity". Relativity (a term borrowed from Michael Krausz[92]) is a thesis about *the condition of enquiry*. It is not a thesis about the *conclusion of enquiry*. Lutz approves of Mark Colby's statement that "argumentative situatedness is inescapable."[93] However such relative situatedness is compatible with objective or absolute or mind-independent or tradition-independent *truth*.

Returning to Rorty's claim, we can say that MacIntyre agrees that "nothing can be said about… rationality" except what is taken as rational in a given society and tradition; where he disagrees is in equating rationality with *truth*. From the historically- and socially-situated position of enquiry, a philosopher (he argues) may indeed find truth. It is impossible to achieve objective or absolute or tradition-independent *rationality* but it is possible – indeed, it is the hope and telos of enquiry – to achieve objective *truth*. This may seem a paradox.

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

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

The primary kind of truth we seek in enquiry is "the adequation of the mind to reality."[94] This is the understanding of truth inherent in the Aristotelian tradition.[95] Aristotle says, "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true."[96] Aquinas calls this the adequation of the intellect to the object.

However, 'truth' is ambiguous across at least two senses: a metaphysical, substantive sense and an epistemological, logical sense. The metaphysical sense of truth is simply reality. "Truth" is being itself. The logical sense of truth (which MacIntyre alludes to here) is the adequation of the intellect to those beings. Logical "truth" is knowing the (metaphysical) truth.[97]

If we understand MacIntyre to be arguing or assuming that (logical) truth is adequation of mind to reality, we can make sense of his endorsement of "relativity". Rationality is something more pragmatic than truth, something more like "warranted assertability."[98] That is, the theories we rationally construct are, for us, the "best theory so far."[99] It is no contradiction or paradox to assert that our rationality is the best thus far but that others in the future (or the past, or in rival traditions) might be *closer* to the truth.

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

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

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

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

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

99. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

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

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

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

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre explicitly retracts his earlier belief that virtues exist without a unity under prudence.[100] The consequences of this retraction, Lutz argues, are crucial to refuting the charge of relativism. If virtues are unified, then even though virtues exist only in the context of practices, "no genuine practice can be inherently evil."[101] Rather, practical reason can judge *apparent goods* as genuine goods. The qualities needed for achieving the spurious goods internal to that "practice" would not be virtues but only *apparent virtues*.

Now, such a definition certainly seems ad hoc. But Lutz provides a persuasive illustration: eugenics. Eugenics certainly seems to bear the markings of a genuine practice. Its apparent good is the purification of the gene pool for future generations. However, genuine virtues militate *against* the achievement of that goal. For example, Lutz cites a story of a doctor who had the virtue of compassion found himself unable to pursue the program of euthanizing mentally-disabled children.[102] We might also recall Huck Finn's internal struggle with his "conscience" in Twain's *Adventures of*

100. Ibid. preface, p. x.

101. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 102.

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

Huckleberry Finn. Huck decides to turn Jim in to the slave owners. He writes a letter outing Jim, and says: "I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now." Yet for all that, after vividly confronting Jim's humanity and goodness, he feels the loyalty of their friendship and wavers:

> It was a difficult situation. I picked up the letter, and held it in my hand. I was trembling, because I knew had to make a choice between two things, and the outcome of my decision would last forever. I thought about it a minute while I held my breath. And then I said to myself: "All right, then, I'll GO to hell"—and tore it up.[103]

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

Some might worry that the distinction between apparent goods and actual goods brings with it more problems than it solves. It is certainly a distinction that leaves many questions unanswered. My first reply is that such a distinction is inevitable and necessary in our practical reasoning. Assume for a reductio that "there is no real distinction between apparent and real goods." Then either *nothing* is "actually good" (everything that appears good is just an apparent good) or that *nothing* is "actually bad though it appears good" (everything that appears good is a real good). But I take it as axiomatic and irrefutable that some things are actually good (life, pleasure, happiness, friendship). And some

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

things that appear good are not good: obeying unjust laws, enjoying the misfortune of an enemy, etc. Therefore there is a real distinction between apparent and real goods.

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

MacIntyre's account offers an explanation of why vices sometimes persist within pseudo-practices, institutions, and traditions from generation to generation; on the other hand, it explains why practice-enabling virtues sometimes emerge to disrupt a pseudo-practice, a wicked institution, and a corrupt or at least incomplete tradition. The fact is that "many kinds of activities can be, and in fact are considered to be, practices. Some of these may conflict radically, owing to errors and insufficiencies in rationality."[104] Errors in rationality explain errors in traditions and hence false ascriptions of the title 'virtue.' Rationality answers to truth, to the world as it is, not merely to the pragmatic truth to "dialectical success."[105] Hence, virtues answer to *what is really good*. They do not merely answer to "what-counts-as-good-for-us", which property is relative to each tradition.

In this way, MacIntyre escapes this iteration of the charge of relativism, while still explaining

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

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

A third reply is in order here. D'andrea[106] points out a critique Philippa Foot has leveled against MacIntyre: after all the informative and wide-ranging historical analysis, MacIntyre's account does not solve the "problem posed by Plato, and never solved … that of showing the rationality, for any man, of a thorough-going acceptance of the restraints of justice."[107] The challenge of a Nietzsche or Callicles or Thrasymachus lies in their acceptance that the good life for humans *requires* some virtues or requires virtue in some sense but their rejection of the "robust concept of justice with its corresponding constraints on action."[108]

One response is this: the question "why be moral?" is never asked in the abstract. For example, in describing the "self of the heroic age" MacIntyre says, "In heroic society there is no 'outside' except that of the stranger. A man who tried to withdraw himself from his given position in heroic society would be engaged in the enterprise of trying to make himself disappear."[109] Even though virtues in twenty-first century North America are not what the same as Homer's day, there is a parallel to be drawn.

Philosophers often ask "why be moral?" hypothetically. They ask it *as if* speaking on the skeptic's behalf, or as if *they* were skeptics. But hypothetical moral skeptics will not do. We must consider a concrete character, real or fictional. Once we look for a real or fictional skeptic, a problem

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

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

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

109. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 126.

arises. By MacIntyre's lights, sincere "why be moral?" skeptics are political or social outcasts. For millions of people who are full-fledged members of their tradition, the "why be moral?" question will not usually arise. Parents, teachers, religious leaders, politicians, businesses, and non-profit organizations all have a hand in giving each member of the community the tradition out of which the community arises and within which abstract philosophical or pseudo-philosophical worries such as "What does it all mean?" do not arise because they are satisfactorily answered.

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

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

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

In short, MacIntyre's theory gives an account of two contradictory phenomena. It explains how a moral skeptic might arise within a community and how that skeptic might be moved to a more adequate grasp of the truth; and it explains why, in healthy, unified, moral societies, *so few*

people become moral skeptics.

Conclusion Draft 1

Human beings need oxygen and food by nature. These are biological necessities. Biologically, we are animals evolved from simpler animals.[110] But we are also social and practical-reasoning animals by nature. Our advanced practical reasoning sets us apart. We have the burden and responsibility to set the course for our own lives, and to care for the dependent among us who are not yet practical reasoners, who are temporarily disabled, or who are permanently infirm. Any tradition that does not do justice to these realities will be defective. Any practices that militate against our distinctively human life are bad practices. Whatever virtues are included on the list had better not exclude virtues that make human life possible; it had better not exclude (as Aristotle did) women and manual workers from the very possibility of developing virtues. Tradition and rationality are not ultimately at the mercy of perspective but can be rationally adjudicated.

MacIntyre thinks that "human beings need the virtues" because they are intrinsically good and useful for transforming communities and persons.[111] He began by defining virtue in reference to practice. But moral enquiry itself is a practice that takes place within a tradition. At the practical level of daily life, a small community (such as a family or town or university) does well to organize themselves around a common vision of what is good and a common conception of what qualities will help everyone to attain that good. It can and should be undertaken by regular folk, not just specialists in philosophy. And the goal of such enquiry is discovering what is really admirable and pursuing it, becoming more admirable moral agents through the acquisition of virtues. Virtues are acquired traits that enable the achievement of goods internal to the practices, those traits that sustain traditions, and those traits by which we overcome perennial temptations to lead lives that are divided, deviant, or contrary to our true nature. Furthermore, at the theoretical level of philosophical ethics,

110. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* x.
111. Ibid.

the concepts of virtue, practical wisdom, and happiness supply for moral theory what many modern moralities have not: a clear, coherent, useful, and justifiable theory that grounds a rational pursuit of the good life and resolvable moral disagreements.

Other objections I may or may not touch on

What about *akrasia*?

What is foolishness?

VI. Is practical reason natural?

This question ought not to be ignored.

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

VII. Rationality/Nature Criterion

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

> "Whether or not we accept a consequentialist framework, questions in the theory of value would seem to be an important focus for practical reflection. Many philosophers are attracted to the idea that reasons for action are ultimately provided by the values that can be realized through action (Raz 1999). If this is right, and if we assume as well a realist or at least non-subjectivist conception of value, then a different way of thinking about the task of practical reason comes into view. This may be thought of not primarily as a matter of maximizing the satisfaction of the agent's

> given ends, nor of specifying ends that are still inchoate, but rather as the task of mapping the landscape of value."[112]

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

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

The first reason, argued above, is that rationality in part defines our nature. We are animals of a particular sort: practical, rational animals. We identify ourselves as creatures about human generic truths obtain (though with exceptions), such as that we have rational capacities. We our identify ourselves in this way whether scientifically, philosophically, religiously, anthropologically, psychologically, or what have you. And our 'rational capacities' include language, abstract thought, argumentation, mathematics, philosophy, natural science, and so on.

A second reason is that we are not merely rational but also practical: we *practice*. One can conceive of rational creatures (gods, martians, angelic intelligences, artificial intelligences) that are not also "practical" creatures – that do not practice anything. Deep Thought, the computer from Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide*, is a mere *knower*.

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

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

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

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