Chapter 1

Wisdom: Virtue in Excellent, Practically Reasoning, Social Animals

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

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

"There could be no reasons unless a rational animal has a general conception of its own good, and thus a general sense of how to live."

–Jennifer Frey, *The Will to Do Good*, 79.

I. Introduction

The three themes of this dissertation have been the three points on the "virtue triangle": virtue in relation to practical reason, and both in relation to 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 3) allowed us to hypothesize that human nature is to be a practical, rational animal (in chapter 4). The account given of human nature allowed us to specify criteria that any account of virtue ought to satisfy (in chapter 5), and we began detailing such an account from the neo-Aristotelians (in chapter 6).

The neo-Aristotelian view of virtue, as we saw, is intrinsically related to reason at many points. So now I must make good on my claim that the same account cannot be completed without an account of practical reason. Then, in a later chapter, we will crown the project with a detailed account of human teleology that will, we may hope, will be plausible in its own right and render more plausible what has come before.

The Centrality of Practical Reason

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

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

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

2. Cf. Especially Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001), chap. 4; John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 331–50; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

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

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. **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 natu-

ralism 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."[4]

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

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

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

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

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

Are moral reasons one type of practical reason?

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

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

> The business of ethics is to clarify and solve "problems", i.e. situations in which it is difficult to know what one should do; that the ultimate beneficiary of ethical analysis is the person who, in one of these situations, seeks rational ground for the decision he must make; that ethics is therefore primarily concerned to find such grounds, often conceived of as moral rules and the principles from which they can be derived; and that meta-ethics consists in the analysis of the terms, claims, and arguments which come into play in moral disputation, deliberation, and justification in problematic contexts.[8]

By contrast, character ethics is focused on the long-term goal of living well by executing worthwhile goals in every day life. Aristotle is an example of a Character Ethicist. Aristotle:

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

8. Edmund Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," *Mind*, 1971, 552. Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist* 67, no. 4 (1984): 498–513.

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

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

Let the Quandary ethicist represent the view of moral reasons as special, perhaps overriding, kinds of reasons pertaining to the rights, obligations, or duties of one individual in relation to others. Even in asking the "how do I live?" question, a Quandary ethicist is likely assuming that the answer will include a set of moral reasons weighed against or in opposition to non-moral reasons (such as prudential reasons). As Martha Nussbaum points out, a Quandary ethicist might ask "how do specifically moral ends and commitments figure among the ends that [a moral agent] pursues?" But she clarifies:

> This question is posed in a characteristically modern way, presupposing a distinction between the moral and the non-moral that is not drawn, as such, by the Greek thinkers. But if one objects to that characterization, one can rephrase it: for example, What role does concern for others for their own sake play in here scheme of ends? What role does political justice play in her scheme of ends? And so forth."[10]

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

> Many if not most moral philosophers in modern times see their subject as having to do exclusively with relations between individuals or between an individual and society, and so with such things as obligations, duties, and charitable acts… 'moral' and 'prudential' considerations [are] contrasted in a way that was alien to Plato or Aristotle.[11]

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

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

11. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

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

How did this distinction between moral and non-moral reasons arise in western thought? Foot cites Mill as an early proponent of the distinction:

> J. S. Mill, for instance, expresses this modern point of view quite explicitly, saying in his essay *On Liberty* that 'A person who shows rashness, obstinacy, self-conceit . . . who cannot restrain himself from harmful indulgences' shows faults (Mill calls them 'self-regarding faults') which 'are not properly immoralities' and while they 'may be proofs of any amount of folly . . . are only a subject of moral reprobation when they involve a breach of duty to others, for whose sake the individual is bound to have care for himself.'[15]

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

> 'Moral' is the etymological descendant of 'moralis'. But 'moralis', like its Greek predecessor *ethikos* – Cicero invented 'moralis' to translate the Greek word in the *De Fato* – means 'pertaining to character' where a man's character is nothing other than his set dispositions to behave systematically in one way rather than another, to lead on particular kind of life… The early uses of 'moral' did not contrast with " 'prudential' or 'self interested' " nor with " 'legal or 'religious'… The word to which it is closest in meaning is perhaps most simply 'practical'."[16]

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

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

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

15. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

16. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 38.

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

This point is not merely of historical or etymological interest (though of course, the narrow sense of the word 'moral' in discourse today is clear enough). The point is that qualities such as benevolence and generosity we tend to call human "moral goodness" are of a type with a *broader category of goodness*. Foot explains: "I want to show that judgments usually considered to be the special subject of moral philosophy should really be seen as belonging to a wider class of evaluations of conduct with which they share a common conceptual structure."[17]

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

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

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

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

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

The peculiarly *moral* 'ought' means, for some, a final, verdictive ought – like the kind of "thou shalt" language used in the Ten Commandments. But *this* kind of ought, Anscombe thinks, only makes sense in the mouth of a believer in divine law. I should prefer rather to reserve the final, verdictive ought for what Foot (following Davidson) calls what someone should do "all things considered."[20]

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

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

19. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19.
20. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 57.
21. Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

the assumption entirely; moral judgments "have their own kind of logic" and their significance, like other kinds of judgments, comes from "exhibiting the logic of their usage."[22] The significance of moral judgments is that "they enable us to solve problems of appraisal and of action." Solving problems of evaluation (we might say) and action is their place in "a pattern of language and action…" He continues:

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

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

That is not to say that practical reason does not include the domain of "concern for others". It is only to argue that other-regarding qualities such as benevolence and generosity (which are easily thought of under the description human "moral goodness") are *of a type* with a broader category of goodness. She says: "judgments usually considered to be the special subject of moral philosophy should really be seen as belonging to a wider class of evaluations of conduct with which they share a common conceptual structure."[23]

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

23. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.

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

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

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

Considering practical reason as a whole in this way helps us to understand Aristotle and the neo-Aristotelians. Jack Weinstein says: 'The term practical rationality is derived from Aristotle's *phronesis*. It is to be distinguished from *sophia*, a more technical form of reasoning. Practical rationality leads to more approximate conclusions; it takes context and relative facts into account, and it usually leads to moral or political conclusions."[25] If we take philosophical ethics to be reflection on morality as a whole then, on this view, philosophical ethics is reflection on practical rationality. Practical rationality is simply the process of deciding what to do. It is the process of thinking through

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

progress rather than regress in moral theorizing.

Can practical reasons motivate?

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

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

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

considered.

Motivation thoughts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

29. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 63.

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

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

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

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

> Practical deliberation about ends is not an easy or well-defined activity. There are no straightforward criteria for success in this kind of reflection, and it is often unclear when it has been brought to a satisfactory conclusion. These considerations encourage the Humean assumption—especially widespread in the social sciences—that there is no reasoning about final ends. On the other hand, how is one supposed to clarify one's largest and most important ends, if not by reasoning about them in some way? Rather than exclude such reflection because it does not conform to a narrowly scientific paradigm of reason, perhaps we should expand our conception of practical reason to make room for clarificatory reflection about the ends of action.[32]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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