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Becoming What We Are: Virtue and Practical Wisdom as Natural Ends

Keith Buhler
University of Kentucky, keithedbuhler@gmail.com
Author ORCID Identifier:
http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9495-6550
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BECOMING WHAT WE ARE:
VIRTUE AND PRACTICAL WISDOM AS NATURAL ENDS

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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By

Keith Buhler

Director: Dr. David Bradshaw, Professor of Philosophy

Lexington Kentucky

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

BECOMING WHAT WE ARE:

VIRTUE AND PRACTICAL WISDOM AS NATURAL ENDS

This dissertation is about ethical naturalism. Philippa Foot and John McDowell both defend contemporary neo-Aristotelian ethics but each represents a rival expression of the same. They are united in the affirmation that virtue is 'natural goodness' for human beings; they are divided in their rival conceptions of 'nature.' McDowell distinguishes second nature or the "space of reasons" from first nature or the "realm of law." Foot rejects this division.

On Foot's naturalism, natural goodness is a just as much a feature of first nature as health is, even though human practical reasoning is unique in the biological world. I defend Foot's view by appealing to "generic propositions," a little-utilized feature of linguistic theory. Life forms and functions described in generic statements are intrinsically normative and yet just as scientifically respectable as other naturalistic concepts. Hence, the generic proposition that "humans are practical, rational primates" has both descriptive and normative content. It follows that the ethical and rational norms defining a good human life are a subset of natural norms which can be known as such from an "external" scientific point of view as well as from an "internal" ethical point of view.

Going beyond Foot's views, I present a new interlocking neo-Aristotelian account of virtue and practical reason. Virtues are excellences of practical reasoning and rational practice. Virtues enable and partly constitute a good life for human beings. Practical reasoning is the ability to pursue perceived goods and avoid perceived evils in every action. Practical wisdom, which is excellence in practical reasoning, is the master virtue that enables one to succeed in becoming truly human, despite varying abilities and life circumstances. In short, all of us ought to pursue virtue and practical wisdom because of what we are; virtue and practical wisdom are natural ends.

I aim to secure the naturalistic credentials of my view by examining three influential conceptions of 'nature,' criticizing McDowell's conception and showing how my view is consistent with the remaining two. The resulting view is called 'recursive naturalism' because nature recurs within nature when natural beings reason about nature, about themselves, and about their own reasoning.

KEYWORDS: ethical naturalism, neo-Aristotelianism, virtue, practical wisdom, natural law, natural ends

Keith Buhler

December 4, 2016

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By

Keith Buhler

Dr. David Bradshaw
Dissertation Director

Dr. Clare Batty
Director of Graduate Studies

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For Lindsay Elizabeth.

"Oh, who shall understand but you; yea, who shall understand?"

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Table of Contents

γένοι' οἷος ἐσσὶ μαθών. (Become what you are, having learned what that is.)

—Pindar, *Pythian* 2, line 72.

Chapter 1

Many Sorts of Naturalism

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

1. Nature and Ethics

This dissertation is about ethical naturalism. But what is 'naturalism'? There is no consensus as to the meaning of the term. Should we then simply stipulate a meaning and move on? I do not think we should. Almost a century ago, Roy Wood Sellars said it well: "Questions of terminology are less superficial than is often supposed. Precision in terminology usually accompanies clear thinking, and is at once its condition and effect."[1] Sellars is one of many other philosophers over the last hundred years to have taken pains to clarify the difference between his view – naturalism – and materialism. Why? Is there any point in labeling any view, much less an ethical view, as "naturalistic"?

The answer, in part, is that the term 'nature' and its cognates 'naturalism' and 'naturalistic' are philosophically potent; they are what Richard Weaver calls "god terms." God terms are words and phrases that, though vague, have an indelible, inherently positive, connotation.[2] If this is right, then Sellars (and others) are so concerned to establish the naturalistic credentials of their view for two reasons: first, whatever philosophical theories earn the right to the label acquire an automatic

1. Roy Wood Sellars, "Why Naturalism and Not Materialism?" *The Philosophical Review* 36, no. 3 (1927): 216–25.

2. Richard M. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Psychology Press, 1985).

positive connotation; and secondly, the potency of 'nature' derives, in part, from its connection to another god term – namely, science. 'Science' and 'nature' are often simply defined *in terms of each other*. To pull a few examples out of dozens: "nature is, more or less, what our latest and best science tells us it is;"[3] "moral facts exist only if they can figure in our best scientific explanations;"[4] "Natural facts are understood to be facts about the natural world, facts of the sort in which the natural sciences trade."[5] In short, the sciences study nature and nature is whatever the sciences study. This way of talking is very inadequate and very common. (I shall try state things more adequately in chapter 6.)

What, then, is ethical naturalism? Even before clarifying our terms, we can understand it as the venturesome pursuit a "scientific ethics" or "ethical science." If successful, ethical naturalists can attach to their moral theory part of the aura of objectivity we attach to science.

My project in what follows is to work toward a theory of virtue and practical reason that is consonant with, and reinforced by, a plausible version of scientific naturalism. To many, such a project seems depressingly ill-fated. On the one hand, a genuinely *normative* virtue theory that is consistent with scientific naturalism might seem impossible. For example, Stephen R. Brown's recent defense of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism argues that "an individual human being may be evaluated as good or bad according to how well that individual realizes the human way of life" but even he concedes that his account is "in the end… fundamentally descriptive."[6] Arthur Ward, likewise, thinks that the "traditional objections to virtue ethics" are decisive. He argues that "facts about human nature do not on their own seem to generate reasons for humans to act in accordance with their nature."[7]

On the other hand, ethical naturalism might seem undesirable. For example, it runs afoul of the widely-assumed division between science and ethics. On this assumption, theoretical disciplines such as physics and biology study objects, their properties and so on, while practical disciplines study

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

4. Terence Cuneo, *The Normative Web* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 50.

5. James Lenman, "Moral Naturalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2014, introduction.

6. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, 1.

7. Arthur Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory" (PhD thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2013), 35.

values and social norms, etc. The natural sciences study factual and descriptive matters, while the disciplines that used to be called the "moral sciences"[8] study evaluative and normative matters. On this assumption, each kind of discipline is autonomous. And most thinkers are content to leave it that way.

One of the many pitfalls into which a putative "scientific ethics" might fall is a scientific encroachment on ethics. For example, E.O. Wilson boldly stated that "the time has come for ethics to be removed temporarily from the hands of the philosophers and biologicized."[9] Thankfully, scientific thinkers are not usually so zealous to abduct a philosophical discipline (nor are philosophers, as a rule, eager to surrender them) but there is a legitimate danger of appearing to license such encroachment.

An equal and opposite pitfall would be that ethics might encroach on science. While working scientists must certainly adhere to legal, professional, and rational norms in conducting and presenting their research, it seems a bit much to suggest that they should be accountable to moral philosophers. In light of these pitfalls professional and philosophical pitfalls, perhaps the widespread assumption that science and ethics are autonomous is the safer course.

There are two main ethical alternatives to naturalism that follow the safer course of accepting the fundamental divide between science and ethics. The first alternative is ethical *non-naturalism*, classically articulated by G. E. Moore and (more recently) by Russ Shafer-Landau.[10] Non-naturalist views argue that (even if moral facts are *realized* by natural facts) moral facts are neither identical to natural facts nor fully reducible to natural facts. Accordingly, philosophers such as Moore and Shafer-Landau conclude that moral philosophy proceeds independently of the methods of "natural philosophy" (i.e., the natural sciences). Non-naturalism allows one to embrace "robust realism" about morality and practical reasoning.[11]

The second alternative – equally safe for scientific naturalists – is to reject robust realism.

8. E.g., Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix I.

9. Edward Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Harvard University Press, 1978) 562

10. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge University Press, 1903); Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*, 4 (Oxford University Press, 2003).

11. Jay Wallace explains robust realism as 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… [such facts constitute] an objective body of normative truths. R. Jay Wallace, "Practical Reason," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2014, section 2. Wallace cites Parfit (2011) and Scanlon (2014).

This alternative encompasses a variety of quite different views, such as as error theory, expressivism, subjectivism, moral nihilism, and perhaps others. The underlying motivation for denying robust realism is the perceived incompatibility of robust ethical realism with the modern scientific worldview. This is evident in anti-realism's main defenders. For example, John Mackie admits that "the main tradition of European moral philosophy" accepts objective values but argues that modern science has overthrown all that. Likewise, Simon Blackburn commends anti-realism because it 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."[12] And Jay Wallace explains that expressivism offers a "naturalistic interpretation of practical reason… that may seem appropriate to the enlightened commitments of the modern scientific world view… it makes no commitment to the objective existence in the world of such allegedly questionable entities as values, norms, or reasons for action."[13]

2. Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism

In spite of these formidable difficulties, this dissertation commends the riskier course of pursuing ethical naturalism – specifically, neo-Aristotelianism. Contemporary neo-Aristotelians – among others[14] – have offered a serious challenge to the assumed divide between norms and nature or facts and values. Accordingly, they have challenged the comfortable assumption that science and ethics can be neatly divided. Perhaps it is possible to offer an account of human biology and society that is both scientifically robust *and* normatively significant. Perhaps there are moral facts about what human beings are and ought to be that we can discover by engaging in practical reasoning. Perhaps success as moral agents depends on how well we conform our lives to the ways human beings ought to live.

There are, of course, other forms of ethical naturalism, such as Cornell Realism and Frank

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

13. Wallace, "Practical Reason."

14. Cf. Justin L. Harmon, "The Normative Architecture of Reality: Towards an Object-Oriented Ethics" (PhD thesis, University of Kentucky, 2013).

Jackson's functionalism.[15] They share with neo-Aristotelian the insistence that some moral facts *are* identical to – or reducible to – natural facts – and hence that moral philosophy *can* and *should* employ methods similar to those employed in the natural sciences. But what is remarkable is that neo-Aristotelian theory has avoided some of the pitfalls mentioned above. Rather than licensing unjust encroachment of some disciplines over others, it has become a thriving research program across disciplines. Neo-Aristotelianism is making inroads in moral philosophy, metaphysics, philosophy of science, as well as in the medical, social, and political sciences.

On the neo-Aristotelian account, the premises about human nature as practical reasoners are intrinsically related to normative conclusions about what one ought to do. As Rosalind Hursthouse explains, evaluations of plants, animals, and humans all "depend upon our identifying what is characteristic of the species in question."[16] In other words, the *normative evaluation* depends on the *descriptive facts* of the species: its activities, its life form, and so on. Evaluating things on the basis of what they are is central to neo-Aristotelian naturalism.

Alasdair MacIntyre articulates the intrinsic relationship between human nature and human ethics – a particular kind of 'is' and 'ought' – with his discussion of the three "elements" of morality.[17] The first element is "untutored human nature" (as it is). Understanding "human-nature-as-it-is"[18] is a task for philosophers, as well as psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, etc. and would include a conception of the human species as rational animals as it is *prior* to deep self-reflection or moral effort. The second element is humanity as it could be and should be – what MacIntyre calls "man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos."[19] Understanding the natural human ends we can and *ought* to pursue is, for MacIntyre, "the whole point of ethics." The third element is the set of virtues,

15. Cornell realists such as Richard Boyd and Nicholas Sturgeon argue that moral facts supervene on nonmoral facts in much the same way biological facts supervene on physical ones. My dissertation cannot enter deeply into discussions with views of this kind, but the comparisons and contrasts are important to make. For example, why is it that Boyd, Sturgeon and Gibbard are consequentialists in their normative theory while neo-Aristotelians are not? I briefly address this question in chapter 4. And why do Boyd et al. mostly focus their explanations of terms and facts like 'goodness' on instances of what is good for humans? It will be clear in chapter 2 that I am willing to countenance a larger set of normative facts about all organic life.

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

17. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame, 1984), 54 ff.

18. Ibid., 55.

19. Ibid., 55.

actions, emotions, etc., needed to move from the first to the second points. For MacIntyre, positing a normative theory such as virtue ethics is futile without the other two elements.

I think MacIntyre's "three elements" also help to explain the puzzle of why 'neo-Aristotelianism' is both a substantive normative theory and a metaethical theory. Foot and McDowell not only defend ethical naturalism but commend the pursuit of virtues such as courage, moderation, justice, and practical wisdom, among others. Is the conflation of metaethics and normative ethics a philosophical foul? Not at all. First, other brands of moral realism closely align with particular normative commitments: Frank Jackson and the Cornell Realists tend to endorse a form of consequentialism or welfarism. Richard Boyd explains:

> Many naturalist moral realists have also advocated some version or other of consequentialism as the substantive naturalist moral theory to which they are committed. Indeed, although nothing like entailment between these positions obtains, the idea that moral questions are questions about how we can help each other flourish seems central to contemporary naturalist moral realism. In a certain sense, some version of consequentialism seems to be the natural position for naturalist moral realists.[20]

Secondly, the question of whether metaethics and normative ethics are even separable is a dispute that cannot be settled out of court. Allan Gibbard narrates how the hard line distinction between substantive ethical matters and formal metaethical matters originated in the writings of G.E. Moore. And, at the risk of understatement, not everyone agrees with Moore:

> 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… Those who reject any systematic distinction between questions of meaning and questions of substance might likewise reject a sharp, separate subject of metaethics.[21]

Rosalind Hursthouse, Alasdair MacIntyre, Philippa Foot, and John McDowell are other good examples of philosophers who think that metaethics and substantive ethics are not ultimately separable. I

20. Richard Boyd, "Finite Beings, Finite Goods: The Semantics, Metaphysics and Ethics of Naturalist Consequentialism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 66, no. 3 (2003): 505–6.

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

follow them in this. My thesis will commend the acquisition of character and epistemic virtues *and* will analyze normative terms in a way consonant with a plausible version of scientific naturalism.

I think these brief comments are sufficient to demonstrate three truths about neo-Aristotelianism: (a) it is avowedly ambitious and equally unsettling; (b) it faces titanic opposition on terminological and academic grounds no less than philosophical ones; and thus, (c) it is a significant theory in normative ethics and beyond.

The remainder of this introduction explains why I focus more on Foot's *Natural Goodness* rather than Hursthouse's *On Virtue Ethics*, and provides an initial characterization of the contrast between Foot's and McDowell's rival sorts of ethical naturalism.

3. On Natural Goodness and Virtue Ethics

Philippa Foot's *Natural Goodness* is one of the rare philosophical monographs that manages to be a work of art. One reviewer warned that it is "so gracefully written that the reader runs the risk of… mistaking the book's fluidity for shallowness. In fact, the depth… is remarkable."[22] Indeed, it is a delight to read for its elegance and pugnacity, but it is a duty to read for its wisdom and profundity. Building on her prior work in virtue theory, Foot blends metaethics and normative ethics by laying the foundation for what Mark Murphy calls a "secular natural law theory."[23] She argues that living virtuously and wisely is natural goodness for human beings just as hunting in packs is natural goodness for wolves.

The obvious objection to such a thesis is that it inappropriately blends facts and values, that it either "biologizes" ethics or "enchants" science. This obvious objection (which Foot tackles head on in her monograph) rests on the common notion that nature and science are entirely distinct from values and ethics. This objection is a serious one. But it is more likely to be leveled reflexively by someone who has not wrestled with Foot's argument. John Hacker-Wright is correct to say that "Foot's recent readers have made some rather serious missteps in approaching her work."[24]

22. Brook J Sadler, "Review of 'Natural Goodness'," *Essays in Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2004): 28.

23. Mark Murphy, "The Natural Law Tradition in Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2011, `http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/natural-law-ethics/`.

24. John Hacker-Wright, "What Is Natural About Foot's Ethical Naturalism?" *Ratio* 22, no.

Receiving an initial "cool reception"[25] is not an infallible sign of a classic, but it is one telltale sign. It is plain from the literature that too few ethicists and metaethicists have come to grips with the precise details and wide-ranging implications of her argument. For example, James Barham suggests that Foot's *Natural Goodness* and Rosalind Hursthouse's *On Virtue Ethics* are making the same case, but that Hursthouse's "account is the clearer and more detailed of the two."[26] This comparison is misleading on two fronts.

First, even though both books are successful in their aims, they have very different aims. Hursthouse's book is intended to render modern virtue ethics conventional; Foot's book is intended to disrupt a hundred years of metaethical convention.[27] Hursthouse offers an olive branch to deontologists and utilitarians, trading in her formerly combative rhetoric for mutual respect so that iron may sharpen iron. Foot (like Anscombe and MacIntyre) calls into question much of what has passed for modern moral philosophy, naming names and picking fights.

Secondly, the relative clarity of the two books fits their aims. Hursthouse's overview of virtue ethics is aimed at non-expert graduate and undergraduate students. It therefore exhibits some of the necessary, though unfortunate, style of textbooks: comprehensive, responsible, and occasionally plodding. Foot's "fresh start"[28] is aimed at professional ethicists. It is therefore more comparable to a Platonic dialogue or Humean treatise: Foot plays the Socratic gadfly to the experts with "a swaggering gait and roving eye." Her book is "crude"[29] because it is what Waismann calls a "living thought," digging deep into the soil of our presuppositions. *On Virtue Ethics* is a thoroughly respectable book, but *Natural Goodness* makes one proud to be a philosopher.

Happily, some ethicists *have* come to grips with the significance of Foot's case. For example, MacIntyre's eventual position begins to look similar to Foot's position, for he defends the importance

3 (2009): 321.

25. Ibid., 309.

26. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism." He says, "Neo-Aristotelian naturalism is articulated at length and along mutually similar lines in two recent monographs, Foot's *Natural Goodness* and Hursthouse's *On Virtue Ethics*."

27. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 5: "For better or worse—and many will say worse—I have in this book the overt aim of setting out a view of moral judgement very different from that of most moral philosophers writing today."

28. Ibid., 5.

29. Ibid., 1.

of human biology to human ethics in his most recent ethical monograph more than he did in *After Virtue*.[30]

By contrast, McDowell's opposition to scientism leads him to disagree with Foot. McDowell's and Foot's respective approaches to neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism represent rival visions of the relation between human beings and nature and hence between ethics and science. As I shall show, the fault line between these rival views is of enormous philosophical and ethical significance. The fault line between these views is the theme of this dissertation.

4. Organic and Social Naturalism

Foot and McDowell represent rival versions of contemporary neo-Aristotelianism. They are united on the view that some properties (such as virtues) are instances of 'natural goodness' for creatures like us but divided on how to cash out the notion of *natural goodness*. It is worth quoting the opening passage of McDowell's "Two Sorts of Naturalism" to situate the convergence and divergence of their accounts:

> 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.[31]

McDowell, like Foot, is opposed to non-naturalism and in favor of *some sort* of naturalism. But he is also opposed to a cruder form of naturalism which he calls "bald naturalism." What is 'bald naturalism'? This is McDowell's term for metaphysical and epistemological commitments to crass materialism and scientism. On bald naturalism, nature is the complete spatio-temporal cosmos. Nature includes natural causal laws but excludes "non-natural" entities such as Platonic forms, values, norms, and

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

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

reasons along with gods, ghosts, and angels that can only be known via empirical, scientific methods. On bald naturalism, there is no room at all for normative, ethical knowledge unless it can be acquired through the undue application of empirical methods to ethical matters. McDowell thinks, instead, that if our best ethical thinking cannot be squared with a particular dogma of empiricism, so much the worse for the dogma. Nevertheless, McDowell also rejects ethical non-naturalism, supernaturalism, and subjectivism.

While McDowell does not quite accuse Foot's view of slipping into bald naturalism, he is worried that it *might* do so or at least that it *might be misinterpreted* as doing so. What then *does* he endorse? He would concede that the conceptual space between non-naturalism and bald naturalism is admittedly tight. There are two main rivals jockeying for a position within that space. As Julia Annas explains, even rejecting non-naturalism and bald naturalism, some neo-Aristotelians emphasize the *biological* nature of humanity (in contrast to the odd normativity of our rationality) while others emphasize the *rational* nature of humanity (in contrast to the mundane descriptivity of biology).[32] Both views are broadly Aristotelian and broadly naturalistic, but the small difference between them has large ramifications.

I shall dub these two rival views 'organic naturalism' and 'social naturalism' throughout these chapters.[33] The rivalry between organic and social naturalism is the primary theme of this dissertation, so it will be important to provide an initial explication of each here.

Social naturalism is the view that normativity and teleology are intrinsic to *human nature*. On this alternative, humans are naturally practical, social, and rational creatures who undertake to achieve their chosen ends, as individuals and in groups. Rosalind Hursthouse, the early MacIntyre, and (possibly) Iris Murdoch are social naturalists.[34] For example, in his earlier work, MacIntyre announced that his account of virtue is "happily not Aristotelian… although this account of the

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

33. James Barham calls his own version of the Footian view "reformed naturalism." (James Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology" (PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame, 2011) 215.) I shall call my version 'recursive naturalism,' for reasons I explain in chapter 6.

34. Murdoch assumes that human life has "no external point or τελος," but that it has a point *from within.* Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts* (Mouette Press, 1998) 79

virtues is teleological, it does not require any allegiance to Aristotle's metaphysical biology."[35] The "metaphysical biology" MacIntyre refers to here is the metaphysically realist view that formal and final causes inhere in biological species. His ethics is teleological only insofar as *human society and rationality* are teleological. Otherwise, he would insist that the natural world described by the sciences is "bald" of moral facts unless and until it is observed, judged, and evaluated by rational agents such as ourselves.

Organic naturalism, by contrast, is the view that normativity is intrinsic to *organic nature*. On this alternative, natural properties such as being alive or being healthy are objectively normative, even prior to human evaluation. Michael Thompson, James Barham, Jennifer Frey, the later MacIntyre, and others are organic naturalists.[36] They argue that simply *to be alive* is to possess a natural good; to be healthy is to possess a natural good. Accordingly, death or extinction, sickness or injury would be natural evils. Plants, bacteria, and humans are similar in that thriving involves performing whatever movements are necessary for the organism to survive, develop into species-specific maturity, and reproduce. Organic naturalism insists that the complex biological system on earth cannot be exhaustively and scientifically described without normative concepts and terms.

35. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 197.

36. For a detailed exposition of the full menu of philosophical options, see Mark Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," *The Monist* 87, no. 1 (2004): 3–51. And for particular defenses of natural normativity in the philosophy of science and the philosophy of biology, see: Larry Arnhart, "Aristotle's Biopolitics: A Defense of Biological Teleology Against Biological Nihilism," *Politics and the Life Sciences* 6, no. 2 (1988): pp. 173–229; Monte Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford University Press, 2005); Philippe Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose: From Comparative Anatomy to the 'Adventure of Reason'," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 37, no. 4 (2006): 649–74; Mariska Leunissen, *Explanation and Teleology in Aristotle's Science of Nature* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

McDowell is, by my lights, a social naturalist.[37] He argues that we are naturally social creatures who can speak, reason, and engage in intentional action by "second nature"[38] or "the space of reasons."[39] McDowell's social naturalism grounds ethics in "second nature" – human reasoning and all that comes with it. I call his view 'social naturalism' because he also argues that rationality is essentially social; we learn our first language and initial inventory of concepts and beliefs from our family, culture, and education. In this way, McDowell aims to afford a place for norms and reasons in "nature" while still excluding a non-natural realm of divinity or platonic forms. The strength of social naturalism is that it captures the commonsense insight that human beings live in societies and create their own goals. We not only act but act *on reasons*. The cost of social naturalism, as I shall explain throughout these chapters, is an incorrigible cultural relativism and an undesirable nature/human dualism.

Foot is an organic naturalist. Rationality is unique to humans but is not fundamentally discontinuous with "first nature." The strength of organic naturalism is that it offers a more unified account of humanity's place within nature and promises a firm ground for the objectivity of morality. The cost of organic naturalism seems to be a picture of nature at odds with the scientific picture. For organic naturalism, the question is: Are "natural norms" natural objects like other natural objects? And how do we identify them – through normal scientific methods or not?

Even for a moral naturalist, there are a variety of sorts of naturalism on offer. The proper way to understand the debate between Foot's organic naturalism and McDowell's social naturalism is as a negotiation for the conceptual rights to the label 'ethical naturalism' without falling into either bald naturalism or non-naturalism. In what follows, I attempt to move this negotiation forward.

37. McDowell calls his view by a variety of names: 'liberal naturalism' (*Mind and World*, Harvard 1996, 89, 98); 'acceptable naturalism' (*Mind, Value, and Reality* 197); 'Greek naturalism' (*Mind and World* 174); 'Aristotelian naturalism' (*Mind and World* 196), 'naturalism of second nature' (*Mind and World* 86); or 'naturalized platonism' (*Mind and World* 91). Christopher Toner calls McDowell's view 'excellence naturalism' or 'culturalism.' Along the same lines, Goetz and Taliaferro distinguish 'strict' and 'relaxed' versions of naturalism: Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008). For further exploration of these distinctions, see Hans Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (August 2006): 202–21, 204.

38. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II; Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Part III, § 151.

39. Cf. Wilfred Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, § 36.

I draw primarily on overlapping themes in the writings of Foot, McDowell, Hursthouse, and Alasdair MacIntyre and interact with other sources as needed: from historical sources (Aristotle, Aquinas, Hume), to other ethicists (Bernard Williams, Allan Gibbard) to other neo-Aristotelians (Jennifer Frey, Micah Lott, Chris Toner, James Barham, and Stephen R. Brown).

My argument is that organic naturalism is more plausible than social naturalism. I make this case by offering interlocking accounts of virtue, practical reason, human nature, and nature in general. My case is intended to be faithful to Foot's view against McDowell's, but I also aim to extend her view. I hope to show that an account can be given of each theme that is plausible in its own right and even more plausible considered as a whole.

5. The Argument

In short, this dissertation defends the thesis that human beings are best understood as practical, rational primates with a set of natural ends, including the obligation to acquire virtues and practical wisdom. I argue that *every* organism has a natural life form and set of natural ends, where 'natural' denotes a property both normatively relevant and scientifically respectable. What is naturally good for an organism is, first, to be what it is and, second, to become fully mature. So, since human beings are natural organisms, it is essential to learn what we are in order to know what we ought to become. On my account, traditional virtues such as courage, moderation, and (especially) practical wisdom belong to 'the human being,' where that designation is both descriptive and normative. These virtues define our human life form and hence define for us what is to be pursued. Since human beings *are* practical, rational primates, we *ought* to become practically wise.

The attraction of this view is that we can avoid the twin dangers of relegating practical rationality and normativity to a non-natural realm or denying their objective reality altogether. The study of human beings and the human good is, in principle, open to contributions from philosophical ethics and the whole family of natural and social sciences. For example, moral anti-realists can deny natural normativity but only in the face of biological sciences. On my account, there is a single definitive criterion by which to judge how successful we and others are in living a good life: are we becoming what we are?

6. Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 defends the thesis that there are such things as natural normative facts. I give two examples: normative life forms and normative functions or teleological facts. These "natural norms" may not obtain everywhere in nature, but they do obtain in all living organisms.

Chapter 3 extends the case to argue that there are *human* natural norms. I argue that the life form of human beings is best understood as being practical, rational primates. The natural, normative function of human beings is to become fully formed, fully mature instances of their species who can practically reason *well*. Just as we discern what are normal or abnormal traits of oak trees, wolves, and bears not by making mere generalizations but by examining *exemplary* members of the species that are fully grown, healthy, and flourishing, we can discern what are normal or abnormal traits of human beings by examining exemplary members of the species – namely virtuous and wise humans.

Chapter 4 describes in more detail what traits count as virtues of character and practical reasoning. I offer a series of interlocking features that virtues have, and underscore the importance of practical reasoning within a "tradition" and culture. And I defend the notion that the acquisition of virtue is morally obligatory on all human beings against various misunderstandings and objections.

Chapter 5 returns to the notion of practical reasoning. I provide a more detailed account of what it means to engage in practical reasoning. I critique McDowell's equation of virtue with practical knowledge, in favor of the distinction between successful practical reasoning (which is practical wisdom) and rational practices and emotions (which are organized and managed by practical wisdom, but not identical to it). All practical reasoners are engaged in a substantive process, not merely an instrumental one. Success or failure in practical reasoning and rational practice determines whether one is living a virtuous or vicious human life.

Chapter 6 defends the foregoing account in light of a renewed discussion about nature and naturalism. I provide a full critique of McDowell's brand of naturalism, which, I argue, is ultimately inconsistent within itself. As alternatives, I explore two other forms of naturalism: "unrestricted naturalism" and the Footian form of "organic naturalism," and show how the accounts of virtue and

practical reason already developed are compatible with both.

Chapter 7 concludes with a brief summary of the argument and some reflections on related topics.

7. A Word About Method

I went down to graduate school with a decade-long resolution to write on Plato's later dialectic. This dissertation is on ethical naturalism because Foot's *Natural Goodness* drew me in a new direction. However, I still associate her work with Plato's in at least one way: the astonishment I felt when first reading Foot's *Natural Goodness* can only be compared to my first encounters with the Platonic dialogues – confusion tempered with delight. So, though my research focus changed, there remains one respect in which these chapters might be seen as fulfilling my original resolution to study Plato's later dialectic – not by examination but by enactment. That is, I aim to construct the following argument as a sort of dialogue between author and reader.

I mention this to explain why, for the sake of this project, I have bracketed discussions of supernaturalism and non-naturalism. Not that these alternatives do not deserve full consideration, but I take my primary interlocutors to be readers who share (with Foot) an attraction to moral realism about virtue but who share (with McDowell) a commitment to modern science. In order to persuade this kind of interlocutor that the two are not incompatible, I aim to assume nothing they would not assume, and to address first the objections that might arise in their minds. I would have written differently for a different implied audience, but every dialogue must have a limited scope and a definite voice. If my study of the Platonic dialectic has taught me nothing else, it is that one must not only *understand* one's interlocutors but in some sense *become* them.

Chapter 2

Organic Naturalism

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

While ethical naturalism has a variety of expressions, the common problem is how to relate ethical and otherwise normative facts with non-normative facts. The term 'normative' refers to 'ought' talk. As Alan Gibbard says:

> 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.'[1]

So the problem is to explain how the way things *are in fact* relate to the way things *ought to be*. I shall call this the 'is-ought gap.' Hume is often credited with (or blamed for) the insight that an 'ought' can never be derived from an 'is.'[2] When it comes to ethics, how could mere facts motivate me to act,

1. Gibbard, "Normative Properties," 321.

2. In a famous passage, Hume says: "In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is however, of the last consequence." (*A Treatise of Human Nature* book III, part I, section I.) Nevertheless, Arnhart and MacIntyre argue that Hume himself allows for a kind of inference from "is" to "ought" in other places. (Cf. Larry Arnhart, "The New Darwinian Naturalism in Political Theory," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 02 (1995): 389–400; Alasdair MacIntyre, "Hume on Is and Ought," *The Philosophical Review*, 1959, 451–68) I think Moore deserves

without any evaluative commitment? How could mere facts entail some moral truth? How could mere facts *be* values? As Stephen R. Brown suggests, "when all is said and done, [the is-ought gap] might be *the* problem of ethics."[3] Thankfully, if natural norms exist, then they undercut the is-ought gap. Natural norms would not "bridge" the is-ought gap; rather, they would show that the putative gap is spurious.

The purpose of this chapter is to argue that there are such things as natural norms. At least *some* normativity is discoverable in natural life forms and functions themselves and that is not projected by human evaluators. These natural formal and teleological facts are just as real and familiar as other scientific facts. My hypothesis is that the set of natural norms includes some human norms which can form the basis for a plausible ethical naturalism.

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

Section 1 explains in more detail the two kinds of is-ought gap that philosophers have taken to render ethical naturalism impossible. It explains how one notion of natural normativity makes ethical naturalism at least possible.

Section 2 presents a novel case for what I call "organic normativity." I first summarize Philippa Foot's and Michael Thompson's case for natural norms of two types: formal and functional norms. I augment the case on the basis of generic propositions, that organisms have a real life form and a natural teleological process.

Section 3 considers the three possible explanations of the phenomena of natural norms: realist, anti-realist, and reductionist. I show how the realist is free to accept the simpler explanation. I concede that the anti-realist has an explanation that is worth exploring further, but leave it aside since that explanation is not necessarily as attractive to the scientific naturalist.

Section 4 tackles the alternative to my view that is most popular among scientific naturalists: reductionism. I aim to show that while reductionism cannot be fully rebutted, it is, at the very least, no

more of the blame (or the credit).

3. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, 95.

more scientifically respectable or rationally necessary to believe than naturalistic, normative realism.

1. Two Challenges

Consider a few pretty uncontroversial normative propositions: '*better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied*' or *'tolerance of people with different views is essential to democracy'*. Supposing these are true, *why* are they true? The non-naturalist has a good explanation: such propositions pick out fundamental, non-natural, moral facts. The naturalist anti-realist also has a good explanation: such propositions express something about the speaker, her individual values, or cultural norms. The ethical naturalist's explanation is a bit trickier. He must show how such statements relate to the *natural* facts. The most straightforward path would be to argue that "you ought to be wise" is a normative truth derivable from some other fact that is natural. In general, ethical naturalism states that some ethical facts are grounded in natural facts or are identifiable with natural facts.

The is-ought gap has at least five dimensions. There is an *ontological* gap between normative facts and natural facts; a *logical* gap between normative claims and non-normative claims; a *semantic* gap between normative concepts and non-normative concepts; an *epistemological* gap between the way normative claims are justified and the way non-normative claims are justified; and a *motivational* gap between how norms motivate to action and how facts motivate or fail to motivate to action.[4] All these gaps draw the contrast between bald nature on the one hand – McDowell's "realm of law" – and normativity on the other – McDowell's "space of reasons." The point is that when it comes to human evaluations, 'is' statements may be interesting but they seem useless for practical purposes.

To simplify matters, we can use the epistemological form of the is-ought gap to express the

Is-Ought Challenge:

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

The first premise of the is-ought challenge sets out a criterion for ethical naturalism: the norma-

4. Ibid., 75–76.

tive propositions that feature as conclusions of ethical arguments must be derived from descriptive premises. The second premise seems to render hopeless the thought that we can evaluate things on the basis of what they are. It is difficult to imagine how the challenge could be met. If it cannot be met, then ethical naturalism, and neo-Aristotelianism, is a non-starter.

The is-ought gap seems to me fatal to some forms of ethical naturalism. Namely, it is fatal if we concede that nature is "bald" – a purely descriptive, mathematical matrix of non-normative facts and laws. However, the is-ought gap can be *undercut* if we deny that picture.

Of course, I can concede that nature consists of *merely natural facts*. The concession is a tautology. I do not concede, without argument, that all natural facts are non-normative. To concede that nature is purely descriptive would be to allow my opponent to beg the question. My opponent might likewise complain that I beg the question in my own favor. It is true that, if I were to merely stipulate that there *are* natural norms, this stipulation would beg the question in my favor. The only thing for it is for me to *argue* from agreed upon premises that there are such things as natural norms. Having done so, it is fair of me to request an argument to the contrary. If the critic merely insists on reaffirming that all nature is non-normative, that would be mere question-begging.

So, are there such things as natural norms? We can use the ontological form of the is-ought gap to express the **Bald Nature Challenge**:

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

This second challenge, like the first, sets out a criterion that ethical naturalism must satisfy. Namely, ethical naturalism must offer an account of some natural norms that are both real and brutely natural, not derived from other (descriptive) facts.

Foot argues that features of nature are instances of 'natural goodness' or 'natural defect.' About such qualities, she says:

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

patterns found there, patterns of natural normativity.[5]

Two clarifications are required before attempting to meet this challenge. First, natural normativity is an indeterminate concept that might include a variety of different kinds of normativity that are not obviously moral normativity. For example, notions such as the proper, the healthy, the advantageous, the adaptive, the mature, and so on, might be genuinely normative without being sufficient as ethical norms. Even if some natural norms were intrinsic to mundane biological species such as the white oak (Quercus alba) or the sloth bear (Melursus ursinus), more work would be needed to argue that natural norms are intrinsic to the human (Homo sapiens sapiens) and that our ethical life depends on conforming to them. Secondly, natural normativity might be only a feature of human nature, as John McDowell argues, or it might be a feature of any organic life. I shall return to this dispute in later chapters. For now, I only wish to emphasize that even if natural normativity can be shown to be plausible, then ethical naturalism is *possibly* true.

2. Generic Truths, Natural Norms

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

First, start with natural formal facts. Scientists and non-scientists alike easily observe that nature is full of kinds: sunflowers are not oxygen; wolves are not bears; lead is not gold; and so on. Kind concepts allow us to both distinguish x from y and to gather together all the x's. Wolves and jackals are both dogs; lead and gold are both elements; ice and steam are both water, and so on. Classifying entities into categories and kinds is intuitive and natural.[6] Though I shall not explore the

5. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.

6. Susan Gelman and Lawrence Hirschfeld, "How Biological Is Essentialism," *Folkbiology* 9

expansive literature on essentialism, it is prima facie plausible to affirm that categorial thinking is a constitutive feature of human thought and possibly a feature of nature itself.

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

Kinds and their ends can be conceptually distinguished but are intrinsically related. Is the shape of a hip bone adaptive for its purpose or is that purpose conducive to the development of such-and-such a shape? The structural and functional features of organisms are distinguishable *de se* but not, I suggest, *de re*. Rather than trying to tease out a distinguish between kinds and ends, we do better to allow that the natural structures and functions are inseparable aspects of a single entity. Indeed, philosopher of science Tim Lewens summarizes the folk biological conception of a "kind" by linking together the concept of a life form or "essence" with the concept of a function or "telos:"[8] a kind is a "teleo-essence," a thing with an end.

How do philosophers explain the apparent existence of kinds and teleonomic behaviors? The explanations may be either realist, reductionist, or anti-realist. Realist explanations argue that kinds and their ends are what they seem to be: fundamental facts of nature. Reductionist or anti-realist explanations argue that kinds and their ends are not what they seem. The anti-realist argues

(1999): 403–46; Stefan Linquist et al., "Exploring the Folkbiological Conception of Human Nature," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B: Biological Sciences* 366, no. 1563 (2011): 444–53.

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

8. The Greek word '*telos*' is commonly translated as "end," but it is bursting with an array of possible meanings, including: "definite point," "goal," "purpose," "cessation," "order," "prize," "highest point," "realization," "decision," and "services." See Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon: Founded Upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Harper & Brothers, 1896). Strong fills out this already rich picture with a wider array of related meanings from the Koine Greek: "from a primary *tello* (to set out for a definite point or goal); properly, the point aimed at as a limit, i.e. (by implication) the conclusion of an act or state (termination (literally, figuratively or indefinitely), result (immediate, ultimate or prophetic), purpose); specially, an impost or levy (as paid); continual, custom, end(-ing), finally, uttermost." See *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: New American Standard Bible.* Updated ed. La Habra: Lockman Foundation, 1995. Entry 5056.

that kinds and ends don't ultimately exist; there are only concrete particulars and in various stages of a mechanical process. The reductionist argues that *some* kinds exist, but they do not correspond to our initial scientific categorization; and that *some* end-directed teleonomic processes are real but it is reducible to non-end-directed processes.

Before discussing these options in full, let's explore the neo-Aristotelian treatment of natural normativity in more detail. Philippa Foot argues that human virtues are instances of a broader class of natural properties: 'natural goodness.'[9] Foot is well aware that her offering is likely to offend the ears of some listeners. Her defense is the thought (drawn from Wittgenstein) that crude beginnings are often a necessary first step on the way to something refined. To earn an audience for her argument, her first chapter (which she calls a "fresh start") clears away some shaky assumptions inherited from Hume and Moore. Many modern ethicists treat human valuations as unprecedented, almost miraculous, new appearance in the cosmos. Instead, we should expand the scope of our inquiry to examine the status of humans as natural entities.

Moore assumed that, in philosophical ethics, 'good' is the ultimate predicate under review. This is one of the "shaky assumptions" Foot wishes to clear. She argues that statements like "pleasure is good" are not good paradigms for philosophical reflection. Evaluation of human creatures and evaluation of plants and animals follow *the same logical pattern*. In such evaluations, good is good *for*. Contrast 'good' with other predicates like 'red' or 'beautiful.' In a statement such as 'the house is beautiful,' the predicate 'beautiful' doesn't need a complement. The house is *beautiful* – full stop. But 'good' has a different logical function. 'Good' is more like 'useful.' The phrase 'The house is useful' *does* need a complement. When we say 'the house is useful' we must specify what it is useful for – *for a mom of six, or useful for an artist,* or what have you. Likewise, 'good' always means *good for someone* or *for something.* In reference to organisms and other natural objects, 'good' always needs a complement.[10]

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

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

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.

Foot agrees on this point with Michael Thompson's groundbreaking work.[11] Thompson argues that the concept of "life" is not, as it may seem to some, a property of some beings where *being* is the fundamental concept; rather "life" is a fundamental concept.[12] 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."[13] When we observe and examine living things we rightly employ some shared categories and our conclusions rightly share a logical structure.

What is that common structure? Thompson reviews and refutes a variety of crude definitions of life one finds in biology textbooks: life is a property of anything that is alive, such as capacities to reproduce, grow, metabolize, etc. The problem is that even though such properties are co-extensive with the property of being alive, they are wildly insufficient for the task of *defining* life. Indeed, such properties depend on a prior understanding of life. Thompson's alternative is that life is a fundamental concept. We recognize things as alive before we learn about their shared traits; indeed, we can only ascribe a set of traits *living things* share if we are already in possession (absent that set of traits) of a concept of living things under which we gather a sample.

On these considerations, it is most reasonable to hypothesize that life is a fundamental concept, along with 'being,' 'quantity' and others. Once we accept that intuitive conclusion, then the argument gets interesting. For every individual living being is a member of a species or life-form. And living beings are not just *acted upon*; they *act*. Each species has its characteristic actions, but the important point here is that organisms as a whole are characterized by being the source of their own action. As John Haldane says, quoting the medieval motto: "things are specified by their power."[14]

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

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

13. Ibid., 57.

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

Thompson says that "action in this sense is a specific form of *life process*."[15] Since living beings are characterized by *acting*, each particular species engages in *its own* particular activities. Beavers build dams and robins build nests as part of their own life process. If this is so, then there are life-form specific *successes* and *failures* to act. Each life-form is subject to its own normative appraisals: something would be wrong with a beaver that built a tiny nest or a robin that tried to build a massive dam.

By introducing the term 'natural normativity,' Foot is insisting on a point that is both interesting and controversial. If evaluative properties like health and disease are really instances of natural goodness and natural defect, then some evaluative properties are *primary qualities of nature*. McDowell and others will object to this characterization of natural normativity. They think it "queer" that nature should exhibit such properties, and they find it easier to judge that human beings are the only evaluators. It might be that terms like 'good' and 'bad' are sui generis evaluative terms, and that evaluative properties are "in people's heads" as it were. But Foot's analysis of language about plants and animals indicates that such a conclusion is not the natural presumption.

A much more natural starting point is to assume that such terms are used relative to natural kinds – and especially life-forms and their activities or functions. The natural goodness under discussion is not just a human ascription but seems to be something humans *recognize* in all living things. Certainly, some properties are human ascriptions only. Other properties are in the world and only show up in human ascriptions insofar as we accurately reflect the facts. Foot's point is that *some* instances of natural goodness seem much more plausibly instances of this latter kind. For, there is "no change in the meaning of 'good' between the word as it appears in 'good roots' and as it appears in 'good dispositions of the human will'."[16] The identification of what is *good for* a non-human organism is sometimes identical to the identification of what is *good for* a human being. Foot's theory explains this in the simplest way. Foot concludes that this point holds about " 'goodness' and 'badness' and therefore about evaluation in its most general form."

By contrast, McDowell and those who would draw a sharp contrast between "moral" and "non-moral" uses of the term must give long and sophisticated explanations for why it makes sense

15. Thompson, *Life and Action*, 27.
16. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 39.

to describe a healthy plant and a moral person both as "doing well." The plant is not just doing well *for my garden* but doing well as itself. It is doing what such plants are supposed to live. The human being is not just living well *for a westerner* or *for a Californian* but doing well as a human being. Rosalind Hursthouse articulates Foot's insight in this way:

> The starting point is an idea that she has never lost sight of, and which figures in her early attack on Hare. It is the idea that 'good', like 'small', is an attributive adjective. What that entails is that, although you can evaluate and choose things according to almost any criteria you like, you must select the noun or noun phrase you use to describe the thing you are calling good advisedly, for it determines the criteria of goodness that are appropriate. Hare can call a cactus a good one on the grounds that it is diseased and dying, and choose it for that reason, but what he must not do is describe it as a good cactus, for a cactus is a living thing. He can describe it as a good 'decorative object for my windowsill' or 'present to give my detestable mother-in-law', but not as a good cactus.[17]

I should make two clarifications about the scope of my thesis thus far. First, the 'good' is a good-of-a-kind, not good simpliciter. It would be a natural leap to assume that the good-for-us is an instance of the good simpliciter, but this is a different question altogether. Blackman argues that there *is* no good other than goods of kinds.[18] Others would argue that the good-of-a-kind is an instance of the good simpliciter. I wish to remain agnostic on this issue. While my thesis identifies what is good for us as an instance of something *truly good,* it remains quiet about the broader metaphysical or cosmic significance of the fact.

A second clarification is this: when I talk of the 'human good' I intend to refer to the species *Homo sapiens sapiens*, the way that talk about a robin's egg being *blue* is to predicate a blue-of-a-kind. Folk ontology tends to classify people by preferences or nationalities akin to the way it classifies leopards and bears; but my analysis trades on the concepts used in biology. Hence, my good-of-a-kind analysis is intended to refer to organisms and biological species, which are most plausibly understood as natural kinds, rather than social groups, which are not. There is more to be said about these two clarifications, but exploring them would take us too far afield.

17. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 195.

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

I would now like to augment Foot's case with a novel argument for natural normativity. Like her case, my argument depends on a minimal commitment to scientific realism[19] and on "Aristotelian categoricals." But I believe the case can be made stronger by utilizing a feature of language called 'generics.'

Michael Thompson is one of the first to work out "the special logic of judgments we make about living things, and then to indicate its application to ethics." Such judgments have a variety of names in the recent neo-Aristotelian literature: the most common are "Aristotelian categoricals"[20] and "natural-historical judgments."[21] Less common are references to "norms"[22] or "bare plurals."[23] I prefer the shorter and less adorned term *generic*.[24]

My postulate is this: **some generics about human beings are true.** If this is true then, I shall suggest, we have good hope of cutting up nature at the joints. When combined with a moderate scientific realism, generic truths from sciences such as biology, physics, and anthropology (and perhaps others) support a modest natural normativity which will be further articulated in chapter 4 to indicate how certain traits are virtues or vices for human beings. The case in brief is this:

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

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

20. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

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

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

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

24. Cf. Francis Jeffry Pelletier and Greg N Carlson, *The Generic Book* (University of Chicago Press, 1995); Sarah-Jane Leslie, "Generics: Cognition and Acquisition," *Philosophical Review* 117, no. 1 (2008): 1–47; Andrew M Bailey, "Animalism," *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 12 (2015): 867–83 for a discussion of a specific generic: "we are animals" in metaphysics and philosophical anthropology; Andrei Cimpian, Amanda Brandone, and Susan Gelman, "Generic Statements Require Little Evidence for Acceptance but Have Powerful Implications," *Cognitive Science* 34, no. 8 (2010): 1452–82 for an experiment in cognitive psychology that seeks to quantify the prevalence levels at which subjects tend to agree to generics: e.g., 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.

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

Andrew Bailey's recent paper provides a helpful (and humorous) introduction to the topic of generic statements. He asks:

> What are generics? A fine question, but a difficult one. Start with this sentence: 'Buddhists are way into meditation'. This first sentence is, let us suppose, true. So far so good. But is it equivalent to 'for every x, if x is a Buddhist, x is way into meditation'? It does not appear to be. For the second sentence might be false (some Buddhists might not be way into meditation) even if the first sentence is, as we have supposed, true. The first sentence could be true, somehow, even if not all Buddhists are way into meditation (similarly, 'ducks lay eggs' may be true even if not all ducks lay eggs, 'mosquitoes carry dengue fever' may be true even if only a very few mosquitoes carry that virus, and so on). We are now positioned to observe one curious property of generics: they admit of exceptions.[25]

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

A generic is interesting because it is, or we treat it as, a truth about forms, or species. The subject of the statement is not all S's nor merely some S's, but the "infima species."[26] In this way, generics pick out what we might call formal facts, facts about the life form in question. Thus Sarah Leslie: "It is widely accepted that [definite] generics are singular statements which predicate properties directly of kinds. For example, 'tigers are extinct' predicates the property of being extinct directly

25. Bailey, "Animalism," 869.

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

of the kind *Panthera tigris*, and would be true just in case Panthera tigris had the property of being extinct."[27]

McDowell thinks that exceptions to a generic truth are a "logical weakness" in deriving conclusions from generics about human beings. He cites the example from Anscombe (and Aristotle) that "humans have 32 teeth," saying "there is a truth we can state in those terms, but from that truth, together with the fact that I am a human being, it does not follow that I have 32 teeth. (In fact it is false)."[28] McDowell accepts that even a true generic captures fails to reach deductive certainty. If this is his objection, it rather misses the point. Aristotelian-categoricals are not half-hearted universal judgments; they are not universals with widely-acknowledged counterexamples. Rather, they are judgments of a logically different kind. Far from being a logical weakness, the ability to capture both a truth and its exceptions generics are what enable us to capture truths about natural kinds that help explain statistical variation and inconsistency.

Prasada says that, "Much of our conceptual knowledge consists of generic knowledge – knowledge about kinds of things and their properties."[29] We can approach generics through what Prasada calls "formal, quantificational" semantics or through "principled connections." Principled connections support formal explanations, normative expectations, and a statistical expectation of prevalence. In other words, we explain that the dog has four legs *because* it is a dog (formal explanation); we expect that Fido should have four legs *unless something is wrong* (normative expectations); and we expect that if we counted up a population of dogs, *most* dogs would in fact turn out to have four legs (statistical expectation).

Generic truths, once discovered, set a normative expectation by which we evaluate individual members on how well or badly they exemplify their life form.[30] The normative expectation cannot, it seems, be reduced to statistical correlations. Rather, statistical correlations can be a sign of (or can be an illusion of) a principled connection.

27. Leslie, "Generics," sec. 1.

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

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

30. Ibid., 3.

There is much to be learned about the linguistic features of generics, but none of the unexplored frontiers render generics useless for applications in neo-Aristotelian ethics. A few examples of what needs to be learned include the correlation between statistical prevalence and normative identity; many generic truths describe what is statistically prevalent but not all. What is the difference? Is one reducible to the other? Furthermore, Leslie distinguishes between indefinite generics and definite generics. For example, "tigers are striped" admits of specification ("that tiger over there is striped") while definite generics do not ("domestic cats are common" does not license "that domestic cat is common.") Finally, indefinite generics are trickier: "Ducks lay eggs" is a true generic while "ducks are female" is a false one, even though only female ducks lay eggs. And "mosquitoes carry the West Nile virus" is true even though less than one percent of mosquitoes carry the virus while "books are paperbacks" is false even though more than eighty percent of books are paper backs.[31] How do we sort through these correlations between generic connection and statistical prevalence?

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

Generic truths are acquired via a normal scientific means of empirical observation, rational reflection, and discussion. This familiar process is certainly revisable. For example, an ethologist who discovers a wolf hunting alone may have a normative expectation that the wolf is not healthy. But she cannot know certainly in advance that this is so. She must test the hypothesis. A few reasonable interpretations are available: perhaps the lone wolf is unhealthy; perhaps the initial generic that 'wolves hunt in packs' was false; or perhaps this wolf is actually a new species of wolf. As it happens, in the case of wolves, no known species of wolf hunts alone so there is very strong reason to conclude that a lone wolf is rabid. But the point more generally is that generics are acquired and modified by a familiar, if complicated, process of scientific reasoning. Michael Thompson points out that: there is a "general and thoroughgoing reciprocal mutual interdependence of vital description of the individual and natural historical judgment about the form or kind."[32] Put differently, Micah Lott says:

31. Leslie, "Generics."

32. Michael Thompson, "Apprehending Human Form," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*

> At each stage of an empirical investigation, our observations are mediated by our current understanding of the life form whose members we are observing. At the same time, our observations of those individual members will in turn improve our understanding of the life form itself, which then makes possible even more accurate and extensive future observations.[33]

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

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

To see this second kind of natural normativity, begin with the concept of a function. Eyes perform the function (in an organism) of seeing, hemlock trees perform the function (in an ecosystem) of shading rivers, and so on. Thompson, for example, cites the scientific observation that "flowers have blossoms of such-and-such type in order that such-and-such insects should be attracted and spread their pollen about."[34]

While some philosophers of science have thought that teleological normativity could be explained in terms of function, I would suggest that the reverse is rather true: the structure of a function

54 (2004): 52.

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

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

is teleological. There are many senses of the term 'function,' but the kind of biological functions under review are teleological, or at least teleonomic, in that it is an arrangement of parts toward a particular purpose or end.

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

> By "teleology," I have in mind such words and concepts as "purpose," "end," "goal," "function," "control," and "regulation," as well as the real-world biological phenomena to which these words and concepts refer. This means that the word "teleology" should always be construed here in its internal or "immanent" sense – purposiveness existing in living beings themselves – and never in its external or "transcendent" sense of an overarching cosmic principle.[35]

Ernst Mayr (following Colin Pittendridgh) calls a process "teleonomic" if it is not a process of intentional purposes.[36] He says, "I have therefore refrained from using anthropomorphic language, particularly the terms of purpose and intention, when explaining teleonomic phenomena in animals and plants."[37]

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

> All objects of the physical world are endowed with the capacity to change their state, and these changes strictly obey natural laws. They are end-directed only in a passive, automatic way, regulated by external forces or conditions… All teleomatic processes come to an end when the potential is used up (as in the cooling of a heated piece of iron) or when the process is stopped by encountering an external impediment (as when a falling object hits the ground). The law of gravity and the second law of ther-

35. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 1.

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

37. Ibid., 123.

> modynamics are among the natural laws which most frequently govern teleomatic processes.[38]

For my purposes, however, even teleonomic programs would count as instances of natural normativity insofar as the development of an organism at one time is incomplete but will later be complete. As Waddington puts it, "the end state of the process is determined by its properties at the beginning."[39] Normative, in my sense, is not the antonym of "descriptive"; normative is the antonym of descriptive *at present*. "The egg is not a chicken" is true at present. But "chickens start their life as eggs" is also generically true. Hence "the egg is a chicken" is a kind of teleological judgment about what it may, under proper conditions, become. As Chris Toner says, "natural-historical judgments readily admit of combination into teleological judgments."[40]

Taken broadly, then, the first point is to realize that talk about functions and ends is just as scientific as talk about life-forms, species, and natural health or disease. Mayr quickly rebuts many of the common objections (I should rather say prejudices) against teleonomic processes. For instance, teleological statements and explanations, he says, do not "imply the endorsement of unverifiable theological or metaphysical doctrines in science."[41] Rather, as Mark Perlman says:

> Many objects in the world have functions. Some of the objects with functions are organs or parts of living organisms… Hearts are for pumping blood. Eyes are for seeing. Countless works in biology explain the "Form, Function, and Evolution of …" everything from bee dances to elephant tusks to pandas' 'thumbs.' Many scientific explanations, in areas as diverse as psychology, sociology, economics, medical research, and neuroscience, rest on appeals to the function and/or malfunction of things or systems.[42]

Mayr's highly suggestive alternative to conscious purposes is natural "programs." A program is "coded or prearranged information" that regulates an organism's behavior or development up to a pre-defined end-point.[43] Mayr's examples include the development of bones, organs, and shapes that come with physiological maturity, migration. Programs are "the result of natural selection."

38. Ibid., 125.
39. Conrad Hal Waddington and others, *The Strategy of the Genes: A Discussion of Some Aspects of Theoretical Biology.* (George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1957).
40. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 222.
41. Mayr, "The Idea of Teleology," 122.
42. Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," 1–4.
43. Mayr, "The Idea of Teleology," 127–8.

However, they contain information: "not only blueprints of the goal but also the instructions of how to use the information of the blue print."[44] The concept of a program, he assures us, is similar to concepts deployed by geneticists and computer programmers. The point is that the telos is not some mysterious spirit hovering above the organism, beckoning it to reach its full potential but coded into the organism from the beginning. Regardless of the details of Mayr's proposal for explaining teleonomic processes, the mere fact that natural processes occur is indisputable – and we describe such processes in generic propositions.

Generic propositions usefully capture the functional or teleological properties of natural organisms. As Chris Toner says, "natural-historical judgments readily admit of combination into teleological judgments."[45] This kind of combination of generic truths is very familiar. No sooner have I learned the formal facts about a penguin (that it is a bird, that it can swim, that it has a countershaded white belly and dark back etc.) do I learn that *penguins are countershaded in order to avoid predators from above and below.*[46] 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. It is rather a normative fact about the penguin. As Hursthouse says, "Wolves hunt in packs; a 'free-rider' wolf that doesn't join in the hunt fails to act well and is thereby defective."[47]

There is one objection that is easy to forestall. Someone might point out that genetic drift results in species evolving every which way, including the emergence of adaptive, maladaptive, and adaptation-neutral traits. This is true, so far as it goes, but not really an objection. Two replies are, I think, sufficient. First, it is an inextricable part of the scientific process to reason out which traits are instances of natural goodness and which are not. Just because one hundred percent of organisms eventually die doesn't mean that death is naturally good for them. Just because a high statistical number of organisms have a particular feature – a stripe or a scale or what have you – doesn't necessarily

44. Ibid., 128.

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

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

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

mean that the feature is a formal one of the species. Rather, one must keep an eye open to larger samples, possible counterexamples, and one must keep one's generics tentative until they are very well grounded. Similarly, part of the scientific process is reasoning out which traits are *adaptive*. Even the way the objection is phrased assumes that some traits are adaptive – that is, adaptive for *survival and reproduction.* Allowing even this minimal sense of normativity concedes my point that the normativity is discovered by the scientist rather than purely ascribed by him. A second response is that the generics under discussion are not about species-qua-fluid-across-millennia but about species-qua-fixed or apparently fixed within a given period. The fluidity of species over time, like a slow-motion film with thousands of frames, requires countless generations. For all we can observe of most species in the course of a human lifetime (say) or even since the birth of modern science in the 16th century, the species-at-present are fixed enough.

In my overall argument, generic truths are intended to serve as counterexamples to premise 2 of the **Bald Nature Challenge** above. That challenge asserted that no facts are genuinely both natural and normative. Generics describe such facts. Generic facts are natural, in that a large percentage of scientific knowledge consists of scientists predicating generic truths of natural kinds. Generic facts are also normative in at least two ways: first, an individual organism may exemplify or fail to exemplify its life-form; and secondly, *some* generics pick out natural functional or teleological facts about life forms (that penguins are counter-shaded *to avoid* predators, that hearts are *for* pumping blood, etc.). On my view, the most scientifically respectable option is to accept the straightforward, generic truths delivered by such sciences as biology and physiology about forms and functions.

3. Three Paths Forward

My case begins with the indisputable natural phenomena that organisms appear to exist in natural kinds and, secondly, that organisms engage in teleological or teleonomic end-directed behaviors. Scientists and non-scientists can and should attempt to explain these appearances. There are three possible responses we shall consider.

The first, and most plausible, is to simply accept normative realism. I call this view 'organic naturalism' to distinguish it from an "enchanted" view of nature wherein even rocks, chemicals, and

stars instantiate normative properties.[48] While realism about kinds and teleological phenomena is disputable, it seems to be the simplest explanation and the one most consonant with scientific realism. When Kant denies realism about natural teleology he admits we cannot help acting as if it were true.[49] If we cannot help acting as if p were true, it seems a fine hypothesis that p is, indeed, true.

The second, and least plausible, path is that we could embrace full-scale normative anti-realism and deny the objective reality of any such norms in nature (and indeed, even in human beings). This path requires us to explain away all putative natural kinds and teleonomic phenomena in nature. (It might also require explaining away practical reasoning and intentional, end-directed action in human beings.) For example, we would have to deny that animals, plants, insects, all living things (and even ecosystems) exhibit end-directed or teleonomic behavior: eyes see, hemlock trees offer shade to fish, stomachs digest, deer leap to avoid predators. This denial is almost incredible. If all generics are false (or only conventionally true) then it is in some important sense false that 'wolves hunt in packs' and false even that 'penguins are birds.' It is false not only that "eyes see" but even that "humans are primates." Arthur Ward draws this conclusion:

> Perhaps the most provocative conclusion of the dissertation is that there is no such thing as good eyesight or bad hearing *per se*. Or equivalently, that it is strictly speaking false (without further qualification) that humans have ten fingers and ten toes. Both sorts of claims rely on teleological norms that entail good-of-a-kind evaluation, the application of the attributive "good," which I argue can only be legitimately applied to artifacts… some people find the denial that "humans have ten fingers" or the possibility of "good hearing" to be so implausible as to be a reductio of my entire argument.[50]

Denying the existence of (normatively significant) good eyesight does indeed seem to me a reductio of such anti-realism. Even if a position is 'absurd,' that doesn't mean it is automatically false or not worth considering. It might well be true. But if it is true, then absurdity is true and truth is absurd. There have been many philosophers who have thought so. Despite my inability to see the plausibility

48. The proponent of a view of nature in which all material objects instantiate normative properties would reject the label 'enchanted.' The term 'enchantment' presumes that an object has no intrinsic evaluative properties but receives them, like a spell, from the evaluator. The issue cannot be settled by presumption. Nevertheless, this issue is not my main focus.

49. Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose."

50. Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory," 82.

of global normative anti-realism, I must acknowledge that it has impressive defenders who deserve a fuller response than I can give here. Since anti-realism is not likely to appeal to the scientific naturalists in my intended audience, for present purposes, I shall proceed on the assumption that modern scientific reasoning is capable of grasping the non-absurd intelligibility of nature.

The third path, and the most plausible rival to realism, is to develop a reductionist account of apparently natural norms. This path accepts the appearance of such things as natural kinds, natural teleology, natural functions, etc., but *reduces* these phenomena to less spooky (read: more mechanistic) phenomena consistent with a conception of bald nature. For this section, I ignore natural kinds and focus simply on teleological normativity. So we can call reductionism of such natural norms "teleological reductionism" or "teleoreduction," following James Barham.[51] Arguing for or against teleoreductionism has become a cottage industry.[52]

I find the fervor for reductionism in philosophy of science and philosophy of mind odd. Perlman is right to be surprised. He says: "It is surprising that analytic philosophers, with their strong focus on science, would reject a notion that is so central to some areas of science, most notably, biology and engineering sciences… Biology cannot, or at least in practice does not, eliminate functions and purposes."[53] I do not think that the appeal of teleological reductionism is due to its intrinsic plausibility; its appeal is mainly due to the mistaken assumption that it is the only scientifically respectable option. When compared with another view that is equally scientifically respectable and more plausible, that appeal wanes.

Nevertheless, the arguments for teleoreductionism are sophisticated, and some proponents hold out hope for even better arguments to come. More to the point, some of its proponents af-

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

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

53. Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology." 6. One might suppose that Perlman's qualification "or at least in practice does not" leaves open space for the normative anti-realist. I welcome the critic who would try to show that biology *can* eliminate functions; what I have tried to suggest, and what Barham argues in great detail, is that the attempt has been made and has failed. A few failed attempts at reduction does not prove that reduction is impossible. But it does make the more plausible view, teleological realism, a better candidate for the default view.

firm reductionism because of an operating background belief that, globally, reductive physicalism is a victorious view, despite ongoing local skirmishes. My objections to the reductionist argument, which amount to the charge of non-sequitur, are unlikely to overturn someone's background beliefs. Barham's summary of the dialectic seems to me correct:

> If someone were comfortable with a purely physicalist worldview that had no place in it anywhere for teleology in any form, then nothing I will say here would do much to discomfort that individual. All I claim is that, if one is already convinced of the rationality of taking at face value at least some of the teleological concepts that we employ both in everyday life and in biological discourse, then one is not required to relinquish that conviction on the basis of the notion that molecular biology and the theory of natural selection, either severally or jointly, have already settled the matter by providing us with a successful means of eliminating such concepts from biology.[54]

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

4. Against Reductionism

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

> To reduce a putative teleological phenomenon is to give an account of the phenomenon that is both empirically and theoretically adequate and that neither employs any teleological concepts nor presupposes any other teleological phenomena.[55]

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

54. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 110.
55. Ibid., 109.

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

> The first position, stemming from a seminal article by Cummins (1975), views being a function fundamentally as making a causal contribution (in the efficient-causal sense) to the maintenance of a larger system of which the function in question is a component part.[56]

In that seminal article, Cummins attacks the assumptions that "(A) The point of functional characterization in science is to explain the presence of the item (organ, mechanism, process or whatever) that is functionally characterized," and "(B) For something to perform its function is for it to have certain effects on a containing system, which effects contribute to the performance of some activity of, or the maintenance of some condition in, that containing system."[57] Essentially, this path explains a natural function as a relation between parts and wholes.

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

It does no good to assert that part A has a causal role within organism B *after one has already presupposed an irreducibly functional analysis*. The teleoreductionist is obliged rather to show how one can distinguish teleological and non-teleological part-whole relations in absence of or prior to such presuppositions. The teleological realist also affirms that hearts play a causal role in the vertebrate's body. The teleological realist's point is that the heart is a part of the body with an irreducibly functional part. It is simultaneously true that the heart *causes* blood circulation and that the heart pumps *in order to* circulate blood. The heart is *the blood pump* of the body.

56. ibid., 111.
57. Robert Cummins, "Functional Analysis," *The Journal of Philosophy* 72, no. 20 (1975): 741.

The teleological realist is free to identify the function of a particular body part, and then to characterize the part-whole relation in irreducibly functional terms; the teleological reductionist cannot do likewise. Relatedly, we should note that even the reductionist's notion of a "role" is essentially teleological. The thought that the heart "plays a role" within the organism's circulatory system seems to be conceptually identical to the thought that the heart *has a function* within the circulatory system. So the reductionist must be wary not to smuggle in teleological concepts into a putatively non-teleological account. If all available reductionist strategies *did* somehow smuggle in teleological concepts, this fact would be somewhat telling. One cannot be blamed for wondering if reduction is not just difficult but impossible.

The second major candidate for teleological reduction is the "natural-selection" strategy which appeals to the historical genesis of the organ in question. This reductive strategy is perhaps best viewed as a supplement, rather than alternative, to the causal-role strategy. Natural selection reductions provide a causal-historical explanation of a present day teleonomic function.[58] There are a few different sub-strategies on this front.

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

My objection to this sub-strategy is this: have we even produced the *right kind of explanation* for a phenomenon such as the pumping of the heart? Obviously, natural selection is not a *selection* in the sense that *some agent* is "selecting." Natural selection is rather a scientific description of a process wherein generations of populations are either extinguished or preserved. Natural selection comes in to show how the organism varies, passes on heritable traits, and gives rise to new phenotypes. Thus

58. Ruth Garrett Millikan, "In Defense of Proper Functions," *Philosophy of Science* 56, no. 2 (1989): 288–302.

Barham says:

> …the functionally coordinated organism must already exist before it can be selected. On this view, we assume that the functional coordination of the organism is *prima facie* evidence of teleological determination, and since that functional coordination is presupposed by the theory of natural selection, the theory is in no position to reduce the apparent teleology in biology to mechanism.[59]

So much is clear in outline. However, the details of the case are philosophically important. Specifically, natural selection explains heritable traits that (i) varied in the past and which (ii) played a role in the reproductive rates of the population.[60] Natural selection is not supposed to and does not explain the bare existence of an initial population. Rather, the initial organism or population – with a complete set of formal and functional traits – is taken for granted. So the worry is that the process of natural selection is not the *right kind* of explanation to serve as a candidate for the reduction of apparently teleological activity within individual organisms.

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

59. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 125.

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

of organisms" – or simply homeostasis.[61] The scientific hypothesis some are investigating[62] seems to be that these two processes are separately necessary but only jointly sufficient causes to explain the presence of a trait (like pumping hearts) in a population.

A second popular sub-strategy with natural selection reductions is that of Ruth Millikan.[63] Millikan argues that a "proper function" by definition refers to an object's empirical history. She says that "definition of 'proper function' looks to history rather than merely to present properties or dispositions to determine function."[64] A function is a "recursive" concept, since the function of a present day organ is defined in reference to ancestor's functions; and "non-historical analyses" fail in important ways. Barham summarizes Millikan's definition of a proper function: "a present trait's being a function [is] equivalent to its having been naturally selected due to the fitness advantage conferred on an organism by the physical effects of the ancestral trait of the same type from which the present trait-token is descended."[65]

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

Millikan's view entails a implausible corollaries. First, suppose we discovered a new heart-like organism, say of extraterrestrial origin with distinct evolutionary parentages. It would have to be classified as having a different proper function, despite the fact that it circulates oxygenated blood through the organism just like terrestrial hearts. Secondly, hypothetical "Swampman" arguments press a similar point. Suppose an exact material replica of Donald Davidson spontaneously emerged from a swamp; on Millikan's theory, even though the Swampman is equipped with a heart and lungs

61. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 131.

62. James A Shapiro, "Revisiting the Central Dogma in the 21st Century," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1178, no. 1 (2009): 6–28.

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

64. Millikan, "In Defense of Proper Functions," 289.

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

and legs and eyelids, none of these has *any* "proper function." Millikan bites the bullet on both of these implausible corollaries:

> Take any object, then, that has a proper function or functions, a purpose or purposes, and consider a double of it, molecule for molecule exactly the same. Now suppose that this double has just come into being through a cosmic accident resulting in the sudden spontaneous convergence of molecules which, until a moment ago, had been scattered about in random motion. Such a double has no proper functions because its history is not right. It is not a reproduction of anything, nor has it been produced by anything having proper functions.[66]

On Millikan's view, then, such an organ with an identical structure that causes identical effects would not have any "proper function" at all. Millikan is well aware of the seeming absurdity of this conclusion, and defends her view against wild hypothetical counterexamples. Nevertheless, it still seems to me the counterexample cuts against her view, despite being fanciful.

It is more plausible, in light of such counterexamples, to accept the thought that an organ's *function* and its *historical genesis* are not identical. We can support this intuitive conclusion by showing a few ways that the two concepts come apart: Useless vestigial organs have an empirical history but no present day functional capacity; spandrels have a present-day functional capacity with no direct, primary selection history; the language capacities in say, the right hemisphere of the brain *can* be taken over by the left hemisphere in the case of injury or lobotomy, presumably because the brain is (present-day) adaptable and not because the brain function redundancy was selected for in every individual case. These counterexamples demonstrate *at least* that function and history conceptually can come apart.

What is the alternative? In Barham's view, functions are "essentially modal, not historical, concepts."[67] Barham quotes Fodor's vivid statement that "my heart's function has less to do with its evolutionary origins than with the current truth of such counterfactuals as that if it were to stop pumping my blood, I'd be dead."[68] If we made contact with extraterrestrials whose blood-like liquid was circulated by a pump-like organ, how could we discern whether it was a heart? We could query

66. Millikan, "In Defense of Proper Functions," 292.

67. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 139.

68. Jerry A Fodor, *The Mind Doesn't Work That Way: The Scope and Limits of Computational Psychology* (MIT press, 2001), 86–87; cited in Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 138.

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

Barham cautions against "imagining that 'selection history' could confer normative value on a biological function in the same way that pedigree confers value on a horse, or provenance on a painting."[69] "History" is not a special power but is simply the set of physical interactions over time. The question about which set of physical interactions over time produced X might be (and I think is) intimately related to questions about the function of X; the point is that they are two different questions. Michael Thompson, too, insists that judgments about natural teleology are made true from the form of life under question, not from "hypotheses about the past."[70] This seems right to me. It does not matter for present purposes *how* the function came to be, just whether or not it really *is* at present. Barham is right to point out that the problem with Aristotle's views of biology (say, believing that the seat of perception was not in the brain) was not that he lacked knowledge of evolution, but that he lacked an adequate knowledge of physiology.

My conclusion, based on these considerations, is that reductionist strategies are not very promising. 'Not very promising' is a far cry from 'hopeless.' There may be a successful reduction *one day*. But today is not that day. It may turn out to be possible to find an explanation of teleonomic phenomena "that is both empirically and theoretically adequate and that neither employs any teleological concepts nor presupposes any other teleological phenomena." Until then, the scientific perspective of empirical biology conforms most closely to the commonsense conclusion that *hearts are for pumping blood.*

Part of the resistance to this conclusion is a deeply-rooted anxiety about the prospect of accepting naturalistic normative realism whole cloth. Teleological realism in biology fell into disfavor about the same time as Francis Bacon declared that the search for final causes "defiles" science.[71]

69. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 140.

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

71. "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

This anxiety is misplaced. The proper reply to Bacon is that the teleological nihilism hypothesis has been tried and found wanting. Modern science is no less teleological than it was in the 17th century; perhaps even more so. Fitzpatrick says that, "While neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory does soundly reject any appeal to teleology in the process of evolution itself, there is a large literature in contemporary philosophy of biology defending the legitimacy of employing teleological concepts in connection with adaptations."[72] Thomas Nagel's recent philosophical defense of scientific, Darwinian, natural teleology received wide criticism.[73] However, one critical view by Michael Chorost pointed out that Nagel's main error was not in defending naturalistic teleology but failing to cite the *existing scientific literature*:

> Natural teleology is unorthodox, but it has a long and honorable history. For example, in 1953 the evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley argued that it's in the nature of nature to get more advanced over time. "If we take a snapshot view, improvement eludes us," he wrote. "But as soon as we introduce time, we see trends of improvement…"[74]

In addition to Huxley, we can point to Arnhart's persuasive argument that teleology is an irreplaceable assumption in medical science,[75] or Zammito's defense of the ongoing relevance of natural teleology in biology, since organisms seem to be intrinsically purposeful.[76] Darwin himself might have been a teleologist.[77] And, as Stephen Brown argues, "Neo-Darwinism… can actually be seen as underwriting teleological explanations in biology, that is, as playing a crucial theoretical role in explaining certain kinds of telic phenomena."[78] I have not done anything to place my account on neo-

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." Cf. *New Organon*, Book I. XLVIII.

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

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

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

75. Arnhart, "Aristotle's Biopolitics."

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

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

78. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, 109.

Darwinian footing; instead, my aim is to rebut the charge that finding such a footing is unthinkable. While natural teleological realism is still controversial, it is not a controversy between philosophy and science but a controversy *within science*.

5. Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to argue that there are such things as natural norms. The naturalistic normative anti-realist and the non-naturalistic normative realist agree that all natural facts are non-normative facts. This gives rise to the is-ought gap as a matter of logical necessity. But the is-ought gap might simply turn out to derive from an obsolete view of nature that cannot account for biological science, let alone the social sciences. The neo-Aristotelian view of natural normativity does not *bridge* the much vaunted is-ought gap but rather undercuts it. Natural norms serve as counterexamples to the common belief that all natural facts are descriptive (non-normative) facts.

Instances of natural normativity include familiar scientific facts about organisms: they bear a life form and they engage in natural teleological processes. The three possible responses to such putative natural norms are to accept them (as I have recommended), reject them, or reduce them. Conceding to global normative anti-realism would require adopting scientific anti-realism as well, which is a formidable philosophical view I have not attempted to consider here. Scientific realists tend to choose a reductive strategy, but I have given reasons to think reduction has not yet been accomplished and is not likely to be accomplished in the foreseeable future. In the mean time, it seems clear that naturalistic normative realism is not only assumed to be true in everyday scientific inquiry but is also commended by philosophical reflection.

The argument thus far has attempted to demonstrated that it is at least *possible* that ethical naturalism can derive normative human 'oughts' from other, basic, natural 'oughts.' The next chapter aims to demonstrate that it is *plausible*.

Chapter 3

Practical Primates

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

If all natural organisms can be described by normative generics, and humans are natural organisms, then humans can be described by human generics. If statements such as "apple trees produce apples" are norms capturing the object's natural end, then perhaps statements such as "human beings become knowledgeable" can capture our natural end. Perhaps such statements can be both normative and descriptive natural norms applicable to humans – or simply *human norms*. These natural norms would be binding on human beings as practical rational animals and not merely invented by human individuals or human cultures. These norms would be natural without being crassly biological; they would be both biological and practical.

The purpose of this chapter is to propose that there are such things as human norms. The strategy for identifying them is fairly simple: we must uncover generic propositions about human beings that are both scientifically true *and* normatively significant. For example, we need the same type of Aristotelian Categoricals or generics formulated in the previous chapter about flora and fauna. We need generics to answer questions like: what is a human being? All else depends on the life form of our species. Also, what kinds of activities does "the human" being do? What kind of life does it live? What is its natural end, if it has one – or what are they? The answers would be both descriptive and normative. Human norms would provide prima facie normative bindingness; if I am a human

being by nature, it would be initially binding upon me to *do what humans do* and *become what humans become*. These human norms, I shall suggest, give us insight into the concepts of virtue, excellence, wisdom, and flourishing. For example, it might be that some normative propositions such as "you ought to be wise" are brutely normative *natural* facts.[1]

Section 1 begins with the observation that human beings are natural organisms. Nevertheless, human beings are animals of a peculiar sort who engage in such activities as speaking, innovating, deliberating, and so on. So, I conclude, human beings are practical, rational primates. This conception of human nature is seamlessly both normative and descriptive. If humans fit the larger pattern of natural normativity defended in chapter 2, then evaluation of individual human beings is possible by comparison to the human life form.

Section 2 attempts to sympathetically articulate and respond to a few critical objections philosophers have had about the neo-Aristotelian project of grounding ethical evaluations in a normatively loaded conception of human nature. Each of these receives an initial rebuttal, though a few of them will require further comment in chapter 6.

Section 3 begins to apply the foregoing account of human nature and natural human norms to ethics. Specifically, I shall argue that as practical, rational animals, a basic human norm is that one *is to become a fully mature human being*. Practical primates have a prima facie normative obligation to be what they are (to respect the conditions and criteria of their life form) and a prima facie obligation to become fully mature practical primates.

1. Animals of a Peculiar Sort

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

1. Admittedly, it sounds rather odd to say that an 'ought' can be a brutely normative natural fact. In chapter 6, I shall dissipate the oddity by offering a thorough discussion of the concept of 'nature.'

> The idea that any features and operations of humans could be evaluated in the same way as those of plants and animals may provoke instant opposition. For to say that this is possible is to imply that some at least of our judgements of goodness and badness in human beings are given truth or falsity by the conditions of human life. And even if it is allowed that certain evaluations of this kind are possible – those vaguely thought of perhaps as 'merely biological' – there is bound to be skepticism about the possibility that 'moral evaluation' could be like this.[2]

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

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

> When we moved from the evaluations of other social animals to ethical evaluations of ourselves, there was an obvious addition to the list of aspects which are evaluated. The other animals act [as opposed to chemicals which are only acted upon.]. So do we occasionally, but mostly we act from reason, as they do not, and it is primarily in virtue of our actions from reason that we are ethically good or bad human beings. So that is one difference that our being rational makes.[3]

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

My view is that human beings are animals of a peculiar sort where the peculiarities do not eliminate the commonalities. The traditional formula that humans are "rational animals" is close to

2. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.
3. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* 217.

correct. As such, both the *animal* part of that formula is essential and the *rational* part. To see why, let's first consider in a bit more detail what it means to be an animal, and why it matters. Then we shall look at what it means to be the peculiar sort of practically reasoning animal that we are.

To be an animal is to belong to the "tree of life" – and to have a location in the broader story of life on earth.[4] That story begins 3.5 billion years ago with the first living organisms, and our own part begins about 200,000 years ago with the emergence of anatomically modern humans. In the contemporary classificatory scheme, we can locate humans within the phylum chordata, the class mammalia, the order of primates, the suborder haplorhini, the familiy hominidae, the genus homo, and the species homo sapiens.

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

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

Now, all that is good in life depends on the prior state of being alive at all. Although death is "normal" at the end of the life cycle, it is a very basic normative fact that being alive is a good. What is so morally heinous about murder is that it unjustly and prematurely destroys the good of life. Where theft robs one of this or that particular good, murder robs one of life which is the condition of

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

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

My point is not that the status of mortality is uncontroversial. Whether mortality is condition or criterion of ethical life is a live controversy in bioethics: should we attempt (if possible) to overcome mortality?[5] Would doing so be a morally innocent intervention like body-building or a morally loaded intervention like genetically modifying embryos? My point is that being mortal creatures whose very life is a fragile homeostasis is *at least* a condition that must be taken into account when living life or constructing an ethical theory.

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

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

Furthermore, a scientific account of humanity cannot leave out that humans have large brains relative to other primates, with a neocortex and prefrontal cortex that correlate with abstract thinking, problem solving, society, and culture. A scientific account cannot leave out that humans don't just suffer physiological responses like fear and excitement or arousal, they willfully seek out such emotions for themselves through art and entertainment and willfully cause them in others. Presumably, even an alien anthropologist who knew nothing of human language or "what it is like to be a human" would be able to notice, upon examination, that a human's laugh or cry is different from a hyena's laugh or a crocodile's tears. Part of the alien anthropologist's examination would be to examine the body, brain, and hands of human beings. One of the first things we can imagine they

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

would notice is that humans live in cultures and societies. They are not merely "social animals" like apes; they are language-users, communicating in signs and symbols. Their language is an extremely complex, open-ended system which is both recursive (able to nest propositions within propositions) and productive (able to create sentences by potentially limitless combinations of words). In virtue of language and their opposable thumbs, they are creative; they don't just live on the ground or under ground, but build houses and shelters, sometimes in new places, such as caves, trees, hills, mountains, etc. Also, they are self-reflective. They establish social relations upon biological grounds (some children growing up with natural parents) and upon normative grounds (some orphans growing up in orphanages created by philanthropists). Even before introducing the "human" point of view, we can describe "the human" form of life in some detail. My hope is that these generics are plausibly knowable from an "objective" or third-person point of view of scientific exploration, data gathering, inductive generalization. They seem to have at least *potential* ethical significance; even so, the most ethically significant fact about us is the peculiar differentia of our species: practical rationality.

It is now time to offer a first characterization of the 'practical reasoning' of an organism.[6] Practical reason occupies a place of importance in the theories of many virtue ethicists. For example, Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre have each treated the theme.[7] Chapter 5 focuses on the neo-Aristotelian accounts of practical reasoning in some detail. For now, I shall only offer an initial exploration. Jay Wallace gives an adequate general definition of practical reason: "Practical reason is the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do."[8]

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

6. I shall return to this theme in chapter 5. Throughout, I use the term 'practical rationality' as a synonym for 'practical reason.' Warren Quinn uses 'practical reason' to mean the faculty and 'practical rationality' to mean the excellence use of the faculty. Cf. Warren Quinn, "Rationality and the Human Good," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 9, no. 02 (1992): 81–95.

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

8. Wallace, "Practical Reason," introduction.

of them depend, in one way or another, on activities we call "rational."

Predicating rationality is not merely based on the fact that "some people can do sums," as Bertrand Russell joked.[9] Rather, we predicate rationality on the basis of observing a range of activities such as: to observe, reflect, and perceive; to remember, predict, and categorize; to decide, determine, and pursue; to abstract, explain, and infer; to criticize, blame, and praise; to admonish, prohibit, and command; and so on. Abstracting to what all these disparate activities have in common gives us a sense of what the generic activity of practical reasoning is.

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

First, we should consider the unique phenomenon of human language. Aristotle observed that, "Man alone of the animals possesses speech."[10] Other animals have forms of communication and even a sort of speech. But nothing in modern science has superseded or contradicted the observation (obvious to anyone) that human speech is qualitatively different from other animal speech. Modern science *has* helped us to understand exactly what is different. Upon reflection, researchers have observed communication systems used by other animals such as bees or apes are closed systems consisting of a finite, usually very limited, number of possible ideas that can be expressed. In contrast, human language is open-ended and productive, meaning that it allows humans to produce a vast range of utterances from a finite set of elements, and to create new words and sentences. Our language is unique: it is grammatical, open-ended, recursive, and productive. We are animals who use signs and symbols to communicate self-reflective and abstract thought.[11]

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

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

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

Speech is inseparable from self-reflectivity and sociality. Through our animal senses comes a sensitivity to our surroundings, the ability to see the world, ourselves, the sun and stars, to hear our fellow creatures, and to take the whole cosmos into consciousness. Before learning to speak, infants lack the cognitive capacity to understand what pours in through their senses. Infants also do not initially grasp the difference between non-human and human speech, but learn words by imitation just as well as they learn tweets, barks, and growls. Once words are recognized and learned, an irreversible change occurs. Through speech comes a whole second cosmos of culture. Through speech comes intentionality in all its forms. Through speech comes practical communication (i.e., "pass the salt"), and whole languages and cultures (about 5,000 distinct languages). Through speech comes self-consciousness ("who am I?"), abstraction ("all grass is green"), science, philosophy, religion, mythology, technology and more. Even art and music, arguably, arise from the rational capacity to direct our actions to create not only what instinct demands but whatever the imagination can invent.[12]

The second constitutive feature of practical reason is sociality. When Aristotle asserted that "Man is by nature a political animal," he did not mean the facile point that human beings prefer to reside in groups. He meant that human beings are born into families and families "naturally" join into groups to form societies. Contra Locke and Hobbes, living in a society is the "state of nature." I would suggest that we can interpret Aristotle's assertion as a generic. 'The human being' is formally constituted by being an animal that exists not only in a family setting but in a political setting. Just as 'the human being' is a creature produced by the sexual union of two other human gametes, so 'the human being' is able to speak, and to be enculturated in a particular natural language in a time in human history and a place on the globe.

The third feature of practical reason is the ability to engage in rational practices. All organisms initiate *action* in the most general sense that they move about and do things. And all higher mammals engage in complex (and often social) practices, such as communal hunting, grooming, and building. Humans exhibit unique behaviors. We do not merely *act* – we act *on reasons*. We are the only creatures that set goals, on purpose, far in advance of their fulfillment. We are the only creatures who undertake long, complicated sets of actions in order to achieve those goals. Micah Lott

12. 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."

summarizes the specific point about the human life form: "Human form is characterized by *practical reason*. This is the capacity to act in light of an awareness of the ground of our actions, to recognize and respond to practical reasons."[13] Goal-setting and recognizing practical reasons are inextricably tied. Practical reasons include our assessments of what is worthwhile. We also reflect on past actions and evaluate them to decide whether it is advisable to do the same thing again or try something else. Practical reasoning includes not just deliberating about what to do but weighing the apparent reasons for and against a particular course of action. Hence, as I shall explain later, it is under the category of 'rational practice' that I shall include everything unique about humans having to do with morality.

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

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

2. Objections

We must avoid a misunderstanding about the concept of a 'nature.' In the epigraph above, Chris Toner stated that *human nature is normative.* I don't insist on the term 'nature,' as some object to it on aesthetic grounds; we could just as well express the point by saying that genetically modern homo sapiens sapiens are potentially practical, rational primates. The important thing is not the term

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

'nature' or 'human nature' but the concept of a nature. What do I mean by a nature or life form?

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

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

> The nature of x is both what is special about this x and what makes this x one of the x's as opposed to the y's. When x is defined per genus et differentia both the genus and the differentiating characteristic and their combination could be taken to express what is the nature of x…. Human nature is what differentiates us from the animals and the plants. By nature we are rational beings. Our human nature, however, is also that in virtue of which we belong to the animal kingdom and to the living organisms. By nature we are mammals. We may thus use the concept of nature to differentiate rather than include, but also to include rather than differentiate. And we may use the concept of nature to express that differentiation and inclusion should not be seen as incompatible.[14]

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

14. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 207.

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

A second misunderstanding has to do with the predication of 'rationality.' Humans engage in demonstrative reasoning and practical reasoning. While both are recognizably modes of *reasoning*, they should not be conflated with each other.

There is indeed a linguistic parity in the way we talk about π-type reasons and Q-type reasons.[15] Both are a species of "*reasons*," though they differ in their use. For example, Philippa Foot says that reasons of type (A) are "Reasons for acting, which we may call practical reasons" and type (B) are "Reasons for believing, which we may call evidential or demonstrative reasons." She continues:

> As philosophers, and therefore theoreticians, our job is of course to give the second type of reason, arguing for or against the truth of a variety of propositions that seem to involve special problems—like those, for instance, about personal identity or the existence of an external world. But among these many 'philosophical' subjects we find that of the nature of practical reasons, and in this special case we shall have to give reasons of type B for theses about reasons of type A.[16]

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

Practical reasoning is a better candidate for the single defining feature because all normal, functioning adult humans, regardless of cultures, intelligence quotients, or walk of life, engage in

15. Roy Edgley, "Practical Reason," *Mind* 74, no. 294 (1965): 174–91.
16. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 64–65.

practical reasoning and deliberation. I want to make it indelibly clear that I am not supposing human nature to be rationality per se but practical rationality. It is not merely *thought* but *thoughtful action* that I would like to emphasize. (That practical reasoning is indeed a form of reasoning, and the difference, if any, between theoretical and speculative reasoning, is a theme of chapter 5.)

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

That said, the capacity for abstract or "theoretical reason" is certainly an important feature of human nature and stands out from the capacities of other organisms. While other members of the animal kingdom "think" in one sense of that term, as far as we know, no other animal constructs theories about, say, the cognitive capacities of the animal kingdom. My only point is to challenge the unwitting interpretation of "rationality" to mean abstract reasoning to the exclusion of any other capacity.

A third possible misunderstanding has to do with exceptions to the truth that human beings are practical rational primates. To quote another quip from Bertrand Russell: "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."[17] The humor of his misanthropic jab turns on an ambiguity in the predication of 'rationality.' Certainly, many of us are forgetful, neglectful, and driven by emotion or desire, and our thinking is riddled with fallacies. If by 'rational' we mean the reliability habit of thinking well, then the possession of rationality would be rare indeed. Children, the uneducated, the foolish, and many philosophers are not rational by this high standard. If, however, by 'rational' we simply mean the *potential* to become successfully rational, then every normal human possesses rationality.

A second misunderstanding, more dangerous than the first, is to think that someone who cannot successfully think rationally is not even human. What about anencephalic babies, the genetically

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

defective, the comatose, the mentally ill – are they not really human? An uncharitable critic might accuse me of insinuating so. I deny the charge. In fact, one strength of my argument is that it can explain both why disabilities are sub-optimal *and* why exactly our disabled fellows are members of our species. Generics describe a life form well only when the sample includes exemplary instances of the species – not the young, immature, ill, injured, genetically defective, radiation poisoned, comatose, mentally ill, and so on. However, such are still recognizably members of the species. Humans are "bipedal" by nature even when someone (say, a war veteran) is no longer bipedal. Anencephalic babies who lack the subvenient brain structure necessary for rational consciousness are "rational" by nature even though they will never exemplify their potential for practical reasoning. Abnormal members of our species are recognizably *human* – they are not eagles or moon rocks or dandelions. We have a clean explanation for this, for generic truths are compatible with individual exceptions. Indeed, without well-grounded knowledge of the life form expressed in generic propositions, it would be impossible to describe any individual as abnormal, immature, ill or injured.

A final possible misunderstanding needs a response here. Someone might observe that terms such as "exemplary" or "normal" or "mature" are normative terms and hence charge that I am "smuggling" evaluations in to a process of objective, scientific description. I welcome the observation, but deny the charge. The discernment between ordinary, unusual (but not defective), and abnormal (and defective) is certainly an evaluative discernment. My point has been that such evaluative discernment is part and parcel of objective, scientific generic predication. Researchers do not judge the characteristics of a newly discovered species of beetle by examining its young. They might, at first, mistake the initial specimen for a fully mature adult; but the correction would come from a further application of scientific methods. The capture of a larger beetle that appears to be *of the same kind* would suggest that the initial specimen was either a child or a runt. After collecting a sufficient sample of specimens (say, a dozen or preferably more) the researchers would be in the position to make justifiable fundamentally normative judgments about *which of these individual beetles is exemplary of the species.*

We can draw the same conclusion with a hypothetical situation in which humans are the newly discovered species. Suppose an alien anthropologist were to stumble across earth and study

humans. Suppose that the initial specimen was a 12-year-old boy or girl. If that was the anthropologist's *only* sample, the alien race would come to all sorts of incorrect conclusions about humanity in general. If, instead, they studied mature, healthy, human beings of both sexes, in the "prime" of life, they would be closer to identifying what is generically *human*. My contention is that they would be best served not by examining foolish humans but practically wise ones.

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

2.1 No Organic Natures

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

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

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

> The concepts of unchanging essences and of complete discontinuities between every *eidos* (type) and all others make genuine evolutionary thinking impossible. I agree with those who claim that the essentialist philosophies of Aristotle and Plato are incompatible with evolutionary thinking.[18]

Arthur Ward is a recent critic who agrees with Mayr on this point. Ward argues that "naturalists

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

should reject the idea of 'human nature,' and indeed should reject that any organism or its parts or operations has a nature, purpose, proper function, or the like."[19] I have already pointed out that rejecting all organic natures and purposes is not necessarily the only rational, scientific option; indeed, such a rejection seems to me to be motivated by philosophical materialism far more than it is motivated by any respect for actual biological science.

The arguments of the previous chapter, built on the assumption of a minimal scientific realism, is enough to secure a fairly solid grounding for the notion of natural kinds. Nevertheless, I cannot insist that accepting organic natures and purposes is the *only* rational, scientific option. Nor can I chase down the (justifiably important) dispute about the status of natural kinds. I only ask the reader to consider that both views are live scientific options.

2.2 No Natural Teleology

A second sort of critic accepts natural kinds but denies that these kinds have teleological features. For example, Bernard Williams asserts that: "The first and hardest lesson of Darwinism, that there is no such teleology at all, and that there is no orchestral score provided from anywhere according to which human beings have a special part to play, still has to find its way into ethical thought."[20] Williams says elsewhere:

> The idea of a naturalistic ethics was born of a deeply teleological outlook, and its best expression, in many ways, is still to be found in Aristotle's philosophy, a philosophy according to which there is inherent in each natural kind of thing an appropriate way for things of that kind to behave.[21]

This sort of critic thinks that there are natural kinds and stable species with objective properties, but does not accept the notion that functional or teleological properties feature in purely biological descriptions of organisms.

Williams voices a common opinion when he alleges an incompatibility between Darwinism and teleological realism. The proper response, as articulated by Hursthouse, Foot, Brown, etc., is that

19. Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory," 1.
20. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Taylor & Francis, 2011), 44.
21. Cf. Bernard Williams, "Evolution Ethics and the Representation Problem," in *Making Sense of Humanity: And Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 109.

natural teleology is indeed compatible with Darwinism and does indeed provide "an appropriate way to behave" (or we might add, *ways*) that is "inherent in each natural kind of thing." Natural teleology is not incompatible with evolutionary theory.

Strictly speaking, evolutionary theory is a set of theses explaining the current multiplicity and shape of terrestrial life. It says absolutely nothing about teleological causes or properties.[22] There is room, in other words, within evolutionary theory for discussions about the evidence for or against non-mechanical teleological causation. Thomas Nagel is one who recently presented such a naturalistic theory of Darwinian natural selection combined with teleological causation.[23] I do not wish here to defend Nagel's view so much as to point out that teleological realism is compatible with evolutionary theory. Merely *asserting* that teleological realism in biology is incompatible with Darwinism does not make it so. Naturalistic teleological realism is certainly incompatible with a teleological nihilism distinctive of (certain brands) of metaphysical reductionism. If our knowledge of natural teleology is well-grounded enough then so much the worse for metaphysical reductionism.

One other response to Williams is possible. Williams despairs of finding human nature, including a human telos, because he thinks that modern biological science somehow demands such despair. Rosalind Hursthouse correctly points out that Williams' worry is not actually rooted in the progress of modern science. Williams himself admits that "many of course have come to that conclusion before… that human beings are to some degree a mess… for whom no form of life is likely to prove entirely satisfactory, either individually or socially."[24] If many have come to that (philosophical) conclusion before, without the benefit of modern science, why would we think modern science

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

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

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

is definitive for this philosophical conclusion? If modern science provides additional warrant for rational despair that was unavailable to our ancestors, what exactly is that evidence? It is not enough to gesture. According to Hursthouse, Williams' worry is not an argument at all but an expression of moral nihilism. He despairs of finding one purely satisfactory way of life, and so concludes that human beings are a mess. His may be a rational despair. But citing biological facts cannot prove it so. Whether we should despair or not must be settled by philosophical argument. To amass scientific evidence for p and then to assert the philosophical conclusion that q is a non sequitur.

2.3 Only Biological Nature

A third iteration of the "no human nature" objection is that if there is such thing as "human nature" it is nothing more or less than our biological and physiological makeup. Tim Lewens argues that "the only biologically respectable notion of human nature that remains is an extremely permissive one that names the reliable dispositions of the human species as a whole. This conception offers no ethical guidance…"[25] On Lewens' view, the only talk about our "nature" that would be scientific would be an indeterminate series of complicated stories about physical status and history: our genetics, evolutionary history, neurophysiology, geography, and sociobiology. As Arthur Ward says, "one can affirm that humans have many innate instincts explained by evolutionary processes, yet deny that humans have a "nature" strictly speaking."[26] The problem, as we have seen, is that an empirical "scientific" conception of human nature has nothing to do with *ethics*. All of the complicated stories we could tell – if they are genuinely scientific – would be purely *descriptive*.[27] Bernard Williams expresses a similar objection by saying that nature has bestowed upon us an "ill-sorted bricolage of powers and instincts." He continues:

> [the problem] lies not in the particular ways in which human beings may have evolved, but simply in the fact that they have evolved, and by natural selection… On that [evolutionary] view it must be the deepest desire – need? – purpose? –

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

26. Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory," 1.

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

> satisfaction? – of human beings to live in the way that is in this objective sense appropriate to them (the fact that modern words break up into these alternatives expresses the modern break-up of Aristotle's view).

Williams objects that norms bestowed by the process of evolution would be those that lead us to survive and reproduce. Along similar lines, Fitzpatrick articulates a worry that evolution has bestowed upon us a very specific, ordered power but it is not the power to flourish but the power to reproduce. He says:

> If, however, natural functions and ends in living things are structured by special relations established through the process of evolution through natural selection, i.e., non-incidental relations between traits and a special subset of their effects that figured into the selection process, then natural teleology will not ultimately or generally be about the welfare or flourishing of organisms.[28]

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

A third proponent of this worry is Stephen R. Brown. Brown's defense of virtue ethics is ambivalent. He seems to *wish* he could make the account genuinely normative but concedes that it is, in the end, merely descriptive.[29] 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.[30] Brown thinks that human beings do have a characteristic form of life involving highly rarefied neurological and cognitive processes we do not observe in other animals; but, nevertheless, he thinks that biology reveals that species are the only natural kinds, and species aim to survive and reproduce.

2.4 Responses

The objection that human nature is *merely* a biological (and hence descriptive) concept is a relevant one. Despite the varying details, what Lewens, Fitzpatrick, and Brown agree upon is that if such a thing as human nature or the human life form exists, and if such a thing as a natural teleological

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

29. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*.

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

norm for humanity exists, then it is the norm to reproduce and propagate one's genotype. Three comments are required to untangle this objection.

First, even granting that reproduction is the only natural end of non-human organisms, Lewens et al. assume that human beings are *merely* animals. This can be queried. Above, I asked the innocuous question: Are human beings natural organisms? There are really three slightly different answers: the non-naturalist answer is that humans are natural plus something more than natural;[31] the reductive naturalist answer is that human beings are natural organisms like chimpanzees and nothing more; the non-reductive naturalist answer is that human beings are natural organisms, leaving the rest to one side.

My view is that humans are *at least* natural organisms. Hence, my view can accommodate both non-reductive naturalism and non-naturalism. The only position *incompatible* with mine is the crassly reductive one that asserts that human beings are no different from other primates – even in being practically rational. I can agree that human beings as a species are endowed by their history with a natural norm that leads them, absent countervailing factors, to reproduce. I simply deny that *that is all*. The only way these authors can sneak in the view that *that is all* is by begging the question in favor of a reductive view of humanity.

The reductive naturalist would insist that "human beings are natural," meaning that humans are merely machines made of meat, "heaps of glorified clockwork."[32] Smuggled into this assertion is the assumption that nature is bald. Humans are one of its myriad variegated objects and just parts of the heap. I have tried to argue above that even bacteria and plants give the lie to this picture. Furthermore, the irony is that if human beings were *merely* animals, and subject to *merely animal* natural norms such as instinctual survival and reproduction, we could not *know* ourselves as such. Yet the objection Lewens et al. are posing depends on knowing ourselves as both animals and as self-aware practical reasoners.

My view, by contrast, is based on the empirical observations that humans are the only pri-

31. For example, a non-naturalist or religious philosopher could concede that humans are *partly* natural but would argue that human beings are exceptional in some way – in virtue of being endowed by God with the *Imago Dei*, or enjoying unique cognitive faculties such as practical reasoning. For present purposes, I am bracketing this discussion.

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

mate to engage in recursive, grammatical speaking; to associate in such complex societies; to plan their actions; and to innovate and create. Those observations are enough to render it plain, I think, that our natural telos is not restricted to only to that which we share with the rest of the living world but must include our peculiar capacities for rational reflection – including rational reflection about whether or not to reproduce.

Secondly, Lewens et al. assume that the only natural end of organismic life is reproduction. But this can be queried as well. Certainly, living things sustain their own health and life and animals propagate their genes; living things *sustain* their life form and *transmit* their life form. But which is for the sake of which? Do organisms live in order to reproduce or reproduce in order to live? I do not see how one can assume this to be true without further argumentation. Empirically, we observe *both* that each species propagates its genotype *and* that each species lives its own particular form of life aiming at the development of its own good. My view is that reproduction is *one* of the natural ends of organic life, but that each species has other natural goods, such as health, survival, and the living of a characteristic life. Reproduction is a minimal good without which the other goods could never come to be. However, these other goods may or may not have anything to do with reproductive success. Above, I defended two kinds of natural normativity: the mere existence of creatures bearing life forms as well as their teleological development into fully matured instantiations thereof. An embryonic mammal *is to become* a fully grown mammal. Hence, a human is a practical primate and a practical primate *is to become* a fully mature practical primate. In other words, one of the "norms" of practical rationality, we can venture, is that we *ought to be successfully practically rational*. Practical rational activity and success is part of what it means to be a healthy human being living our characteristic sort of life.

Thirdly, I would try to accommodate the insights of Lewens et al. by conceding that reproduction is *one* of our natural ends. However, we need not jump to the conclusion that it is the *only* natural end or the only fundamental natural end. "Human beings reproduce" is an instance of a broader natural generic truth we can articulate by saying: "organisms survive and reproduce." Human reproduction as a generic pattern is compatible with exceptions: The celibate, the pre-pubescent, the single, the infertile couple, the homosexual couple, and others do not reproduce directly and with-

out aid. Nevertheless it may be true that humans reproduce (like every other organism). That *any particular individual* does not reproduce is not an automatic sign of defect. It seems to me that if, *as a species*, we ceased to reproduce, something would have gone wrong.[33]

Making the distinction between the individual member of the species and the species itself raises other potential problems: Is the human norm to become virtuous merely species-specific and not specific to the individual? (I shall address this problem more fully in chapter 4.) For now, I must be content to assert that some virtues are required for the flourishing of both species and individuals, while practical wisdom is required for *every* individual member of the species since that is what we are.

2.5 Knowing from Inside or Not Knowing At All

There is one further objection that I will return to in chapter 5, but that deserves a mention here. The objection that human nature is *merely* animal and hence the human telos is *merely* survival and propagation of the genotype was supposed to tell against the organic teleology I have been defending. My response is that, in practical rational creatures like us, our biological norms are joined with other norms.

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

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

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

origin is shrouded in mystery, our destiny undecided.

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

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

3. Natural Norms, Human Norms

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

As natural organisms, humans pursue certain basic goods: food, water, rest, shelter, comfort, survival, reproduction. There is every reason to affirm the truth of generics such as "human beings eat food" or "human beings sleep daily." We should hypothesize that deviation from these prima facie norms would be prima facie defective. And that turns out to be the case. Anorexia, starvation,

insomnia, and so on are disorders. Importantly, such disorders would plausibly be recognizable by an alien anthropologist. Just as a scientist may evaluate a particular wolf by reference to its life form, an alien anthropologist could evaluate a particular human's life and actions by reference to its life form. So much applies to both humans and other organisms.

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

> … will and practical reason are on the face of it just two more faculties or powers a living being may bear, on a level with the powers of sight and hearing and memory. The second crucial thought is that an individual instance of any of the latter powers – sight, hearing, memory – is intuitively to be judged as defective or sound, good or bad, well-working or ill-working, by reference to its bearer's life-form or kind or species.[34]

Naturalistic evaluation of human beings on the basis of practical rational activities follows the same pattern as before. Every animal's nature or life form has genus and differentia. For human beings, our differentia is that we can engage in practical reasoning. Hence, our animality and our rationality both count. Being a primate entails that we are alive and share properties in common with all organic nature. Being a practical reasoning primate includes a set of capacities, including abstract thought but also more: speech, sociality, rational practice, and creativity. I also argued that the generic truth about humanity holds good in the face of important objections to the effect that we have no nature, or that our only nature is biological.

Some might object that the thesis, as it stands, is vague: do natural norms bind all individuals or only some? Does practical rationality free us from natural norms in certain cases? Thus far, I have argued that there is good reason to affirm a kind of prima facie natural normativity binding on anyone who belongs to our human species. I concede that I have not yet fully articulated what

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

effect rationality has on our animal nature and rebutted the objection that it renders irrelevant all the prima facie natural norms arising from our animal or biological nature. Rendering this more clear is a task for the next two chapters on virtue and practical reasoning.

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

A couple of clarifications are in order: First, I am by no means suggesting that physical disability or psychological illness constitute "moral defect." Even serious mental illnesses can be borne by the virtuous and mature adult. Rather, the defects that do inhibit living a fully human life are defects of practical reasoning. Someone hearing-disabled or born without arms might be inhibited from widely-enjoyed pleasures of hearing music, say, or playing certain sports, not inhibited from achieving their deeper natural ends. The same can be said for mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety. A person with chronic depression, say, faces pressing challenges in every day life that are liable to inhibit certain pleasures. Nevertheless, in striving to cope with the local illness, it is possible that the extra effort of facing daily challenges can result in a more rapid acquisition of certain virtues, such as patience and courage.

A second clarification is this: Even if I am successful in articulating certain generic truths about humanity, not all the details have been supplied. I aim to capture the foundations of morality, not every last detail. Hence, my account will be a step toward providing a rational basis for evaluation of the vast majority of individual human beings, but it is possible (and indeed quite likely) that I have not touched on certain extreme outliers. For example, persons of extreme practical wisdom are able

to determine, correctly, when acting contrary to received social norms, or speaking without restraint, or living in solitude are the thing to do. Larissa MacFarquhar details cases wherein donors offer kidneys to strangers and foster parents adopt dozens of children.[35]

Likewise, persons of extreme practical folly are able to convince themselves that the "rules do not apply" to them. In some cases, extreme folly can be terrifying, as when it is joined with a mad quest for political power and personal gain, as Hitler or bin Ladin who had *some* conventional virtues and plenty of intellectual competence to put toward their heinous ends. In other cases, extreme folly can be pathetic, as when it is joined with self-defeating helplessness and spite. Dostoevsky's Underground Man demonstrates such extreme folly:

> I am a sick man…. I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man. I believe my liver is diseased. However, I know nothing at all about my disease, and do not know for certain what ails me. I don't consult a doctor for it, and never have, though I have a respect for medicine and doctors. Besides, I am extremely superstitious, sufficiently so to respect medicine, anyway (I am well-educated enough not to be superstitious, but I am superstitious). No, I refuse to consult a doctor from spite. That you probably will not understand. Well, I understand it, though. Of course, I can't explain who it is precisely that I am mortifying in this case by my spite: I am perfectly well aware that I cannot "pay out" the doctors by not consulting them; I know better than anyone that by all this I am only injuring myself and no one else. But still, if I don't consult a doctor it is from spite. My liver is bad, well–let it get worse!

While admitting that he is sick, he lets it get worse. While admitting that doctors know what to do, he doesn't consult them. While admitting he should not be superstitious, he is. While admitting that he is hurting himself, he continues out of spite. Dostoevsky's character is fictional but anyone who has come across such a dizzying person in real life is aware that the normal methods of encouragement and persuasion are ineffective. Thus far, my thesis has not offered an explanation of such extreme outliers. Nevertheless, articulating what is true of humanity *generically* provides a foundation from which it is possible to assess the outliers. What makes the Underground Man so pathetic as a type (and so powerful as a literary character) is that he seems *inhumanly* wretched. My account offers a plausible explanation: he falls short even of enjoying a basic, human level of practical wisdom.

35. Larissa MacFarquhar, *Strangers Drowning: Grappling with Impossible Idealism, Drastic Choices, and the Overpowering Urge to Help* (Penguin Press HC, 2015).

We are now in the position to articulate a second ethical upshot of the generic that human beings are practical, rational primates. If acorns are (potential) oak trees, then it seems to follow that an acorn *is to become* an oak tree. I won't insist on using the word 'ought' (the acorn *ought to* become an oak) because 'ought' talk strongly suggests agency and it would be silly to ascribe agency to lower organisms. But I do insist on the *natural normativity* of that statement. The individual acorn that fails to become an oak *never* fully realized its nature. Likewise, if human beings are practical rational primates, then it follows that human beings *are to become practical rational primates*. This normative generic proposition is rooted in the thought that humans *are* practical rational primates. But it goes further to suggest a teleological end: we are to become (in full actuality) what we already are (by virtue of membership in our species).

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

I do not intend to suggest that there is something inherently morally praiseworthy about the acquisition of factual knowledge, understood in terms of institutional education or advanced degrees. There is nothing inherently morally defective about a person or culture who lives in, for example, in ignorance of advanced knowledge about biology, chemistry, astronomy, and mathematics. Rather, every person from every walk of life at every stage of life stands in need of *practical wisdom.* One of the recursive aims of practical reasoning is to determine just how far and in what areas one needs to advance one's knowledge: a lawyer who does not spend years studying case history would be just as unwise as a farmer who does do so. Both would benefit from reflection on more universal human tasks such as making and maintaining friendships, dispatching familial and social commitments, and so on.

If our nature is to be practical, rational primates, then we have some general notion of our natural "function." I shall not go in for the Aristotelian view that the natural work (Greek: *ergon*) of human beings is contemplative science, an activity by reference to which success and failure may be

judged. Rather, I shall be more ecumenical: the telos of every life form is, at the very least, to do all the activities that constitute its mature flourishing. So we should predict quite generally that the human telos is to become *fully mature* practical, rational primates. The conceptions of human nature (as practical reasoning animals) must be defined in relation to virtue (the excellences of rational practice and practical reason) and to human nature as it could be, our natural telos (to be excellent and mature practical, rational primates).

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

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

I grant the notion that virtues are "the human" qualities is a reversal on the all-too-common notion that "human" qualities are neutral with respect to moral praise or blame. The common notion is a mistake, so the reversal is justified. As I tried to argue above, all life forms discovered by scientific investigation and articulated in generic propositions are inherently normative. Hence, the concept of human nature cannot and should not be value-neutral. Rather, as Micah Lott points out, the concept of human nature:

> …must embody a normatively significant understanding of human life and action. For any conception of human form is a natural-historical account of 'how the human lives.' As with 'the tiger' or 'the mayfly,' a natural-history of 'the human' provides an interpretation of the characteristic and non-defective life-cycle of the species.[36]

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

Virtues on my account will turn out to be qualities that enable one to become – and partly constitute one's being – a mature organism. As I shall detail more in chapter 4, virtues are not just *any* natural good, for our physiological life consists of a process of maturation, nutrition, rest, exercise, homeostatic maturity, reproduction, characteristic activities, aging, and death. Many human goods enable this process, from oxygen, food, sleep, and so on. However, the virtues are a subset of natural goods pertaining to one's actualization of excellent practical reasoning and excellent rational practices. The virtues enable one to perform characteristically rational activities such as speaking, socializing, thoughtful acting, and creating. As I argued above, the peculiarity of our life form is that we are inherently self-aware language-users who grow up and live in a language-community with a history and tradition, and who are curious to know what is true about ourselves and our world. We are also extravagantly innovative, creating a myriad of tools, forms of art, and other products for our use and enjoyment. We are inherently conscious and self-conscious beings who speak, interpret, and create in the context of a linguistic community such as a family, society, and culture. We are inherently goal-oriented and self-determining beings who are to some degree able to acquire new traits or lose them, able to achieve our natural ends or fail to achieve them, able to become aware of the "givenness" of our biology and work with or against it, and are able to treat an entire biological life not only as an event but as a project. Although we are pushed about by our biological instincts and by social pressures, we do not *simply* stumble around through life; at times we also act on *reasons*. That is, we deliberate about future actions, and reflect on past actions, and become puzzled in the present about what is called for. The success of our actions is not guaranteed, and the reasonableness of our justifications is not guaranteed. Rather, we muddle through on the best evidence we have.

The criterion of a definition of virtue, then, is that the excellences intrinsic to our life form are those traits that practical rational primates per se *need* to be what they are and to live life in such a way as to become what they can potentially be. Prima facie, a basic set of virtuous traits such as courage, moderation, and practical wisdom are incumbent upon every member of the species. There is room, even so, for further reflection and specification of virtues needed – more here, less there – by individuals belonging to varying life circumstances, social roles, and differing stages of life. I shall attempt to provide a bit more specification in the following chapters.

Just as important as specifying the basic set of virtues that constitute natural goodness is identifying the basic set of vices that constitute natural defects. *Natural badness* would include all those traits that practical rational primates as such *need to avoid*. Vices would be those acquirable traits over which one has some measure of control, rather than just any natural evil such as hunger, exposure to predators or extreme temperatures, disease, accidental injury, and premature death. Non-moral natural evils such as these do indeed tend to frustrate one's development toward the natural end of being a fully mature practical reasoner and hence each one partly constitutes species-specific misery. We should expect that moral vices (such as cruelty) at least partially contribute to other natural evils (such as premature death). But we ought not confuse the two. Even a virtue such as commendable generosity with one's resources might lead to hunger, and commendable courage might lead one to premature death. However, the acquisition of a vice is the voluntary infliction of a natural, moral evil upon oneself and, potential, on others as well.

One final objection deserves mentioning. The cool-headed despair of a J.P. Sartre would deny that human nature exists, ready-made, prior to one's willful self-creation and self-expression. He would deny, therefore, my picture of natural goodness as the excellent performance of one's function understood as the actualization of one's intrinsic life form. Instead, he would insist that we are radically free to choose what we are and what we will become. The shape of this Sartrian thesis certainly sounds quite different from mine – but is it so different? Sartre agrees with me that what one *is* determines what one *ought to be*. For he says: "my freedom is perpetually in question in my being; it is not a quality added on or a property of my nature. It is very exactly the stuff of my being."[37] He agrees with me that one cannot choose to *not* choose. One is *necessarily* free. While one must decide *what else* is true of one's nature, one cannot choose to be an unfree thing. While Sartre's existentialist picture of a human being is that it is simply freedom, a pure will, a choosing thing, my more scientific picture is that a human being is a practical, rational primate. Our nature is constituted by both the genetic, biological, and physiological as well as the psychological and practically rational. Hence, on my view, the set of actions one must *necessarily* do is larger than simply the action of choosing.

37. J.P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 566.

For example, one must become practically wise because one is practically rational. Just as Sartre would accuse someone who tried *not* to choose anything of bucking their nature, I would accuse someone who tried *not* to be a practical reasoning animal of bucking their nature. We agree that rebelling against one's own nature and life form is futile and foolish; we disagree about how best to characterize that nature and life form.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that human beings are practical, rational animals. I addressed and responded to several objections, and tried to bridge the connection between the descriptive/normative generic that sets the standard for our life form, and also show how specific ethical obligations fall out of that normative foundation: there is a prima facie obligation to eat or sleep and keep oneself alive, or to become fully practically rational over time. And I began to sketch how the specific qualities of excellence for practical rational primates are moral and intellectual virtues, including moderation and immoderation, justice and injustice, practical wisdom and foolishness, and so on.

The hypothesis is that virtues are a specific type of quality belonging to creatures like us. Virtues are the human specific goods-of-a-kind. The virtues constitute a set of normative constraints on what one is and what one ought to become arising from one's nature as a practical primate. The acquisition, then, of virtues both causes and constitutes the actualization of our life form as practical rational primates. Truly exemplifying our life form constitutes our species-specific flourishing. Virtues are commonly supposed to be "excellences" of human beings. Relative to what is such a quality excellent? The answer can only be that virtues are excellences relative to our nature or life form. They are the traits or qualities that enable us to actualize our life form, to fully express in a life what we are by nature. If what we are by nature is practical, rational primates, then virtues (we can further predict) will be traits pertaining to practical reason and animality. The sketch of a fully virtuous and wise human being would not, on this account, describe an unattainable moral ideal; like a painting of a fully grown oak tree, it would describe the natural state of a human being that has arrived at its natural end. It would be a sketch of what we truly are.

Chapter 4

What We Are

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

The previous chapter laid out the criteria a naturalistic account of virtue would have to satisfy. Just as excellent specimens of any natural organism reflect an inherent natural normativity, excellent human beings would reflect an inherent "human" normativity that arises from our nature as practical, rational primates. Human norms must be *animal* since we are primates; they cannot be *merely* animal since we are *practical* primates with a peculiar form of life.

My thesis in this chapter is a normative one: virtues for practical rational primates are excellent rational practices and practical reasoning – while irrational practices and practical irrationality are natural vices. To put a fine point on it, the description of a fully virtuous agent is a more accurate description of 'the human being' than any mere statistical generalization. Human virtue – and especially practical wisdom – describe *what we are*. The task of the moral life is to become what we are.

My purpose is to defend this paradoxical notion by building on the normative virtue theories of Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre.[1] These neo-Aristotelians show how it is possible to evaluate the

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

kind of life one is actually living with reference to the normatively human. I also discuss and critique their accounts. The result is a unified view according to which virtues are excellences of rational practice and practical reasoning, while vices are constituted by irrational practices and defective practical reasoning.

Section 1 draws from Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre to develop a concept of virtue: firstly, virtues benefit humankind (including but not limited to their possessor) while vices harm. This point breaks down the putative divide between altruistic or other-regarding and self-regarding virtues.

Section 2 argues that virtues constitute excellent human *functioning* and that they are especially beneficial in that they are corrective of tempting vices. Section 3 virtues are not just any positive traits such as those given by luck, nor are they necessarily even *acquired* at all – rather, virtues are in principle *acquirable*. Section 4 argues that some virtues are excellences of "rational practicing" while others are excellences of practical reasoning about one's whole life. Section 5 argues that virtues are excellences of "social reasoning" in that they enable the health and progress of societies and traditions.

1. Virtue as Natural Goodness

Foot, MacIntyre, and McDowell each offer detailed accounts of virtue and its relation to reason and nature. For example, Philippa Foot argues that virtues are the acquirable, beneficial, corrective excellences of practical reason.[2] Alasdair MacIntyre argues that virtues are "acquired human qualities" that enable the virtuous person to succeed in individual practices, in life, and in traditions.[3] John McDowell argues that virtue is a kind of perceptual sensitivity to what is required to live well.[4] My goal in this section is to articulate a fairly comprehensive treatment of virtue, drawn from what these three writers agree on, but sensitive to what they disagree on. I shall first state eight points about

Secondary Qualities."

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

3. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191.

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

virtue and vices that bring these ethical concepts into clear light.

The first point about virtue is that virtues are beneficial to their possessor. Hursthouse calls this "Plato's requirement" on the virtues: "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."[5] While virtues may come with a cost, there is something counterintuitive about the notion that X is a virtue that could, in the end, ultimately be a detriment its possessor.

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

MacIntyre agrees. For MacIntyre, virtues are "acquired *human* qualities."[6] Such human qualities enable their possessor to achieve particular *goods.* MacIntyre's second clause assumes that virtues are beneficial. For MacIntyre, a virtuous trait *cannot* be directed at achieving what is bad.

Assuming that virtues cannot go bad will bring some trouble for MacIntyre's initial definition in *After Virtue*. 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, the prude moderate? MacIntyre indexes virtues to the *goods* internal to practices, but can't practices themselves be wicked? We might say this is the problem of *virtue going bad.*

I should explore three possible responses to this problem before offering my own solution. The first response is to stipulate away the possibility that virtues can go bad. For example, Jonathan Sanford's recent monograph, *Before Virtue*, defends Aristotle's doctrine that "it is impossible to exercise

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

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

any virtue, with the exception of technical skill, wrongly."[7] On this response, virtues are always good, such that if a particular action or trait turns out to be bad, then it must not be a virtuous action or trait. The danger of this response is that it seems like an ad hoc "No True Scotsman" fallacy.[8]

It seems to me Foot argues that virtues cannot go bad while trying to do justice to the worry that the stipulation is ad hoc. Her solution is, I think, ingenious. She makes an analogy to poisons and 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.[9]

An agent's commission of an otherwise virtuous action may be a mistake *for that agent* at that time.

A second, slightly different response is to allow that some virtues can go bad under certain conditions; and so individual virtues although *usually* or *typically* operating toward good ends *can* be corrupted in the absence of a higher-order executive virtue that coordinates virtues toward their proper ends and recognizes if and when a particular virtue has limits. That executive virtue is usually taken to be practical wisdom. An apparently courageous act may serve depraved ends if we allow that the apparently courageous person acted unwisely *in this case*. On this second response, all the virtues depend for their successful execution on the coordinating management of practical wisdom. We might categorize John McDowell's account as an example of this type. In "Virtue and Reason" he argues that all virtues are, in the end, examples of practical wisdom. And since practical wisdom, by definition, cannot go bad, the problem of *virtues going bad* does not arise. "Virtues" benefit their

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

8. For example, Smith: All Scotsmen love haggis. Jones: But McDougal over there is a Scotsman, and he hates haggis. Smith: That just goes to show McDougal is no *true* Scotsman. Cf. Antony Flew, *Thinking About Thinking: Or, Do I Sincerely Want to Be Right?* (Fontana/Collins, 1975)

9. Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 16.

possessor since they amount to the kind of wisdom by which one is able to live a good life. (I shall dispute McDowell's conflation of all virtues with practical wisdom in chapter 5.)

A third response is to expose a hidden assumption in the problem. There are admittedly putative cases of virtues going bad; the critic alleges that *any* traditional virtue might turn out to be bad in some circumstance. To assert that *no traits* are always good would be to beg the question in favor of moral nihilism or relativism.

It seems to me the safest course is to insist on the following minimal stipulation: almost all virtues almost always benefit their possessor. By this stipulation, any theory of virtue according to which virtues turn out to harm their possessor *overall* is simply ruled out. At the same time, the stipulation has three strengths. First, it allows us to take seriously cases wherein a seeming virtue seems to harm its possessor or others; perhaps, if a trait is not beneficial, then we have simply misjudged it as a virtue. Secondly, it allows us to concede the intuitive objection that some virtues (honesty) might be corruptible by the presence of overwhelming vices (such as cruelty) or that individual virtues (such as courage) may be *costly* and so cause their possessor pain or discomfort – many a just politician has passed up personal wealth by refusing bribes. Thirdly, this minimal stipulation agrees with Foot that at least one virtue – practical wisdom – is *always* operative to good ends. I shall discuss this problem a bit more below. For now, I conclude that almost all virtues, if they are truly virtues, are almost always beneficial.

Plato's requirement is that virtues benefit their possessor. I have allowed that they may cause their possessor to lose out on money, fame, or comfort. A related query is whether virtues are supposed to benefit *others* as well or only their possessor. For some virtues, the answer is clearly *both*. Still, aren't some individual virtues *more* beneficial to one party, possibly at the expense of the other?

The answer is difficult to state systematically. By hypothesis, virtues are beneficial to *human beings* as a kind, not just this or that individual. One can approach the thesis that virtues are beneficial to human beings qua human from two angles. Consider moderation with respect to alcohol. Such moderation benefits one's family, one's community and so on. The ravages of alcoholism on marriages, children, and extended families are widely known. So it would seem to be altruistic not to over-drink. Nevertheless, moderation with alcohol also benefits oneself. Indeed, parsing up the

benefit seems foolhardy. (Who benefits more, your children or your liver?)

For virtues such as justice or charity, the answer might be less clear, but the lack of clarity does not damage the account. Foot says, "It is a reasonable opinion that on the whole a man is better off for being charitable and just, but this is not to say that circumstances may not arise in which he will have to sacrifice everything for charity or justice."[10] Even so, she finds the alleged paradox between what we might wish to call "selfish" and "altruistic" virtues overblown.

Certainly, sometimes life presents us with the opportunity to pursue only one of two contradicting or apparently irreconcilable goods; my own good *versus* your good. Sometimes, however, the cases in which virtuous deeds necessitate the loss of other goods are not so devastating as they might appear. It might be that, on occasion, it is better (say) for my family that I sacrifice my health in working hard to earn higher wages; while on other occasions it is better for my family that I sacrifice higher wages to keep myself healthy. Even when there is a clear, irresolvable tension between my good and the good of the group (as when, say, I must sacrifice my life), we can make sense of the demand of morality by appealing to what is necessary *for humans* in general. As Geach says: "Men need virtues as bees need stings. An individual bee may perish from stinging, all the same bees need stings; an individual man may perish by being brave or justice, but all the same, men need courage and justice."[11] Geach further points out that the clear contrast between my "inclinations" (e.g., to self preservation) is largely an artifact of philosophical thinking; many people are *inclined* both to preserve themselves *and* to obey the moral law.

Some critics have posed an objection to the effect that virtues are what Kant would call "hypothetical imperatives" – that we only need virtue *if* we want to be happy. On the contrary, the acquisition of virtue is a formal necessity for all members of the human race. As the gestating bee needs to develop its sting in order to realize its life form, we need virtues *to be human*. If this is right, then everyone has an obligation to develop virtuous traits such as being moderate, tolerant, and wise. Consider only practical wisdom for the moment: the obligation to become practically wise stems not from one's prior commitment to happiness but simply from finding oneself to be a human, and hence subject to a particular form of practical life which, as it turns out, is perfected or realized by

10. Ibid., 3.
11. Peter Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 17.

practical wisdom.

A somewhat different critic might accept the analogy between human virtues and bee stings but point out that, in fact, some bees *don't* need stings. For example, considering the common honey bee, only females, including the queen, have stings; male drones do not. By the same analogy, could there be humans that don't need some virtues? MacIntyre illustrates this objection with respect to promise-breaking. He asks us to imagine a complex, social species who each perform some function on behalf of the survival of the whole. However, the society also includes "free riders" who do not perform any function. He says:

> Such a society would suffer from a natural defect if there were too many free riders, but the existence of some free riders would not be a defect, and the free-riders are themselves not necessarily defective members of the species. For their existence might have the important function of making other members of their society and species more vigilant in sustaining the practices necessary for the society's and species' survival and functioning. So it might perhaps be for human beings with promise breakers.[12]

This objection brings out an important distinction between 'the human' qua a biological species bearing a common life form and humans qua members of society playing various social roles. I cannot fully explore the distinction here. Suffice it to say that the existence of various social roles with accompanying, role-specific virtues is compatible with virtues accompanying a universally distributed life form. As Foot argues: "Human beings do not get on well without [virtues]. 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."[13] Notice the generic form of her statements: "humans" do not get on well. This is compatible with saying that courage is *especially* necessary for a soldier or a firefighter. Even so, plumbers, parents, and professors need a basic level of human courage. And, again, practical wisdom is needed by all who are physically and mentally capable of acquiring it. MacIntyre's example shows how a (virtuous) society *can* sustain the presence of vice-ridden members without being utterly destroyed; it even supports the surprising notion that a virtuous society can retain or augment its

12. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Virtues in Foot and Geach," *Philosophical Quarterly*, no. 52 (2002): 621–31.

13. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 2–3.

virtues by supporting vice-ridden members. It does not do anything to justify the suggestion that vice-ridden members are ipso facto necessary. For even if the presence of free-riders were a net benefit to the imagined society, it is possible for others to play that role, such as the young, the critically injured, and so on.

Another critic might accept all this and ask: if people *need* the virtues, and if even "altruistic" or other-regarding virtues benefit their possessor, is it then egoistic and "selfish" to pursue virtue? Not at all. Acquiring one's own virtue is no more selfish than eating one's own food and getting one's own sleep. The pursuit of virtue is beneficial to the self, but not selfish in the pejorative sense that usually implies neglect of proper sensitivity to the needs of others. Furthermore, the charge of egoism assumes that in every case what is *good for me* is ipso facto *bad for someone else*. We need not assume this. It may be established, upon reflection, that in some cases what might be good for me turns out to be bad for someone else, or for humanity in general, but this must be established case by case. For it may turn out that what is good for humanity in general is ipso facto good for me as a human. Take an example: I would argue that various simple pleasures of life arising from cooking and eating good food, or strolling through natural beauty, chatting with an old friend, are on balance good parts of life. But they are not *the only* goods. If they were the only goods, one might go in for those pleasures and those pleasures alone. One might construct one's whole life around them. But having moderation is a good as well. So a person who enjoys both the moderate pleasures of life and the moderation of pleasure and pain is both a better fellow and better person.

In this connection, we should recall the brief argument above that virtues are intrinsic goods. They are not just traits that *lead to good consequences* for organisms like us (that too). The recent revival of virtue consequentialism defines virtues as instrumental goods. For example, Thomas Hurka argues that virtues have "recursive" value in that they have some intrinsic goodness in themselves while being a means to (other) intrinsically good ends.[14] Still, I differ from Hurka, who thinks that virtues are valuable *primarily* because they are useful to secure other intrinsic goods. Alasdair MacIntyre agrees that virtues have both kinds of value, but switches the priority. For example, he is careful to distinguish between intrinsic and instrumental goods; he says that virtues "enable their possessor to

14. Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford University Press, 2003), chap. 1.

achieve … goods" of practices, which might sound as if he means virtues are mere *instruments* to goods. They are instrumental but not *merely* instrumental to the achievement of goods. They are also *partly constitutive of those goods.*

In my view, MacIntyre is closer to correct here: being virtuous constitutes a naturally good state for human beings. The other benefits that accrue to a virtuous person are of secondary value.

To use a well-worn example, it is fairly uncontroversial that friendship is a good for practically rational, social animals. Suppose that one's *having friends* depends, in part, on one's *being friendly*. What does it mean to 'be friendly'? Being affable is not enough; one must have some of the traits that make one a good friend: being a good listener, showing genuine concern for others, rejoicing when a friend's life is going well, empathizing when it is not, and so on. Such traits are not commendable *merely* because they happen to help one to have friends. Rather, they are commendable because such traits, in part, make one a good human being. It so happens that, when two people have such traits, they will be good friends to each other. Good humans make good friends. And it is better, on balance, to have those traits whether or not friends are forthcoming. Fortune may place one in a lonely setting: military posts, solitary jobs, and so on. But as Judith Thomson says, a virtue is a trait such that, "whatever else is true of those among whom we live, it is better if they have it."[15] Likewise, Philippa Foot says: "let us say then, leaving unsolved problems behind us, that virtues are in general beneficial characteristics, and indeed ones that a human being needs to have, for his own sake and that of his fellows."[16] While we cannot pretend to have resolved the notorious tensions between altruism and egoism, we must move on in the pursuit of a definition of virtue.

2. Excellent and Corrective Traits

The second point about virtue is that virtues cause and partly constitute the excellent functioning of a human being. What is 'excellence'? The concept of excellence is relative to an object's nature and function. The common example is that the function of a knife is to cut, so an excellent knife *cuts well*. More complex beings have more complex functions and therefore a more complex kind of

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

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

excellence. An excellent guard dog is one that barks loudly, is hostile to strangers, but remains gentle with friends, and so on. Artifacts receive their function by design, but even a natural entity such as a dog receives an artificial function (guarding) by design. It is tempting to jump to the conclusion that *all* functions are artificial objects of human invention. On this view, natural organisms (trees, dogs, humans) have no *inherent* function, and no function at all unless one is imposed upon it by an agent from the outside.

As I have argued, however, natural organisms have natural functions, namely to develop fully into what they are. Even without knowing the full details of its origin, we can empirically discover the telos of an organism by observing it grow in proper conditions, and discerning between exemplary and non-exemplary members of the kind. We can learn that an acorn is a *Quercus alba* (white oak) only by observing and reflecting upon its development from embryonic stages to maturity, and by observing the characteristic activities exhibited by mature, typical members of the species. Likewise, the use of dogs in guarding roles is not *only* artificial; even before breeding, some dogs are not at all suited to the task, while others are well suited. We observe that the natural behavior of some full-grown, healthy dogs is to be more alert, protective, fierce, or what have you. Breeders and trainers then augment these natural ends and direct them toward human ends.

A natural inference to draw would be that human beings have a "function," howsoever complex, and that a detailed knowledge of this function is necessary for defining human excellence. I am persuaded by Geach that it is not necessary to be able to specify in great detail, in advance, our function. He says:

> … in that way of thinking it makes good sense to ask 'What are men for?' We may not be so ready with an answer, even a partial answer, as when we ask 'What are hearts for?… But Aristotle is right to my mind in desiderating an answer – the success in bringing men's partial organs and activities under a teleological account should encourage us to think that some answer may be found. Not as quickly as Aristotle thought. It does not show straight off what men are for if we know that men and men only are capable of theoretical discourse… Consider the fact that people of different religions or of no religion at all can agree to build and rent a hospital, and agree broadly and what shall be done in the hospital. There will of course be marginal policy disagreements… But there can be an agreement on fighting disease, because disease impedes men's efforts towards most goals.[17]

17. Geach, *The Virtues*, 12–13.

Geach goes on, later in the same book, to argue for a quite particular conception of the function or telos of humanity. For my purposes, I remain content to hypothesize a quite general function in accord with the pattern above. The function of a practical rational primate is, at least, to become a fully mature practical rational primate – to become, as Pindar recommends, what we are, having learned what that is. This quite general function should not be interpreted to mean that virtuous human beings just sit around "being human" all day; they perform "characteristic action" typical of the species, whatever that turns out to be. Just as we cannot define a priori how tall redwoods grow or the lifespan of an red-toothed shrew, we should not expect that we could define, a priori, how wise a human specimen can become. Instead, we should preserve a healthy agnosticism that is open to new possibilities. Wisdom, like knowledge, is expansive; how many languages can one person learn? 10? 25? 100?[18] How widespread can competence with the basics of quantum physics become? Similarly, how much practical wisdom can one person acquire in a lifetime? How much practical wisdom can a society accumulate in a hundred generations? It seems to me that these questions admit of no obvious, in principle limits.

Still, readers could rightly demand more details. People and societies disagree; does my account offer any judgment on who is right, or who is close? My goal here is to lay the foundations, not to build the whole structure. Nor should we be dismayed at wide and often stubborn disagreement between varying traditions as to which exemplars best represent fully mature, practically wise human beings. The inquiry is a difficult one, and perhaps requires that the inquirer attain to practical wisdom before being able to properly judge the merits of each case. I only insist, here, that we do not need to specify at the outset anything more than that the characteristic actions of practical rational primates will involve the kinds of virtuous actions and excellent practical reasoning that I am developing.

That said, it is much easier to spot weak and sickly specimens of a species. In plants, a well-trained botanist can diagnose *something wrong* with even an unfamiliar species via tell-tale signs such as spots, colors, and sickly shapes. Similarly, a competent adult can diagnose *something wrong* with a hopelessly addicted drug-user whose habit is ruining his life, or with an incorrigible fool whose life is tragically cut short by his own recklessness.

18. Many polyglots are known to have mastered upwards of 20 languages. Some, such as Sir John Bowring, knew as many as a hundred.

A related point is that virtues are corrective. As Foot argues, virtues become urgent when common vices become tempting: they stand "at a point at which there is some temptation to be resisted or deficiency of motivation to be made good."[19]

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

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

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

Kant's error, according to Foot, is in failing to distinguish that which is "in accord" with virtue from that which is *virtuous* full stop. It may be, for example, that a novice tennis player makes an expert shot while remaining merely a novice. The hit is "in accord" with excellence but is not, in this case, an instance of excellence – only beginner's luck. In her self-love example, Foot points out that there is no virtue required to eat one's breakfast and avoid life-threatening danger, but there may sometimes be cases where self-love is a duty – even a difficult, painful duty. She says, "sometimes it is

19. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 8.

what is owed to others that should keep a man from destroying himself, and then he may act out of a sense of duty."[20] So the solution to the happy philanthropist problem is this: if the philanthropist really does have character such that he is delighted helping others, he is morally praiseworthy *because he has worked to achieve that character*. As Foot says:

> For charity is, as we said, a virtue of attachment as well as action, and the sympathy that makes it easier to act with charity is part of the virtue. The 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.[21]

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.

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

> Only a detail of Kant's presentation of the case of the dutiful philanthropist tells on the other side. For what he actually said was that this man felt no sympathy and took no pleasure in the good of others because 'his mind was clouded by some sorrow of his own', and this is the kind of circumstance that increases the virtue that is needed if a man is to act well.[22]

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.

I would like to respond to two possible worries some readers may have. The first worry is that defining virtue as "beneficial" or "positive" by definition is circular and therefore empty. Suppose we define "boldness" as *doing hard things* and "courage" as doing hard things when it is good. Boldness is, so to speak, value neutral. One can be bold in wrongdoing or bold in doing well. If courage is just boldness in doing good, then the affirmation that 'courage (doing hard things when it is good) is

20. Ibid., 13.
21. Ibid., 14.
22. Ibid., 14.

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

This is an important objection, but it misses the point. These ethical propositions are not tautologous but are so widely and commonly accepted as to be easily mistaken for tautologies. If we define "kindness" simply as "a disposition of treating others *in a good way*" then it appears that "it is good to be kind" amounts to the same tautologous proposition "it is good to be good." But kindness is *not* best defined simply as *something good*. Instead, we must realize that some ethical propositions are synthetic, yet so widely believed and so widely affirmed that they appear to be tautologous. Some philosophers argue that this widespread, near universal belief is a sign that these propositions are self-evidently true. For instance, Russ Shafer-Landau says:

> It seems to me self-evident that, other things equal, it is wrong to take pleasure in another's pain, to taunt and threaten the vulnerable, to prosecute and punish those known to be innocent…[23]

Peter Geach argues that just because an ethical conclusion is virtually un-revisable doesn't mean it is a content-less tautology.[24] That kindness is good is rather a hard-won insight. Only by reflection can we know that humans have a nature and a species-specific kind of flourishing. Only by reflection can we learn which character traits are conducive to the realization of our life form while others are conducive to its stultification. (I return to this issue in chapter 5.)

A second worry is that this account of virtue sets the bar for virtue too high. I agree with Foot on this point. She denies the suggestion that *only* those who are completely virtuous are virtuous at all. There is at least one virtue that always operates as a virtue, namely, practical wisdom. While it might make some sense to speak of "foolish courage" (recklessness) or "foolish moderation" (prudishness) it makes no sense to speak of "foolish wisdom." Knowledge may and does contribute to wicked actions, but wisdom (by definition) entails a proper application of knowledge. Since wisdom always operates as a virtue, we admire wisdom perhaps most of all.[25] Secondly, we do admire virtues when they all

23. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, chap. 11.

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

25. As we shall see in McDowell's discussion of virtue-as-knowledge in chapter 5, it might be that when we admire a person's courage or moderation, we are often admiring the wisdom *in* the courage and the wisdom *in* the moderation.

appear in a remarkably virtuous person and when only one or two appear in a partially virtuous person. Foot says:

> There are some people who do possess all these virtues and who are loved and admired by all the world, as Pope John XXIII was loved and admired. Yet the fact is that many of us look up to some people whose chaotic lives contain rather little of wisdom or temperance, rather than to some others who possess these virtues. And while it may be that this is just romantic nonsense I suspect that it is not.[26]

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

3. Acquirable

A fourth attribute of virtues is that they are acquirable. MacIntyre above defined virtues as *acquired* human qualities; I would only modify this definition to "acquirable," because not everyone has all the virtues and some people never acquire some virtues. *How* virtue is to be acquired is an age-old theme I shall not explore.[27] Yet even without stating *how* virtues are acquired, it is still essential to see that they must be *acquirable.*

On my view, we are ultimately responsible for our 'moral' traits. We can voluntarily lose them or attain them by sustained intentional effort. For example, Foot thinks virtues are revealed not only by a person's abilities but by her *intentions*. What are intentions? She argues that the 'will' or practical reason must be understood in its broadest sense, "to cover what is wished for as well as what is sought."[28] Considered thus broadly, practical reason (or the will) contrasts with one's fortune and luck. Call "fortune" all those features of one's life and character that are fixed prior

26. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 17.

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

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

to or independent of practical reasoning. Most basically, all of us are practical rational primates by fortune. We all exist in a time and place in history, with a genetic identity derived from our parents, and grow up in a culture and tradition we receive from our parents, guardians, friends, and so on. As we become adults, we become gradually more responsible for our own character, our decisions, and our habits. So perhaps practical reasoning is the process of deciding what to do with one's fortune: what long-term projects to pursue and which objects are worthwhile to obtain, and how to react to the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."[29] We ultimately decide whether to become – or not to become – fully human.

Saying that virtues are acquirable by intentional effort is not sufficient. We do not judge a person to be virtuous even if he is a well-intentioned nincompoop who always harms when "helping." Neither do we only judge the result of a person's action, for we sometimes exculpate a failing performance in part because the person *meant well* – the exculpation might be called for when circumstances were not favorable, chances of success were low, etc. Instead, a virtuous action is one that aims at the right thing in the right way, and flows out of a person's acquired character. Foot attempts to capture the point that we admire someone who not only does the right thing but who has conditioned himself to do the right thing fluently and almost instantly. She quotes from *A Single Pebble*, a John Hersey novel in which a man saves 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 is this:

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

29. *Hamlet* III.1
30. Ibid., 5.

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

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

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

I have asserted that virtues are in principle acquirable for human beings. As stated, this assertion presents us with numerous puzzles. For example, some skills are acquirable but do not seem to be moral virtues. And some excellences seem to be instances of non-moral natural goodness but are not acquirable. How then can we distinguish moral excellence from skill or strength (which are mostly acquirable rather than inborn) as well as from physical beauty or natural intelligence (which are mostly inborn rather than acquirable)?

One reason these puzzles arise is that there exists a terminological disconnect between the older understanding of morality and the usual modern understanding. (I shall attempt to disentangle the various senses of the term 'moral' in chapter 5.) On the one hand, as Foot explains, *ἀρετή* (excellence) for the Greeks refers "also to arts, and even to excellences of the speculative intellect

31. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*.

whose domain is theory rather than practice."[32] Likewise, MacIntyre says, "The word *arete*, which later comes to be translated as 'virtue,' is in the Homeric poems used for excellence of any kind; a fast runner displays the *arete* of his feet (*Iliad* 20. 411) and a son excels his father in every kind of *arete* – as athlete, as soldier and in mind (*Iliad* 15. 642)."[33] There are many traits (we might call them *skills*) that are beneficial to their possessor and others. Even if we grant that skills are goods-of-a-kind and that a virtue is a good of a kind, skills do not seem to us particularly *moral*.[34] On the other hand, even the traditional list of "moral virtues" (Greek: *arete ethikai*; Latin: *virtutes 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 at all, we would be inclined to classify as an intellectual virtue. Finally, not all of the items on a comprehensive list of positive qualities (e.g., unselfishness) obviously correspond to one of the classical virtues. So, we ought not to assume that the terms 'excellence' or even 'moral excellence' can be a short-cut for understanding the concept of virtue.

The first step toward untangling this puzzle is to observe that skills are indexed to practices and social roles. Virtues are indexed to our life form. Skills are only needed by those who undertake those practices, but virtues are needed by all. A quick wit is necessary for being a comedian; courage is needed for being a human being. Keen eyesight and reliable memory may contribute to a pleasant life and success in various pursuits, but the cardinal virtues are necessary for success in *any* worthwhile human endeavor.

This response poses a new problem: Suppose Smith and Jones have grown up in very different cultures with very different kinds of parents and very different opportunities. Both are, so to speak, front-loaded with virtuous or vicious habits. Do they then have no chance to acquire new virtues or shed vices? Or even if traits that are initially inculcated in a child by parenting, educa-

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

33. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 122, emphasis added.

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

tion, and tradition may be modified later, doesn't their initial reception break down the dichotomy between what is in or out of one's control?

It is true that for the first decade (or two?) we are not primarily responsible for our own training and formation. However, unless illness or injury interrupt it, part of the normal process of childhood development is the gradual transferring of responsibility from caretakers to child. Without having to pin down exactly when one becomes an adult fully responsible for oneself, we can put it this way: one is morally responsible for the character and mind one has *by the end* of life, rather than the beginning. Virtues and vices are first inculcated in a child by fortune and tradition and only later modified by that individual's own initiative. On a related note, MacIntyre agrees with Aristotle that virtues are "natural" for humans. More exactly, Aristotle taught that virtue is *in accordance with* nature but not *by nature*. That is, virtues are not *natural* in the sense that natural attributes such as hair color are 'automatic' but they are natural in the sense that they are *proper* to human beings, they are formal features of practical, rational animals. Virtuous traits are a normal psychological result of cultivating excellence within particular human practices.

It is quite possible that Smith received many of the benefits of good fortune while Jones suffered terrible fortune. Let us grant the earlier points, that (1) they do not need the same set of skills if they won't perform the same social function and that (2) they both need the same "moral skills" essential to any human life, such as relating to their friends and family, cultivating their talents, facing challenges bravely and negotiating difficult decisions with wisdom. Are they equally responsible to acquire all the same virtues? As a matter of fact, few people acquire all or even many of the virtues. But all who are capable of practical reason can and must acquire some. Still, are all virtues acquirable by all? I think an adequate answer to begin with is the motto, '*one should acquire as much of as many virtues as possible.*'

Let me unpack this. It is not necessarily the case that every person can acquire every virtue equally. Aristotle taught that "affability" was a virtue. Modern readers might be inclined to smile at the notion that inborn friendliness and cordiality make one somehow *morally* better than their melancholic counterparts. I do not think he was completely wrong in judging this trait to be humanly important. Social interactions are an optional part of most human lives, and even if we do not

typically classify affability as a *moral* virtue we do tend to admire those who have a proper amount of affability and blame those who are excessively aloof or excessively cloying. If affability is indeed a human norm, are some human norms merely commendable but not obligatory – not "perfect duties" in Kant's sense?

The answer requires some sensitivity to circumstance. A family suffering from undernourishment needs to practice moderation in a very different manner than a wealthy family experiencing surplus. Nevertheless, if it is possible to discover fundamental human virtues (like moderation and practical wisdom), then it is possible to discover virtues the acquisition of which is incumbent upon everyone regardless of their circumstances. Indeed, practical wisdom is needed by all to help identify which virtues and skills are needed in their circumstances. It would be practical folly to take adverse circumstances as an excuse not to acquire any particular virtues.

Relatedly, I want to preempt the suggestion that those who are, say, natively affable or intelligent are *morally* superior to those who are natively solitary or unintelligent. Just as some are natively more physically healthy than others, we can affirm that nature distributes a diversity of gifts. There is no "fault" in being less fortunate. We have to remember the lesson that Anscombe taught us: the peculiarly moral "ought" in virtue ethics is not the same as the verdictive "ought" of a divine law.[35] We ought to become as virtuous and wise as possible because that is our natural end. The failure to do so is a natural evil. For neo-Aristotelians, virtues are not obedience to categorical imperatives or divine commands; they are ways of developing one's emotions into the likeness of a true human being.

But again, at some point of natural maturation we become responsible for acquiring whatever virtues we lack, even within the limitations of our own aptitudes. And most people in the world will not write books, and so the excellence intrinsic to academic practices are not necessarily *human* virtues; however, every human being in the world is a practical, rational primate and has biological parents and so needs the excellence intrinsic to the practice of human life. Even orphans and street urchins live in some form of community.

I must return to the problem of Smith and Jones above. Smith's good fortune consists not only

35. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy."

in the enjoyment of positive external circumstances but the acquisition of some moral virtues from a young age. Jones is less virtuous even before they both reach an age of self-responsibility. How is this fair? First, fortune is certainly not fair. This kind of unfairness cannot be totally eradicated. Secondly, even if some good traits may be inculcated at a young age, rational adults must take responsibility for rendering them secure. Likewise, even if some negative traits may be inculcated at a young age, rational adults must take responsibility for changing them.

We may praise or appreciate those who enjoy good fortune; but we *admire* those who have taken what gifts of fortune they have and put them to good use. We especially admire those who have overcome misfortune to acquire excellence and wisdom against the odds. Compare, for example, the crowds cheering for Olympic runner Derek Redmond when he is winning the gold medal with the crowds cheering for Derek Redmond finishing last after his hamstring tore and his father helped him to cross the finish line. There have been many gold medal winning races that millions of people have witnessed and forgotten. But this race, when an otherwise naturally talented and well-trained athlete finished *last* that remains forever etched in the memory of millions more. It's not just the unbridled emotion Redmond displayed in that moment which so touches viewers; it's the obvious love from his father shown in supporting his son's commitment to finish the race, even dead last. Likewise for Smith and Jones. Suppose that by the time Smith comes of age she is moderate, courageous, and relatively wise while Jones is immoderate, cowardly, and foolish. At some point, both agents take their own character in hand and practically reason about how to live. Jones would be all the more admirable if he became virtuous against the odds.

We can make a final comment about a case like Smith and Jones where their respective levels of virtue and vice are unequal even from a young age. Rather than absolving us of responsibility for our own character, this possibility underscores the importance of moral and intellectual education. In some very key respects, the acquisition of virtues and vices with which we begin adult life depends upon our education.[36] 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

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

– 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 follows all the doctor's orders 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 even across generations. We should never give in to 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.

By calling virtues *acquirable* I mean to argue that certain fundamental moral and intellectual virtues are obligatory on all adequately mature and functional human adults – such as those given emphasis by the Aristotelian tradition, such as courage, justice, moderation or self-control, and practical wisdom. But my account makes space for the commonsense thought that some traits (say, affability) are not obligatory for *everyone* to acquire equally. Furthermore, it may very well be that particular virtues – like skills – are especially necessary (or especially optional) for people in particular social roles or stages of life. Nevertheless, practical wisdom is one virtue that is especially important, because it is obligatory on all potentially practical rational primates – namely, all human beings – and because practical wisdom enables one to adjudicate which and to what extent the other virtues are needful in one's own case.

4. Rational and Practical

The fourth attribute I would like to discuss is this: virtues are those traits that enable excellence in rational practices and practical reasoning. The remainder of this chapter focuses on these two related concepts. In this pursuit, I shall first summarize MacIntyre's notion of "practice," which is both an interesting concept in its own right and also crucial to MacIntyre's account in *After Virtue*.

What is a practice for MacIntyre? A practice is a social activity aimed at defined ends. For example, MacIntyre mentions farming, chess, and political activity, among other examples. (We commonly speak of "practicing" medicine in this sense.) A practice is not merely a reflexive action such as scratching an itch, nor merely a single, discrete, intelligible action such as pulling a weed. It

is, rather, an intelligible set of actions undertaken in pursuit of a pre-determined end. Practices not only have pre-determined ends, but embodied histories. Leading MacIntyre scholar, Christopher Lutz, highlights four aspects of MacIntyre's famous definition of practice. A practice is:

> [1] a complex social activity that [2] enables participants to gain goods internal to the practice. [3] Participants achieve excellence in practices by gaining the internal goods. When participants achieve excellence, [4] the social understandings of excellence in the practice, of the goods of the practice, and of the possibility of achieving excellence in the practice are systematically extended.[37]

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

Secondary education in the U.S. is a practice. It has a history (or a set of histories) dating back to the colonial era, with a significant shift in the 1910-1940s when secondary schooling became the rule rather than the exception. The practice has its own standards, both legal 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's 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 commu-

37. Christopher Lutz, "Alasdair MacIntyre," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015, `http://www.iep.utm.edu/mac-over/`.

nity 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] the criteria for what makes schools and teachers good usually has a *history* and social context that is being "extended" across generations. Good schools recruit and train good teachers; good teachers train the next generation of good teachers, and so on.

One other feature of MacIntyre's concept of practice deserves comment. He defines virtues with reference to goods *"internal to"* practices, and also fashions the same contrast between 'internal' and 'external' goods as one between 'goods of excellence' and 'goods of effectiveness.'[38] What is the point of this distinction?

The "goods of excellence" of a practice are those that *necessarily* contribute to success within a given practice. In secondary education, success is defined by, say, graduation 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.[39]

38. MacIntyre, "Social Science Methodology as the Ideology of Bureaucratic Authority," in *Through the Looking Glass: Epistemology and the Conduct of Inquiry*, Maria J. Falco, ed. (University Press of America, 1979) 42-58. Reprinted in Kelvin Knight, ed. *The MacIntyre Reader,* 55

39. 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.

It is important to hold in mind both *practices* and *practical reasoning*. The virtuous agent does not merely act well (without reasoning) nor merely reason well (without acting). I would suggest that McDowell is wrong to assert that *all* of virtue is by definition a kind of practical knowledge or disposition. Rather, *some* virtues are excellences in practical reasoning but others are excellences in rational practice. (I offer a full critique of McDowell's conception of moral and practical reasoning in chapters 5 and 6.) Acting takes a moment of time; the cultivation and maintenance of habits takes a longer period of time; but living a good life takes a lifetime. So it is impossible to give an adequate account of virtue without considering one's life as a whole. Practical reasoning is the name we give to that whole complex process by which we undertake to direct our own lives.

Turning again to *After Virtue*, MacIntyre's first stage defined virtue in relation to practices. His second stage goes further to include the whole of life.[40] 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."[41] 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."[42]

Envisaging human life in this way faces serious obstacles. Answering them requires doing a bit of philosophy of action. The two kinds of obstacles MacIntyre cites are (a) social and (b) philosophical. The social obstacle is the fragmentation of modern life: "work is divided from leisure, private life from public, the corporate from the personal. So both childhood and old age have been wrenched away from the rest of human life and made over into distinct realms."[43] Just as the temporal segments of life are fragmented into bits (one thinks of the inherently patronizing talk of "senior citizens" compared from the older, inherently reverent talk of "elders"), so also the various projects and pursuits of life are partitioned, labeled, and cordoned off. On this fragmented view of life, the self's social roles are so many conventions masking the "true" underlying nature of the self. This presents a puzzle: how could virtues arise to the level of excellent dispositions for *humans as such*?

40. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 15.
41. Ibid., 202.
42. Ibid., 204.
43. Ibid., 204.

They would have to be dispositions applicable in personal, private, and business spheres, in young, middle-aged, and old age, etc.

The philosophical obstacle is the tendency to atomize "complex actions… in terms of simple components."[44] 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.'[45]

The first fact to notice is that each of these answers picks out different aspects of the agent's action: intentions, intended consequences, unintended consequences, etc. And, importantly, each of these answers places the simple atomic action within a narrative. The action is 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.[46] 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."[47] 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."[48] MacIntyre scholar Stanley Hauerwas argues that the central point in *After Virtue* is that "the concept of an intelligible action is a more fundamental concept than that of an action."[49] This is such a significant insight because it shows how individual actions, like individual words, are intelligible in the context of larger discrete units

44. Ibid., 204.
45. Ibid., 206.
46. Ibid., 207.
47. Ibid., 208.
48. Ibid., 208.
49. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre," *First Things* (2007). Web. The quotation is from MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 209.

of action, such as practices and projects. And, in some sense, the actions one performs within a practice find their intelligibility not only in practices but in the narrative of a whole human life. The same is true for verbal contributions to a conversation: Each word and sentence and speech within the conversation contributes to an unfolding narrative with a history and a telos, without which statements are random and unintelligible. MacIntyre continues:

> But if this is true of conversations, it is true also *mutatis mutandis* of battles, chess games, courtships, philosophy seminars, families at the dinner table, businessmen negotiating contracts – that is, of human transactions in general. For conversation, understood widely enough, is the form of human transactions in general. Conversational behavior is not a special sort or aspect of human behavior, even though the forms of language-using and of human life are such that the deeds of others speak for them as much as do their words. For that is possible only because they are the deeds of those who have words.[50]

Clearly these are weighty matters. Though more could be said, we have arrived at 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."[51]

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 catalog of the virtues will therefore include the virtues required to sustain the kind of households and the kind of political communities in which men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for philosophical enquiry about the character of the good.[52]

The virtuous person is sustained by his virtues on the quest toward the good. Vices not only render difficult or impossible in the achievement of the good; vices can obscure one's assessment of what is good and what is evil.

50. Ibid., 211.
51. Ibid., 219.
52. Ibid., 220.

I can concede that the "quest" of a Stalin or a bin Laden began with good intentions. It is even important to note that the wicked tyrant cannot achieve the most horrifying evils and could not come about without the presence of auxiliary virtues, such as courage and resolve. Just as a den of thieves cannot survive without at least some honor, a wicked regime cannot survive without at least some loyalty and patriotism. Socrates says that the same foolishness and vice that is laughable in the weak is dreadful in the powerful. The more thoroughly vicious characters cause less damage because their evil remains petty.

5. Traditional and Social

The fifth and final attribute of virtue is this: virtues enable the health and progress of whole social traditions. In other words, virtues are personal but not individualistic. Rather, virtues are instances of natural goodness for *humans* – and humanity is naturally social. This is just what we should expect if, as I argued in chapter 3, the practical rationality that characterizes the human primate is defined in part by sociality: humans are born into families and learn to speak the language of their society. Making this case will require a detailed discussion of MacIntyre's concept of tradition and practical reasoning.

The crucial third stage of MacIntyre's *After Virtue* account situates what has come before in a broader social and historical context. For MacIntyre, a tradition is, roughly, a "historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition."[53] I have argued that practical rationality is the differentia of human nature. Insofar as virtues depend for their effective operation on the coordinating management of practical reason, it is of utmost importance that an individual learn how to practically reason well. This happens, or fails to happen, in traditions.

Human beings develop their capacity to recognize practical reasons within a family and society with its own idiosyncratic political, religious, and philosophical worldview. So, quite plausibly, our initial de facto set of beliefs, desires, and dispositions reflect the substantive commitments of our group. As MacIntyre says:

53. Ibid., 222.

> 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 …"[54]

The tradition of inquiry we inhabit gives us not only abstract standards of reasoning but also facts, connections, concepts, and the very language we speak. Rationality, for MacIntyre, is inclusive of all the resources by which we judge truth and falsity. 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.

We can make initial sense of the notion that virtues enable the health and progress of traditions by saying that vices weigh down a whole tradition and virtues correct and potentially elevate it. MacIntyre says:

> Lack of justice, lack of truthfulness, lack of courage, lack of the relevant intellectual virtues – these corrupt traditions, just as they do those institutions and practices which derive their life from the traditions of which they are the contemporary embodiments.[55]

That said, even if we accept, in outline, the thesis that virtues sustain and even correct traditions, the problem of relativism rises. What counts as virtuous is at least partially related to one's culture, for every culture purports to provide for its members some minimal goods. The correct identification of these goods requires practical wisdom. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre explicitly retracts his earlier belief that virtues exist without a unity under prudence or practical wisdom.[56] Christopher Lutz argues that the consequences of this retraction are crucial to refuting the charge of relativism.

> …the relativism of *After Virtue* cannot be overcome unless its definitions of the virtues are extended to embrace the Aristotelian and Thomistic doctrine of the unity of virtue. MacIntyre's rejection of the unity of virtue in *After Virtue* has grave implications for the rest of his virtue theory because the rejection of the unity of virtue divorces the intellectual moral virtue of prudence from the passional moral virtues

54. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 401.
55. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 223.
56. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* preface, p. x.

> of courage, temperence, and justice… Prudence becomes cleverness…The strength of MacIntyre's account of practices is that the pursuit of excellence in a practice entails the pursuit of virtue, but if practices can be evil, and virtues can 'enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to' such an evil practice, then virtues can be anything at all.[57]

By contrast, if virtues are unified, then even though virtues exist only in the context of practices, "no genuine practice can be inherently evil."[58] Rather, we can make practical rational mistakes in judging *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*.

One pointed illustration is 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 virtuous, compassionate doctor who found himself unable to pursue the program of euthanizing mentally-disabled children.[59] We might also recall Huck Finn's internal struggle with his "conscience" in Twain's *Adventures of 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.[60]

The humor of this passage stems from 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 "sub-

57. Christopher Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Lexington Books, 2004), 98–101.

58. Ibid., 102.

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

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

verts" 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.

The threat of cultural relativism is not fully dissolved by arguing that individual virtues can subvert the errors in a tradition. What if one's tradition is deeply flawed? What if one's tradition is so fundamentally mistaken that its vices and errors undermine the possibility that individual virtues can get a foothold?

This question requires more reflection on the notion of practical reasoning. In the next chapter, I offer a full account. Here, I must dispense with one common view that I believe is mistaken. That common view sets up an opposition between tradition and rational criticism. On this view, one is either a conventionalist or a subversive. (Define a subversive as one who goes against (a particular society's) standard, traditional, ideology – the "default" view.) The danger of militating against one's tradition is that the default view is plausible to most people, and so the critic necessarily finds him- or herself in the minority view. On this opposition between tradition and critical reflection, philosophers are often stereotyped as the subversive type. Philosophers are not necessarily all subversives; but many subversives have been philosophers. Nevertheless, I think this whole way of considering the matter is a mistake.

The first reason is that a tradition is not opposed to rational or critical reflection – rather a member of a tradition cannot reason without the resources of that tradition. When we criticize our own tradition from within, we use what good we enjoy to increase the good. Secondly, it is idle to speak being "for tradition" or "against tradition," for "tradition" says contradictory things. Social Group Alpha passes along belief A from generation to generation. If A is false, then rational reflection will turn a philosopher into an anti-traditional subversive; but if successful, the philosopher might persuade Group Alpha to believe B instead, and culturally unify with Social Group Beta. In this case, B will be passed along from one generation to the next. So the very same philosopher will become a

traditionalist. These labels are about as helpful as asserting that one is a "newspaperist" who believes whatever is written "in the newspaper." The question is, *which one*? Traditions, like newspapers, are a medium, not a message. The only thing to do, then, is to examine the message — the content of the tradition.

Still, how is it possible that virtues can sustain what is good in tradition and enable the successful pruning and improving of the same? MacIntyre's answer is that we can rationally adjudicate between traditions (from within a tradition). We can rationally criticize our own tradition with the resources available to us. The result may be that we endorse the truth of the fundamentals thereof, or "switch" from our primary tradition to a rival.

The path of "switching" traditions begins when one undergoes an epistemological crisis in which one identifies the inadequacies of a primary tradition. MacIntyre derived this lesson from his own experience. As a member of the modern tradition of inquiry – which he calls "the encyclopedic tradition" – he reflected on the tradition itself. 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 where decaying fragments of intelligible moral discourse survive, none of which (in isolation) suffices for the rebuilding of the original, vital discourse.

There are many modern philosophers who have gone into similar crises and become distrustful of thought, language, and rationality itself; they join the "masters of suspicion."[61] Rather

61. The term comes, I believe, from Ricoeur, who said: "Three masters, seemingly mutually exclusive, dominate the school of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud." (Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (Yale University Press, 1970) 32)

than join the school of suspicion, MacIntyre took a surprising course. Moved by Thomas Kuhn's influential work on the structure of revolution between various paradigms in the natural sciences,[62] he speculated that a similar structure might obtain in moral revolutions.[63]

After recognizing the failures of one's own tradition, MacIntyre points to a second step: to "exercise… a capacity for philosophical imagination"[64] 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?[65]

This step of learning a second tradition as a "second first language" in turn compelled MacIntyre to recover the tradition of virtues. But virtues are not free-floating moral concepts; they are embedded in a specific, living, moral tradition. Most prominently within our society, that is the Aristotelian tradition. The Aristotelian tradition includes a particular notion of virtue and also of practical rationality.

MacIntyre argues that we should "return" to the Aristotelian tradition of virtue and practical reason because it is more adequate than its rivals. We must beware one misunderstanding. Any talk of "returning" is liable to sound nostalgic. Martha Nussbaum misunderstands MacIntyre's argument along these lines.[66] In her review of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, she cites an age-old dilemma between the social stability afforded by tradition and critical reflection:

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

63. 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

64. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, xiii.

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

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

> 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.[67]

Aristotle's solution is that it should be *hard but not impossible* to change societal structures. Strangely, Nussbaum takes MacIntyre to be reversing Aristotle's balance. She thinks MacIntyre is emphasizing social stability at the cost of "recoiling from reason." But MacIntyre is emphatically not defending "traditionalism" per se. His definition of tradition is *progressive*. Tradition is an ongoing, socially-embedded argument over time, which necessarily entails that moral inquiry is dynamic – even *modern*. To be traditional is not to be past-oriented; to be traditional is to be staunchly future-oriented, since the business of life is not only the pursuit of our telos but the transmission of everything valuable and precious to the next generation.

MacIntyre elevates the ability to critically reflect on one's own tradition and make necessary changes to the level of a virtue, the importance of which "is perhaps most obvious when it is least present." What is that virtue?

> [It is] 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 acti*. 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.[68]

None of this so far has gone to answer the question: what if one's tradition is wrong? How could I, a member of an embodied tradition, ever get far enough "outside" it to criticize it? This question is notoriously difficult. The explanation for the difficulty, if not the solution, is this: We can only think *about* rationality *with* rationality. We can only reflect upon our thinking process by using our thinking process. We can only observe rationality *from the outside* by using rationality *from the inside*.

67. Ibid.
68. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 223.

The matter is so complicated because any argument is self-referential or iterative. When two parties share an identical conception of rationality, then arduous debate is unnecessary; when two parties do not share identical conceptions, arduous debate about a particular issue is liable to shipwreck on the rocks of metaphilosophical disagreement. 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?"

There can be no quick, ready-made answer to the question of how to acquire practical wisdom. Answering it is inextricably bound up in the slow and dangerous process of acquiring the virtue of practical wisdom. We must be alert to the contours of our own tradition and bold in considering its weaknesses and failures. We must also exercise philosophical imagination in learning the contours of rival traditions. Success is not impossible, but neither is it guaranteed. The only hope is to practically reason, and to take care to do it well.

6. Conclusion

Thus far, virtues have come to light as excellent traits belonging to a fully mature and exemplary practical, rational primate. The virtuous person does not necessarily enjoy all the blessings of good fortune, but she does take up all that is given in her fate and put it to the best possible use. Virtuous people's lives are remarkable not for what they are given – any celebrity or cad might be born wealthy or physically attractive or talented – but for what they do with what they are given. And practical reasoning is not a simple process different from other kinds of reasoning or practice; it is the whole complex process by which we undertake to direct our own lives.

Hursthouse points out that we do not just admire those who survive, but those who exemplify a *human* form of life: "The human virtues make their possessor good qua human being, one who is as ordinarily well fitted as a human being can be in not merely physical respects to live well, to flourish – in a characteristically human way."[69] This seems right. The exemplary human being avoids the common and tempting traps one faces along the way of a normal human life, taking up all the intrinsic and natural urges of animality (hunger, thirst, the sexual drive, desires for shelter, comfort, and companionship) into practices that make sense. She works to acquire those traits that

69. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 208.

benefit human beings, both oneself and others, and that enable her to engage in such practices as make sense for human beings. The definition of "making sense" is admittedly variable according a person or tradition's conception of practical reason. And the notorious difficulty of adjudicating conflicting conceptions has been briefly noted. While I do not pretend to have offered a resolution of that difficulty, I have offered two responses: first, an explanation of why it is difficult; and second, a formula from MacIntyre that might promise to help a practical reasoner resolve it by carefully working out a comparison between one's own conception (with its resources and flaws) and a rival conception (with *its* resources and flaws). The virtuous and wise person also navigates his tradition, both sustaining its goods and correcting its flaws. The virtuous person also takes care to proactively cultivate virtues in others without unduly short circuiting her own practical reasoning. On the account thus far developed, these generics pick out what we are; our moral task is to *become* what we are.

We flagged three problems but did not fully address them above: (1) What, if anything, is the human function (ergon)? (2) I said McDowell mistakes the relation between virtue qua knowledge and virtue qua rational organization of one's psychology – including emotions, bodily urges, physical situation, unthinking habits, and so on – so what is the relation between practical reasoning and rational practice? (3) Can virtue go bad? It seems that, without further guidance, otherwise virtuous traits might operate towards wicked ends, or co-exist with vices inside an (overall) miserable and vicious person. The solution to each of these problems requires a clearer account of practical reasoning. That is my next task.

Chapter 5

Practical Reasoning

> There could be no reasons unless a rational animal has a general conception of its own good, and thus a general sense of how to live.
>
> —Jennifer Frey, *The Will to Do Good*, 79.

"How should one live?" This question is central to neo-Aristotelian writers such as Bernard Williams, Philippa Foot, Alasdair MacIntyre, John McDowell, and others. The question is so important, I think, for at least four reasons. First, the question implies that the questioner is aware of a dichotomy or distinction between *the way one is in fact living* and *the way one might live*. As a matter of fact, every capable adult is already living in a particular way. I take it for granted that most people learn to live in a particular way from their culture and family of origin, while also trying to satisfy more or less their own idiosyncratic preferences. But a normal part of human life is pausing to reflect on one's own motives, methods, means, and ends. A crisis can trigger such reflection: what is wrong with my way of life, my values, and/or my choices? And exposure to other people – be they friends, fictional characters, or historical figures – who seem extraordinarily happy can trigger such reflection: what do they know that I do not? What are they doing that I am not?

Secondly, the "how should one live?" question assumes that there are good human lives and bad human lives. I hope that it is uncontroversial to point out that some of the members of our race are fools. (I leave it to the reader to supply illustrations.) If there are ways one *definitely should not live*, then there is at least a way or set of ways one *should* live. Even if it is difficult to answer the question of how one should live, we should not be fully skeptical that there is an answer (or a set of answers).

Thirdly, the question implies that the questioner is at the age of reflection. Young children do not wonder how to live. And, according to my account, practical reasoning is an essential part of one's maturation from a child to a practically wise human being.

Fourthly, the question calls for a *certain kind of answer*, namely, a practically reasonable answer. Recall Jay Wallace's general definition of practical reasoning as "the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do."[1] Although sometimes we reflexively act without thinking, and other times contemplate without acting, ("four and four makes eight"), it seems obvious, on the face, that deliberation and resolute action are not like this. One resolves what to do by considering practical reasons. When a child asks a "how?" question about, say, how to open a jar, we offer a practical instruction: *hold the base tightly, grip the lid and twist to the left.* As adults, we ask "how?" questions about large, multifaceted projects: How to manage a company merger? How to save for retirement? How to raise a child? The "instructions" for such answers will be complex. The "how should I live?" question is simply our most complex long-term project. The answer or answers cannot be an overly vague resolution (e.g., "help to improve the world"), nor mere specific platitudes (e.g., "do no harm"). Rather, a good answer will distinguish between overall good ways and overall bad ways to live and include a set of practical reasons, some general enough to give a trajectory to one's whole life, and others specific enough to provide guidance through the day-to-day matters of human life.

In short, an answer to the "how should one live?" question requires practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is unique among virtues in several ways. First, it is perhaps the one *clearly non-optional* virtue. Everyone has the obligation to become practically wise, regardless of circumstances, social roles, aptitudes, cultures, and so on. The universality of the obligation arises from the mere fact that one is a practical, rational primate. Secondly, practical wisdom is also unique in that it enables one to acquire other virtues, such as courage or moderation, by providing its possessor with the insight and moral skill to develop specific good habits in the varied circumstances of normal life. Thirdly, practical wisdom is recursive: the practically wise person is the most well-equipped to root out folly and become more practically wise.

1. Wallace, "Practical Reason."

The neo-Aristotelian framework for doing ethics views ethical reasoning as a holistic process that must be sensitive to the whole range of practical reasons. According to such thinkers, there can be no adequate theory of ethics without a theory of practical rationality. According to the arguments of the last chapter, virtues are traits that *enable* one to live a distinctly human life *and that partly constitute that life*. In this chapter, I shall argue that the practically wise person is engaged in "mapping the landscape of value"[2] – that is, developing the knowledge and good intentions needed to pursue what is truly worthwhile and avoid what may seem worthwhile but is actually worthless. If successful, I shall be lending support to the age-old view that the skill of engaging in practical reasoning – reliably and successfully – is the virtue of practical wisdom. The practically wise person is one who *knows* the answer or answers, if there are any such answers. The one who answers this question poorly lives foolishly and, ipso facto, badly. He acts on bad reasons and fails to act on good reasons. The one who answers it well lives wisely, and ipso facto, well. Hence, it is essential to virtue that one be practically wise. Or so I shall argue.

Section 1 breaks ground on this complex matter through a sustained discussion of John McDowell's "Virtue and Reason." I offer a qualified defense of his thesis that virtue is a form of practical knowledge, including an initial perceptual sensitivity to the salient facts of a situation with the skill to do what is required by those facts.

Section 2 highlights an ambiguity in McDowell's contrast between 'moral' and 'practical' reasons. He confuses the genus 'practical reasoning' for one species of 'moral reasoning' – that is, reasoning about one's *obligations to others*. I attempt to remedy this confusion by putting in historical context the relationship between 'moral' and 'practical' reasons. McDowell confuses two frameworks for approaching ethics: the 'quandary frame' and the 'character frame.'

Section 3 offers a more coherent alternative. It reprises the argument that human beings are practical reasoning animals by placing our distinctive activity in context of the general inclination of all living things to their own life and health. In this light, practical reasoning is a necessarily substantive form of reasoning about ends, rather than a merely instrumental one about means, because in order to have any reasons at all one must have a first principle of practical reason, namely, a general

2. Ibid., sec. 6.

evaluative conception of what is to be pursued and hence how to live.

Section 4 addresses some serious objections to my way of framing ethical reasoning. For example, how, exactly, is a *rational* calculative process central to *moral* virtue? Here, I deal with three objections that challenge the notion that successful practical reasoning is essential to human virtue.

1. Virtue as Practical Reasoning

John McDowell's "Virtue and Reason" argues, among other things, that virtue is a particular kind of practical knowledge. Practical reasoning is both a rational process and also an initial, perceptual sensitivity that makes visible to us practical reasons. Even though he allows that practical reasons are ultimately intersubjective features of our social world, he argues that they are no more and no less objective than theoretical reasons. In this section, I trace his discussion in some detail, including his statements of various objections and responses to them.

What kind of knowledge is virtue, according to McDowell? It is a practical and dispositional *what to do*. It is not simply propositional. Rather, it is a non-codifiable perceptual sensitivity to salient facts along with a disposition that leads the virtuous knower to act properly – so long as no countervailing psychological factors interfere. Some objections to his thesis will be addressed as we proceed.

How does it make sense to conceive of virtue as practical knowledge? Consider a platitudinous value such as kindness. Suppose kindness is really a virtue. What does it mean to predicate kindness of someone? We cannot ascribe a virtue to someone who acts kindly once or twice, or who does so (even consistently) by pure luck. Justifying the ascription of a *virtue* requires that a person "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."[3] McDowell is gesturing toward three or four plausible criteria for the ascription of a virtue: *reliability* means the kind person must be *regularly* or *habitually* disposed to kind thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; *sensitivity* means that the kind person demonstrates an alertness to the fact that a friend is in need, a child is sad, an elderly parent is lonely, etc.; *practical knowledge* means the kind person knows what to do in such situations; and

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

intentional behavior means that the person correctly feels the imposition to avoid cruel and indifferent behavior and to act on what the situation requires.

McDowell has made it plausible that sensitivity to reasons to behave a particular way is at least necessary for virtue. But is it sufficient? He offers two answers. The first answer is that the presence of a virtue in someone exhaustively explains her behavior. For example, when the kind person sees that a situation requires kindness, that "requirement imposed by the situation" must "exhaust his reason for acting as he does."[4] An ulterior interest (say, in a mercenary reward) would disqualify the action as an example of kindness. The kind person's action is explained by the simple fact that it would be a kind action.

Now, the kindness is not the only reason for action. There are many reasons for action and many situations where no single overriding reason is obvious. Rather, the question of what to do seems to generalize into a question of what is good or advisable, all things considered. McDowell concedes the point. He illustrates it with the example of a parent who is overly indulgent to a child out of kindness. Certainly, the parent is sensitive to what kindness requires but not *sensitive enough* to fairness or to considerations of the child's health, and so on.

To accommodate this observation, McDowell generalizes this point to encompass all of virtue:

> Thus the particular virtues are not a batch of independent sensitivities. Rather, we use the concepts of the particular virtues to mark similarities and dissimilarities among the manifestations of a single sensitivity which is what virtue, in general, is: an ability to recognize requirements which situations impose on one's behavior. It is a single complex sensitivity of the sort which we are aiming to instill when we aim to inculcate a moral outlook.[5]

McDowell is saying that if the kind person's behavior arises from a response to the salient facts he is sensitive to, then the virtuous person's behavior *in general* is explained by just the fact that it is virtuous. The virtuous person's behavior, then, arises from a general sensitivity to *what situations require.* If virtue is a "single complex sensitivity" that constitutes an entire "a moral outlook," then virtue seems to be

4. Ibid., 332.
5. Ibid., 333.

not just a perceptual capacity to notice what is required but also a metacognitive capacity to reflect upon, rank, and order, the various requirements imposed by a situation before acting accordingly.

I have a complaint about McDowell's clarification here, which I shall explain below. In brief, it seems wrong to call the single sensitivity "virtue" when it includes considerations that do not seem intuitively moral at all, such as prudential considerations. For now, I must examine McDowell's response to the non-cognitivist critic who challenges the notion that practical reasoning can, by itself, motivate one to action.

2. Reason, Practice, and Motivation

The first challenge to his own thesis that McDowell addresses comes from moral anti-realism, specifically, expressivism. Expressivists are among the chief contemporary proponents of an alternative, Humean, model of practical reasoning which denies that practical reason is "a capacity for reflection about an objective body of normative truths regarding action."[6]

Thus far, it is fairly clear that I have been assuming a kind of realism. While defending the assumption would take us too far afield, I should point out that it is not viciously circular. Most of us have no pre-analytic objection to the seeming fact that some reasons for acting are good reasons and others bad. Some brute norms (such that it is wrong to torture animals, or that one is not to use ineffective means to achieve one's ends) have a quasi-analytic force to them. Realism about practical reasons is what Nagel calls a "defeasible presumption."[7] Even anti-realism's most sophisticated advocates concede the that realism is the default view. Mackie admits that moral thought and language assumes objectivity, for the notion of objective value has "a firm basis in ordinary thought, and even in the meanings of moral terms."[8] Gibbard goes so far as to suggest that Platonism about reasons is *common sense*.[9]

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

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

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

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

Nevertheless, anti-realism has a serious challenge to the defeasible presumption. Subjectivism is motivated by considering a problem about the status of practical reasons within (a broadly-construed) naturalism. The anti-realist worries that the "defeasible presumption" lying at the center of "the main tradition of European moral philosophy" commits one to non-natural norms and a corresponding non-naturalistic human capacity to intuit them. Philosophers such as Gibbard insists: "Nothing in a plausible, naturalistic picture of our place in the universe requires … non-natural facts and these powers of non-sensory apprehension."[10]

The anti-realist alternatives aim either to debunk the objective purport of moral reasoning or to reclaim it within the confines of a respectable naturalism.

The Humean model of practical reasoning asserts that "cognition and volition are distinct."[11] Practical reasons cannot motivate, at least not by themselves.[12] If this were so, moral reasoning could not satisfy the "practical requirement" – it could neither move us to action nor explain *why* we acted. Indeed, a large part of the appeal of expressivism is that it can satisfy the *practical* dimension of practical reason (though at the cost of the *rational* dimension).

Hence, the non-cognitivist critic would be quick to respond to McDowell with a counterexample of two persons in the same situation who are sensitive to an identical range of reasons for action but respond differently. If such a situation were to obtain, it would disconfirm McDowell's thesis that virtue is practical knowledge.

The expressivist has a neat explanation of reasoning, action, and motivation. If reasons cannot motivate by themselves, then practical reasoners act when reasons co-exist with a conative mental state (such as a desire, interest, or attraction).[13] Practical reasoners do not simply enjoy a

Theory of Normative Judgment (Harvard University Press, 1992) 154.

10. Ibid., 154.

11. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 335.

12. He says: "Reason is the discovery of truth and falsehood." (*Treatise of Human Nature*, Part I.1.)

13. We all exhibit various dispositions to act in certain ways, to rank and organize our various motivations, to pursue certain things, or to make certain decisions rather than others. Such dispositions are clearly practical. They have the right kind of action-guiding force to explain why we act the way we do. On the other hand, there are dispositions. The term 'disposition' gets used in various ways: one can be disposed (say) to repay one's debts (a moral commitment), or disposed to shout when angry (a temperament), or disposed to travel abroad every summer (an interest). But is a "disposition" a form of knowledge?

"single complex sensitivity" to what situations require. Instead, the cognitive bit judges an object, while the conative state provides the movement toward the object. For 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 friend (the non-cognitive bit). The expressivist would say that surely these two *together* – and neither in isolation – explains the behavior.

This challenge presents a pair of twin challenges: is virtue-knowledge *practical* – and if so, wouldn't it be impossible for an agent to perceive what a situation requires and still do wrong? Secondly, is virtue-knowledge *rational* – and if so, mustn't it be codifiable and consistent? The very notion of a unitary "practical reasoning" is a paradox.

2.1 Is Practical Reasoning *Practical*?

McDowell's response to the expressivist critic is this: one must already be sensitive to a particular range of requirements for action in order to even notice the salient facts (e.g., that one's friend is in trouble). It is quite plausible to interpret the difference between the vicious and virtuous person as lying not just in their psychological reactions to what they notice about the world but *in the noticing itself.*[14] The morally calloused person does not notice the fact that his actions are causing others pain. Better, the morally calloused person does not notice the fact *as morally salient*.

This response from McDowell is not conclusive, but it is a good start. It highlights, but does not alleviate, the deep disagreement between the Humean and the Aristotelian camps. He concedes the conditional that *if* two people are identically sensitive to a morally salient fact but act differently *then* virtue cannot simply be a sensitivity. But, for McDowell, one person's *modus ponens* is another's *modus tollens.* So if virtue is to be identified with a single complex sensitivity, then a supposed situation in which two persons perceive a situation and its practical requirements identically but act differently cannot obtain.[15] Is there any way to bridge the divide without begging the question in either direction? McDowell suggests we look to Aristotle.

Aristotle allowed that sometimes the "appreciation of what [a virtuous person] observes is

14. See also Margaret Olivia Little, "Seeing and Caring: The Role of Affect in Feminist Moral Epistemology," *Hypatia* 10, no. 3 (1995): 117–37.

15. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 333.

clouded, or unfocused, by the impact of a desire to do otherwise."[16] It is possible that a person correctly perceives what a situation requires (and hence has the relevant virtue) but fails to act correctly due to interference from other psychological factors. Desires, fears, etc. might cause a "distortion in one's appreciation" of the relevant reasons.[17]

This Aristotelian reply is also not conclusive. McDowell cites an objection from Donald Davidson to the effect that a person might fail to perform the resultant right action *even without such clouded appreciation.* McDowell concedes. But Davidson's move changes the subject slightly, from virtue and vice to continence and incontinence. For Aristotle, continence (or self-control) is not a virtue. If one can only do the right thing by gritting one's teeth and bearing it, one has not fully attained the relevant virtue. Continence is still *comparatively better* than incontinence – but not as good as virtue.

The continent person is able to perform the right action because he recognizes it as right, *despite* countervailing pressures (from desires, say) to do the wrong action. Since the possession of a full virtue includes possession of the proper motivation as well, continence is only needed in the absence of a fully developed virtue. Put differently, the virtuous person is not just one who "balances" reasons to ϕ against countervailing reasons to π. The virtuous person is the one for whom simply identifying the appropriate reasons to act silences countervailing reasons. For example, *in this situation, courage requires that I run into danger.* The virtuous persons acknowledges the danger (and feels rightly apprehensive) but also sees that courageous action in the face of this danger is required; the latter perception, according to McDowell, "silences" other pressures.[18] The merely continent person has to "weigh" reasons; the virtuous person fluently *acts* on the best reason.

In my view, McDowell's reply to Davidson's objection is not quite adequate. Fully explaining the common occurrence that we judge what is to be done but fail to do it would require a lengthier discussion. I have argued in chapter 4 that some virtues are excellent rational *practices*. Following Aristotle, I would suggest that the fullness of virtue is not merely the sensitivity to what is required – which an incontinent person might have – but also a well-ordered psychology (including emotions) and a set of rational habits that empower the agent to follow through on doing what is required.

16. Ibid., 334.
17. Ibid., 334.
18. Ibid., 335.

Virtues require habits, not just knowledge.

We can contrast virtue with continence/incontinence in this way: Unlike the continent person, the virtuous agent has overcome the psychological factors or other factors that cloud the appreciation of what is required. And unlike the incontinent person, the virtuous agent has cleared away other factors that interrupt the execution of the thing to do. Once the fullness of a virtue is attained, the possessor does not need to stop and "weigh;" but sees what is required and acts. (I shall comment a bit more on moral motivation below.)

2.2 Is Practical Reasoning *Rational*?

McDowell's case that practical knowledge can motivate the virtuous person requires addressing twin challenges. We have addressed one side of the paradox which challenges the practicality of virtue-knowledge. The other side of the paradox challenged its *rational* credentials. Pretty clearly, the paradigmatic case of knowledge is theoretical knowledge, i.e., *knowledge that p*. Such knowledge is categorical, propositional, and codifiable into a deductive logical system. McDowell's critic then poses the following argument: knowledge is codifiable. However, virtue-knowledge is practical knowledge or 'knowing-what-to-do', which is not codifiable. Therefore, virtue must not be knowledge.

The error in this objection, McDowell thinks, is not an error in moral theory but 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 are not, ultimately, sufficiently *rational*. Some Humean philosophers (but not necessarily Hume) think that morality is a non-rational domain of sentiments, desires, commitments, approvals, and so on. Other Kantian philosophers (but not necessarily Kant) think that morality is a rational domain and hence must be a matter of identifying first principles and applying them to particular situations. What both parties share is a belief that "rationality must be explicable in terms of being guided by a formulable universal principle."[19] This common belief McDowell wishes to refute.

19. Ibid., 337. MacIntyre, similarly, denies the assumption that normative ethical rules can be derived from universal ethical principles the way we "apply" universal logical truths to particular logical conclusions via a middle term. Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist* 67, no. 4 (1984): 498–513.

McDowell's argument here (drawing on Wittgenstein and Kripke[20]) is that even apparently obvious cases where the rational thing to do seems to require following an objective rule turn out to be cases of a much messier process in which there is no such objective rule we can appeal to. For example, take the objective rule of extending a series of numbers two at a time. Suppose Smith instructs Jones to "add 2" to a number and continue applying the rule indefinitely. We are confident (as is Smith) that Jones will "churn out the appropriate behavior with the sort of reliability which a physical mechanism, say a piece of clockwork, might have." We tend to expect that Jones will produce "2, 4, 6, 8," etc. McDowell thinks this confidence is based on postulating 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."[21] The postulate of a psychological mechanism is mistaken because, as it turns, out, the rule being followed is not so simple as "add 2 indefinitely." It is logically possible that Jones interpreted Smith's instruction as a different rule that happened to produce the same result. The attempt to stamp out this possibility by adding new meta-rules or sub-rules iterates the problem. It is still logically possible that Jones follows a *different* meta-rule or sub-rule that happens to produce the same result. Wittgenstein's conclusion is that even apparently simple rules, successfully followed, cannot be exhaustively described.

McDowell's conclusion is that the true "ground and nature of our confidence" is our participation with Jones in a common form of life. What is a 'form of life?' This is a term of art, also drawn from Wittgenstein and quoted with approval from Stanley Cavell. It refers to the shared result of acculturation or formation. For example, how do we learn reliably to use words and expressions in our native language? There is no clear mechanistic process that explains exactly when a child learns to make exclamations – such as a pained "ow!" or an excited "ooh!". There is no clear mechanistic process by which we learn when to laugh at jokes or when to cry in pity. Instead of a mechanistic process, McDowell suggests that children learn words and behaviors by "bildung" or formation. The result is a "congruence of subjectivities."[22] Jones is able to follow Smith's rule (and we are confident that we know what his instruction meant) even though it is not stated exhaustively because we all

20. Saul A Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition* (Harvard University Press, 1982).

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

22. Ibid., 339.

share a common practice of, say, adding or producing a series of numbers. More generally, all of our shared rationality is not grounded in "external" objective rules but in a shared form of life.

It is disconcerting to many to consider that nothing keeps rationality "on the rails" but a congruence of subjectivities. McDowell admits this is a disconcerting hypothesis; it induces "vertigo." But, he says, our response to such vertigo should not be to embrace a "consoling myth". That "consoling myth" consists of two notions: (a) that rational rule-following is enabled by a psychological mechanism that guarantees consistency; and (b) that there exist objective facts of the matter over and above the congruence of subjectivities. If we abandon these two notions and embrace the model of deductive rationality as grounded only in our intersubjective form of life, then the corresponding model of practical rationality will become tenable.

I think McDowell concedes too much here, as I shall explain below. Nevertheless, my purpose here is to agree with McDowell that both forms of rationality – the practical and the theoretical – are on a par. They stand or fall together. Either they are both intersubjective or both objective. Practical reasoning may be relatively less codifiable than theoretical reasoning, but each is equally a form of knowledge.

McDowell asks a related query: what, if anything, guarantees that the moral person's behavior is intelligibly the same from case to case? If moral knowledge were formulable as a universal principle, then it would be 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 rule-following mechanisms, then how do we explain the virtuous person's reliably correct behavior? His answer invokes Aristotle's notion of a practical syllogism. According to McDowell, the 'practical syllogism' takes the following shape:

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

On the strictly deductive logical model, the role of the major premise is to provide solid universal ethical principles from which it is possible to derive a codified set of particular moral duties. Mc-

Dowell resists this model. The strictly non-cognitivist alternative is that there must be no universal ethical principles at all – only universal psychological states, such as consistent desires, plans, values, or norms. McDowell also resists this model. Instead, the role of the major premise is to articulate a "certain conception of how to live… [namely] the *virtuous person's conception* of the sort of life a human being should lead."[23] What kind of life should a human being lead? The answer "cannot be definitively written down."[24]

If the kind of conception of a good life that the virtuous person has is approximate and non-codifiable, it becomes hard to see why we are bothering to fit moral reasoning into a syllogistic pattern at all. McDowell's response is that understanding virtue-knowledge within a practical syllogism *does* a 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 also explanations of actions."[25] I can explain your behavior by understanding that you were concerned for your friend's welfare and so offered to help. Likewise, you can explain your decision to help simply by citing the fact that your friend was in need. So the general structure of the practical syllogism is useful.

What's more, McDowell concedes that there is a kind of circularity to his account: "the rationality of virtue… is not demonstrable from an external standpoint."[26] And: "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…"[27] The virtuous person's conception of how to live is itself conditioned by 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. The upshot of the combination of non-codifiability with a practical syllogistic form is that the virtuous person takes for a rule of life some conception of how to live but that this conception is part of what it means to be a virtuous person – and thus ensues a certain circularity.

23. Ibid., 343. Emphasis added.
24. Ibid., 343.
25. Ibid., 342. Verbatim: "The explanations, so far treated as explanations of judgments about what to do, are equally explanations of actions."
26. Ibid., 346.
27. Ibid., 343.

McDowell bites the bullet on the incorrigible intersubjectivity of theoretical and practical reasoning. I think he does so because he fails to grasp Foot's insight that objective, natural, normative facts are able to "keep us on the rails." I am not motivated to think this out of a desire to be "consoled." In any case, the presence or absence of a frightening vertigo in the arguer is irrelevant to the argument. The notion that all practical and deductive reasoning is ultimately answerable to the world is a more adequate explanation. As I have argued in chapter 2, both scientific reasoning and ethical reasoning can conform or fail to conform to the relevant range of normative facts. I shall criticize McDowell's intersubjective notion a bit more in the next chapter.

In sum, McDowell thinks virtue is a kind of practical knowledge. That is, virtue is a sensitivity to salient facts that call for a particular response and that intrinsically motivates the virtuous person that response – absent interfering passions. The hypothetical counterexample presented by his Humean critic is one wherein two agents are "sensitive to" or "notice" identical reasons for action but do not act identically. McDowell's response is that while noticing a requirement for action is necessarily motivating *to some extent*, other psychological factors may interfere with the resulting correct action. Furthermore, the kind of "knowledge" that virtue amounts to is uncodifiable, but that does no harm to the account. Virtue-knowledge is rather a broad conception of how to live and a series of specific sensitivities to a range of specific practical reasons. Practical reasoning is *consistent*, moreover, but not by being "objective" (in the sense that even McDowell admits would be desirable) but by being rooted in our communal form of life – precisely the same way in which logical reasoning is. Both are "intersubjective" and rooted in our form of life, but both are as objective as need be.

2.3 Moral and Practical Reasoning

While I shall discuss what I think McDowell gets wrong below, on my view, he gets this much right: practical reasoning is indeed by definition a form of *reasoning*. It is like theoretical reasoning in that it is normative.

Broadly, we can say that theoretical reasoning is a process by which I aim to determine *what to believe* – to answer the question "What should I believe?" When I assess evidence for and against some proposition p, I am looking for *reasons* to believe p is true or false. The successful conclusion of

a rational argument is the judgment that p or not-p. (Or I may not have enough evidence to judge either way, in which case I may withhold judgment.) Similarly, when I consider a scientific hypothesis, I suppose that p and then conduct an experiment that will reveal reasons that confirm or disconfirm the supposition. To fail to believe p upon coming to know good evidence for it, or to believe p in spite of good evidence against it, is to make an intellectual error. If q entails p and I already know and affirm that q, then I *ought* to affirm that p. Similarly, if some reason to π entails a decisive reason to ϕ, and I already know and am committed to π, then I ought to ϕ.

So far as we know, all theoretical reasoners are also practical reasoners. We can imagine creatures such as angels, Artificial Intelligences, and intelligent aliens who might think without acting; but so far as we know, to be a reasoner at all is to be responsive to what Sellars called the "space of reasons," including both practical and theoretical reasons. This consideration is part of the reason why, in chapter 3, I insisted that practical reasoning, and *not* abstract theoretical reasoning, defines human nature. If this is right, then the burden of proof lies with those who would artificially separate the *knowing* and the *practicing*.

That said, my complaint against McDowell's account is that he confuses moral and practical reasons. Suppose Jane can pretty well diagnose a car engine by listening to the way it whines, hums, and clicks. When all John hears is noise, Jane is "sensitive to a range of requirements for action" and knows what to do (say it needs a new timing belt). By McDowell's lights, she has a practical disposition which is virtue. It strains common sense to call any and all such sensitivities "virtues."

Even if we introduce a requirement that practical knowledge must be concerned with requirements pertaining to other people, similar analogies arise in other contexts. For example, an American football kicker is sensitive to the salient facts of what is required to score a field goal, which will help his team to win. And a general contractor is sensitive to the salient facts of what is required to build a structure up to code, and so on, which will help protect the safety of whoever ends up living in the structure. Both of these practical skills *help others* but neither seems to amount to moral virtue. Even though a contractor willfully who fails to build a structure safely might be morally and legally liable for any subsequent injuries, something strikes us as odd about classifying the skill as a virtue.

There is a second, related complaint. McDowell admits that one might potentially need

to rank, order, and weigh a dozen different kinds of reasons (kindness, fairness, appropriateness, prudence, etc.) before one resolved what to do. He seems to switch from talking about moral reasons to talking about *any* practical reason without any mention of the switch. By failing to render a clear distinction between moral and other practical reasons, I believe McDowell falls prey to a habitual way of framing moral discussions that is a subtle mistake.

The habitual way of framing moral discussions we may call the "quandary frame," borrowing the term from a classic article by Edmund Pincoff. Pincoff contrasts "quandary ethics" with another way of framing ethical discussions which he calls "character" ethics. On this frame, 'moral' considerations contrast with prudence and any other kind of practical consideration. 'Moral' considerations most commonly refer to "other-regarding" considerations (opposed to self-regarding ones), altruistic (as opposed to egoistic), considerations of benevolence (as opposed to selfishness), or conscience (as opposed to self-love).[28]

The contrast between moral and all other practical reasons gives rise to a distinctive way of approaching ethics. Pincoff writes of quandary ethics:

> 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.[29]

According to Philippa Foot, the quandary frame is the way most modern philosophers approach ethics. She says:

28. The relation between virtue and happiness or self-regard is an expansive one: For fuller treatments, one might begin with: Alasdair MacIntyre, "Egoism and Altruism," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York, Macmillan, 1967), 462. Michael Slote, "Agent-Based Virtue Ethics," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (1995): 83–101. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism," in *Morality and Self Interest*, ed. Paul Bloomfield (Oxford University Press, 2009), 205–21. Yong Huang, "The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2010): 651–92. Paul Bloomfield, "Eudaimonia and Practical Rationality," in *Virtue and Happiness*, ed. Rachana Kamtekar (Oxford University Press, 2012).

29. Edmund Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," *Mind*, 1971, 552–71 552. MacIntyre offers a criticism along similar lines to Pincoffs in his "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?"

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

Relatedly, Martha Nussbaum says:

> This question [of how 'moral' ends figure among other ends] 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."[31]

Kant and Hume agree on the quandary frame, despite their significant substantive disagreements. They both present morality as a kind of crisis strategy. On any given normal day, agents are free to pursue their own self-interested inclinations – get a good job, save for retirement, eat healthy foods, exercise, make friends, and so on – so long as they commit no wrong. So long as life presents no moral dilemmas, moral reasoning is idle.

The alternative type of ethics is what Pincoff calls "character" ethics (of which I take neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics to be a token). Such ethics is focused on the long-term project of living well by executing worthwhile goals in every day life. Aristotle is the premier example of a character ethicist because he thought of ethics as a branch of the whole practical enterprise:

> …[ethics and politics] is 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.[32]

The Greek way of framing moral questions viewed *all* practical ends as 'moral.' MacIntyre provides the clearest summary of the older use of 'moral':

> 'Moral' is the etymological descendant of 'moralis'. But 'moralis', like its Greek predecessor *ethikos* – Cicero invented 'moralis' to translate the Greek word in the

30. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

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

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

> *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.'[33]

MacIntyre's point is not merely etymological; it is conceptual. When quandary ethicists conceive of 'moral reasons' as a special overriding type of practical reason concerned with duties to others (contrasted with self-regarding prudential reasons), they fall under the illusion that moral reasons may not be practical and that practical reasons may not be moral. By contrast, the character ethicist views life as presenting the variety of possible ends that could clash or harmonize that all need to be accounted for.

It is helpful to observe that, at some point in the history of western moral philosophy, the topic of the "moral" began to separate off from the broader topic of the practical. Foot cites Mill as an early proponent of the distinction:

> J. S. Mill, for instance, expresses this modern point of view quite explicitly, saying in his essay *On Liberty* that 'A person who shows rashness, obstinacy, self-conceit . . . who cannot restrain himself from harmful indulgences' shows faults (Mill calls them 'self-regarding faults') which 'are not properly immoralities' and while they 'may be proofs of any amount of folly . . . are only a subject of moral reprobation when they involve a breach of duty to others, for whose sake the individual is bound to have care for himself.'[34]

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

While I don't intend to suggest that there is something automatically laudable about the older Aristotelian emphasis, my contention is that the modern emphasis on "relations between individuals or between an individual and society" fails to capture much of what is interesting about the "how should one live?" question. The modern distinction obscures the real ethical situation.

To return to McDowell, I can now put my complaint in clearer relief: is he a quandary ethicist or character ethicist? In my view, McDowell's view represents a mixture (indeed, a confusion)

33. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 38.
34. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

of the two. Like the character ethicist, he emphasizes the "how should I live?" question and invokes practical knowledge as an important part of the answer. However, like the quandary ethicist, he represents moral considerations pertaining to the rights, obligations, or duties to others (such as kindness) as a special, perhaps overriding, kind of reason. He does not seem to notice that broadening the virtuous person's perceptual sensitivity to what *any* situation requires renders his account ambiguous. Are moral reasons *one type* of practical reason, or can any practical reason count as a "moral" reason (broadly construed).[35]

3. Practical Reasoning as Pursuing the Human Good

The remedy for this confusion is to return to and defend a more consistent account of practical reasons. Happily, this account will reinforce what we have argued above about the natural normativity in the human life form and all organic life. This section builds on the work of Philippa Foot and on Jennifer Frey's recent discussions of Anscombe and Aquinas.[36]

On the Aristotelian account, as developed by Aquinas, practical reasoning is by definition an end-oriented activity that aims at the perceived good of one's form of life. The primary question is not "why should one respond to moral reasons instead of prudential ones?" but "why do we act at all?" and "how can we act well?" Asking this question, and answering it, is a practically rational activity that defines the human life form. Certainly, as Foot says, some practical reasons have to do with "obligations, duties, and charitable acts" to others; but others pertain to what is required for oneself and even for third-person objects such as the environment, possessions, and perhaps even abstract objects.

Considered thus broadly, the normativity of practical reasoning is clear: some reasons for acting are good while others are bad. Errors of morality, then, belong to a wider class of practical errors. As Foot says: "I want to show that judgments usually considered to be the special subject of

35. Foot, *Virtues and Vices* chapter 13, "Are Moral Reasons Overriding?"; Cf. also John McDowell and I. G. McFetridge, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 52 (1978): 13–42

36. Foot says: "It is my opinion that the *Summa Theologica* is one of the best sources we have for moral philosophy, and moreover that St. Thomas's ethical writings are as useful to the atheist as to the Catholic or other Christian believer." (*Virtues and Vices*, 2.)

moral philosophy should really be seen as belonging to a wider class of evaluations of conduct with which they share a common conceptual structure."[37] On this frame, any reason to ϕ or not to ϕ is a practical reason, and successfully sorting through all such reasons is a virtue, namely practical wisdom. Unsuccessfully doing so is the vice of imprudence or practical folly, which inhibits one's ability to live a human life.

Defending the Aristotelian account requires us to revisit in more detail some of what was argued above in chapter 2. Recall the observation that all organisms act toward ends, with or without reflection. Frey summarizes Aquinas in this way:

> All living things are a self-sustaining system of powers that functions to bring the living thing into being and to sustain its being. The movement of any part of a living thing, at any particular moment, is necessarily explained by reference to the movement of the whole thing towards a single end: the coming to be, maintenance, or reproduction of that very form of life.[38]

As I argued above, all living things exhibit teleological movement. In proper circumstances, they grow into maturity, which is the exemplification of their form of life. This form of life is what Aquinas calls a thing's "nature": wolf hunts in packs by nature, trees extend roots into the ground by nature, reptiles warm themselves in the sun by nature, and so on.

The sunflower has no consciousness with which to incline toward sunlight. 'Things are specified by their power.' When it comes to higher organisms, insects and mammals and so on, organisms have "appetite." They demonstrate the capacity to sense and to move consciously toward or away from certain objects: The antelope pursues healthy grass and flees a lion. The animal can only experience what is good or bad for it as a particular object.

While natural norms are features of all living beings, human beings are distinct in also being aware of such norms. Humans grow, reproduce, and enjoy conscious experiences like other animals and also *know* that they do so. Obviously, plants and animals do not "naturally incline" toward their good by reflecting or choosing it. Frey points out:

37. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.

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

> Aquinas would agree with us that it is a category mistake to say that a sunflower wants to grow towards the light, if by this we mean that the flower somehow registers a positive feeling or has an inner impression towards the light, which "causes" it to move toward the light. The plant does not apprehend or desire anything; thus Aquinas is very careful to say that it does not have a power of appetite. In fact, Aquinas is at pains to note that a plant has no window onto the world at all – it just has conditions in which it characteristically comes into being, maintains, and reproduces itself.[39]

Lower organisms naturally incline toward their own good. Higher organisms perceive objects but do not perceive them *as* falling under universal categories. By contrast, a human being can recognize universals. Human beings are specified by their "power" – their capacity to engage in cognitive and deliberative activities. While animals can not only sense but *perceive*, humans have the capacity of "intellection" – the power of abstracting formal properties from what is perceived. 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. Animals may perceive something *as* dangerous or *as* desirable. Human beings perceive *that* the dangerous thing is a predator or the desirable thing *is food*.[40]

The extra ability to perceive under universal categories brings with it the human capacity for taking up natural inclinations or aversions in a deliberative act. Natural inclinations may be underwritten or overridden. Confronted with a delicious and healthy salad sitting on someone else's plate, I recognize it *as not mine* and hence choose not to reach for it. Confronted with a lion in a zoo, I choose not to flee, for I recognize it *as not dangerous*. Frey summarizes:

> Rational animals, like any animal, have a natural inclination towards their good as a whole, and like lower animals this power is actualized through their apprehension of things in the world. But Aquinas argues that a rational animal relates to the world through the application of universal concepts, and thus it is inclined to pursue or avoid things under an intellectual, universal apprehension of them. Thus, Aquinas says that the will is inclined towards its objects under the formality of the "universal good," rather than the particular good.[41]

39. Ibid., 69–70.

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

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

By the same token, human beings are capable of an extra ability to err. The conclusion that all living things move toward their own natural ends is compatible with the biological judgment that some specimens are defective, just as it is compatible with the ethical judgment that some agents – such as Dostoevsky's Underground Man – are practically irrational in failing to pursue their own natural ends. Human beings are supposed to practically reason well. When they do not, the defect that arises is more than merely animal. Any animals might be afflicted by sickness or injury; only human animals can inflict themselves with new injuries and even new illnesses.

We have been speaking of the human capacity for recognizing and pursuing particular ends as good. As we saw in chapter 4, a full conception of virtue demands that we expand our scope to include the whole of life, the conception of our human good that constitutes the answer to the "how to live?" question. McDowell gets this part right in his discussion of the practical syllogism. Every rational practice is undertaken in pursuit of some particular end *in context* of a total conception of what is good in general. Frey continues:

> Consequently, we can say that rational animals have an understanding of different levels of ends, and at least a vague sense of how they are supposed to hang together as a whole. This conception of how it all hangs together is what Aquinas calls the ultimate end – a rational animal's general, conceptual understanding of how to live or go on. Aquinas thinks that any sane, mature adult will necessarily have cobbled together some such conception. Aquinas calls this conception "the universal good", and he argues that it is the will's proper object. Everything that is willed is willed under this rational aspect of good, as to be pursued because *in accord with my general conception of the good.* In fact, Aquinas thinks there could be no reasons unless a rational animal has a general conception of its own good, and thus a general sense of how to live.[42]

Frey's argument here is that the question of 'how to live' is a question about my good as a human being; answering that question requires the human activity of practically reasoning. And since every "sane, mature adult" engages in this activity, every sane mature adult has a general notion about the answer. The crucial insight is that without such a general notion, we *would not engage in rational action at all.* Frey continues:

> No human action is intelligible without attributing to the agent herself some conception of this end, no matter how inarticulate, unsystematic, or unreflective it might be.

42. Ibid., 78–79, italics in original.

> Aquinas takes it for granted that in coming to be a human being – i.e., being raised in a community of other human beings, coming into the possession of concepts, a language, and coming to have a world – one comes into some such conception, and thus comes to act voluntarily.[43]

Human beings act. And all intelligible actions are undertaken in pursuit of some end. Therefore, all intelligible actions of humans are undertaken in pursuit of some end. This conclusion can accommodate the commonsense observation that not *every* move we make counts as an intelligible action. Aquinas makes a helpful distinction between the "actions of a human" and "human actions." An *action of a human* can be any motion of a human body: mumbling while asleep, scratching an itch, or idly tapping a foot. A *human action* is by definition an action in pursuit of a goal which is perceived as a good. A human action is an action such as running a race, starting a conversation, or tapping out a message in Morse Code. These actions are both intelligible and intentional in a way other animal actions are not. With this distinction in mind, we can state an important clarification. It is not the case that a human being without *any* practical reasons would perform immoral deeds; a human being without *any* practical reason would not do anything at all. He might move about, driven by instinct or fear or desire, but such a person would not engage in any human actions. Like Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener (from the short story of that title), the person who does not engage in practical reasoning or identify any practical reasons would simply waste away and die.[44]

Aquinas' distinction between human actions and the actions of a human can also go to explain some compulsive or addictive behaviors. Unfortunate people in the overwhelming grip of, say, a heroine addiction, might be injecting themselves with the drug against their own evaluations of what should be done. However, in extreme cases of addiction, the action hardly falls under the description of a human action. Heroine is so highly addictive that one or two uses can create a dependency that lasts a lifetime. The addict's initial decision to use the drug can still fall under the description of a human action, perhaps aimed at some perceived good such as pleasure or joining in a social group. But just as one is free to choose to slide into a muddy hole in the ground but not necessarily free to climb back out, one is free to use a habit-forming drug but not necessarily free to stop feeling the overwhelming compulsion, even though one might wish never to use again.

43. Ibid., 87.
44. Herman Melville, *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (Best Classic Books, 1966).

If all action aims at some good, then where does the process begin? How can one pursue ends *before* actualizing the natural ability to practically reason? We can again compare practical reasoning with demonstrative or theoretical reasoning. Aquinas puts the comparison this way:

> …as "being" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, so "good" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. Consequently the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of good, viz. that "good is that which all things seek after." Hence this is the first precept of practical reason, that "good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.[45]

Aquinas points out that the first thing human beings apprehend as theoretical reasoners is simply "existence" or "being" – infants perceive that some things are there and others not there. They eventually come to perceive objects *as* objects, as individual objects, and to name and categorize them with language acquired in a social setting. Likewise, the first thing human beings apprehend as practical reasoners is simply the "good" or "desirable." The use of 'good' here, it bears repeating, is not a special moral sense of good, but simply means 'desirable' or 'to be pursued.' An entity is 'good' when it is considered as an object of inclination. Hence, infants perceive that some things are to be pursued and others avoided. To be *theoretically* rational is to judge a proposition p as true or false, as best one can, according to the rational assessment of the reasons for affirming or denying p. Similarly, to be *practically* rational is to judge a practical reason ϕ to be pursued or avoided, in accord with the rational assessment of the reasons for pursuing or avoiding ϕ. Without a general principle in either case, practical reasoning and rational practice are unintelligible.

Given this basic and abstract formulation of the structure of practical reasoning, we can further specify good ends. Just as the basic structure of reasoning begins with the apprehension of being in general and grows to include apprehension of particular beings, concepts, and categories, practical reason begins with the apprehension of good in general and then determines particular goods.

> Practical reason is the movement of thought towards, rather than away from, material particulars…. practical reasoning is a movement from general knowledge of

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

> what is good and how to live, towards the production of the kind of life that is essentially characterized by such knowledge. When it is done well, what is understood is the same as what is produced: human form or human life.[46]

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

> For practical reason, the starting points are the most primitive human goods that the will is naturally inclined to seek: life, knowledge, family, friendship, play, political community, and so on. These are the ends that all human beings want for their own sake, as intrinsically valuable to them. And they want these things in a rational way – viz., because they have a conceptual apprehension that they are constitutive of their general good.[47]

Having said this, we should make two clarifications. First, I think Frey is asserting a generic truth when she says "these are the ends that all human beings want"; the truth admits of exceptions. Whatever the causes of psychopathy, some people seem insensitive to the obvious draw of natural ends. Such people don't want knowledge, don't care to have friends, don't like to play, detach from their families, and in some cases show careless disregard for life – both their own and that of others. The important point is not that "primitive human goods" are pursued by all without exception – though indeed they are pursued by the vast statistical majority. The important point is that without some notion of primitive human goods, we could not identify disorders like psychopathy. Social behavior is not merely statistically normal but normative.

Secondly, some readers might object that this account equates "pursuing the good" with "pursuing the human good," including such "primitive goods" as life, knowledge, friendship, and so on. Might there be goods that are *good simpliciter* that one ought to pursue, *regardless* of their bearing any internal relation to the human life form? Iris Murdoch argues along these lines that the starting point of ethical training must be aesthetic training.[48] One must cultivate the ability to see intrinsic value by first learning to see intrinsic beauty in art and nature, learning to appreciate it dispassionately. Just as the dispassionate pursuit of knowledge aims at knowledge of external realities (physical objects, animals, chemicals) and not just at knowledge of knowers, might not the pursuit of the good aim at external goods?

46. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 2.
47. Ibid., 88.
48. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts*, 90.

McDowell takes Murdoch's thesis in a different direction. He argues that "the remoteness of the Form of the Good is a metaphorical version of the thesis that value is not in the world… The point of the metaphor is the colossal difficulty of attaining a capacity to cope clear-sightedly with the ethical reality which is part of our world."[49] For McDowell, this recognition of the difficulty of ethical training can benefit one "negatively, by inducing humility, and positively, by an inspiring effect akin to that of a religious conversion." For McDowell, then, ethical (and aesthetic) training is not progress toward the *discovery* of objective value but toward the unfolding of one's subjective or intersubjective values.

I am content to remain neutral with respect to these two options. *Minimally*, practical reasoning is the ability to judge the good of the human life form. This minimal ability is compatible with the paradoxical thought that what is good for humans is not *merely* the human good. What is good for humans might be the good simpliciter. It is needful, before examining this further issue, to defend the notion of basic, human goods. That is my aim here. Jennifer Frey summarizes:

> …all practical reasoning is ultimately reasoning for the sake of attaining or maintaining these ends [i.e, basic human goods]. Consequently, all practical reasoning is ultimately for the sake of living the sort of life that pertains to man. Indeed for Aquinas, there could be no practical teleology without natural teleology, since there would be nothing to reason towards if the will were not by nature inclined towards the exemplification of human form.[50]

To sum up the account thus far, all organisms incline toward the good of their life form, including those basic goods that enable the full actualization thereof. Various organisms express this inclination in various ways. For lower organisms, consciousness plays no part in this process; for higher organisms, consciousness does play a part. For humans, the essential difference is a sensitivity to the space of reasons, both evidential and practical. 'Practical reasoning' is the name for the whole complex process of perceiving certain salient facts as reasons to pursue or avoid some course of action, and comparing and ranking competing reasons in light of an overall conception of a good human life and acting accordingly. None of this is intended to deny that evaluative practical reasoning arises in a normal process of socialization. Rather, that our conception of how to live would arise that way is

49. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 347.
50. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 66.

what we would predict for rational primates who speak and live in society.

4. Objections

I am now in a position to state and respond to three objections.

1. Procedural Reasoning: One challenge is the familiar notion that practical reasoning is a value-neutral procedure by which we line up means to our ends.[51] On this view, moral reasoning is about the morally good and bad while practical reasoning is about something else entirely, such as the prudent or imprudent, the advisable or ill-advised. So how could an *intellectual* exercise be essential to *moral* virtue?

2. Reason, Practice, and Motivation: Another challenge comes from non-cognitivism (especially expressivism).[52] The worry is that practical reasons by themselves can't motivate us to act (without complementary psychological attitudes such as desires), while motivations to act cannot be rationally evaluated as true or false. Is practical reasoning really *rational*? And if so, is it really *practical*? It seems that it must be either one or the other.

3. Overriding Reasons: A third challenge is a familiar distinction between "moral reasons" on the one hand and "prudential reasons" on the other, where moral reasons are overriding reasons. On this distinction, one can be *foolish* by failing to act on some considerations, but one is immoral by failing to act on relevant overriding moral reasons. If practical reasoning is a process of identifying or inventing what is advisable or ill-advised (but not ultimately binding), then how does this process relate to an appropriate sensitivity to what is morally permissible or impermissible (which is ultimately binding)?

4.1 On Procedural Reasoning

According to the **Procedural Reasoning** objection, reasoning is not about ends but only about means. Practical reasoning is a procedural or instrumental process. The critic alleges that one may

51. For a discussion of this distinction, see: Brad Hooker and Bart Streumer, "Procedural and Substantive Practical Rationality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Rationality* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 57–74.

52. Non-cognitivism is motivated by metaphysical naturalism, which objects to normative realism about practical reasons. I shall address that objection in chapter 6.

only criticize Smith as "irrational" when Smith fails to use the necessary means to her own ends, but one may not criticize Smith's *ends themselves* as irrational. For example, if we define practical reasoning as the process by which one adjudicates the means to *one's own health*, then *any* unhealthy action (e.g., eating delicious but less-than-healthy food) would be ipso facto irrational. Isn't it problematic to build into the definition of rationality any specific, ready-made ends?

The first response to this challenge is that, even on the procedural view, practical reasoning *must necessarily have a certain intelligible structure*. The advocate of the procedural view, no less than the advocate of the substantive view, needs a sufficiently general starting point for procedural reasoning to even get off the ground. Frey's candidate for that starting point is the maximally general conception that "good is to be done and evil avoided" or that "one must pursue one's own good." Her argument concluded that when practical reasoners act at all, they act *by definition* in pursuit of a particular object falling under a universal category. In order to construct *any* practical syllogisms as we do, one needs a sufficiently broad "major premise."

A second response to Frey's view is that it does not build in very *specific* ends. The built-in end is quite general: it is some conception of how to live in the way (or set of ways) that is good for practical, rational primates like us. This substantive good or set of goods is general enough to accommodate a variety of controversial details about what one ought to do or not do. In other words, the substantive view of practical reasoning allows for the possibility that, in a disagreement, both parties are basically rational, while one party may be more accurately identifying what is to be pursued or avoided.

Foot offers two additional considerations that support this Aristotelian account. When she wrote her famous "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," she argued that moral reasons are not overriding, categorical imperatives contrasted with every other kind of reason. She explains that, at the time, she had not discovered a way of showing "the rationality of acting, even against desire and self-interest, on the demand of morality."[53] What changed her mind was an argument from Warren Quinn to the effect that if practical reasoning is to be important at all it must be *by definition* the pursuit of some good. Quinn says:

53. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 63.

> Practical thought, like any other thought, requires a subject matter. And for human beings the subject matter that distinguishes thought as practical is, in the first instance, human ends and action insofar as they are good or bad in themselves… Practical thought deploys a master set of non-instrumental evaluative notions: that of a good or bad human act, a good or bad human life, a good or bad human agent, and a good or bad human action. Practical reason is, on this view, the faculty that applies these fundamental evaluative concepts.[54]

What Foot found so compelling is the change to "seeing goodness as setting a necessary condition of practical rationality and therefore as at least a part-determinant of [practical rationality] itself." To one who objects, she points out that:

> 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?[55]

Quinn, Foot, and Frey are arguing that goodness is a "necessary condition of practical rationality." Rational action is action in pursuit of some end, where "some end" is not merely an end (such as food, friendship, or knowledge) that is intrinsically desirable for practical rational primates like us. Identifying and pursuing such ends *as desirable or undesirable* is already a substantive evaluative judgment. Therefore, any rational action necessarily includes a substantive evaluative judgment.

If we accept this point, and I do not see how to avoid it, then we are already committed to a minimally substantive view of practical reason, rather than a merely procedural one. The alternative to aiming at the apparent good is not aiming at some value-neutral "end" or goal; the alternative to aiming at the apparent good is *not acting at all*.

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

55. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 63.

4.2 On Motivation

While I summarized McDowell's reply to the Humean critic above, I would like to return to the subject of motivation here. It will be useful to briefly situate my neo-Aristotelian account within the debate between motivational internalists and externalists, even if I cannot adequately engage the vast body of literature here.

In brief, the motivational internalist argues that any practical reasons "out there" must necessarily connect up with my motivational structure if they are to move me to action.[56] The motivational externalist, by contrast, argues it is possible for there to be practical reasons "out there" such that I *ought* to be motivated by them, even if I am currently not. Indeed, the existence of binding practical reasons that I am ignoring or failing to act on is the prime explanation of immorality.

The danger of internalism is that it seems to allow that the amoralist who is *not motivated* to be moral is off the hook. By contrast, the externalist argues that the immoralist has *reasons* to ϕ even if she has no (current) *motivation* to ϕ.

On my view, motivational internalism gets this much right: one is motivated to pursue something that falls under a category that, within the existing motivational structure, one *already judges* to be desirable. However, the internalist too narrowly defines a "motivational structure." If by "motivational structure" we mean my present set of broad psychological inclinations, then it is possible that we may not have the right motivational structure that would lead to moral action. But if by that we simply mean *my overall practical disposition toward the worthwhile, desirable, and good*, then it is quite uncontroversial to assert that one only goes in for ϕ-ing when ϕ-ing seems to be worthwhile, because to be a practical agent just means to be oriented to pursue the good and avoid the bad. 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 (whether I disapprove of it, or avoid it, or both).

What motivational externalism gets right is that there might be reasons to ϕ that I am not

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

aware of and (hence) am not motivated by. For example, perhaps it is true that one ought to save for retirement, but I may fail to do so because I am unaware of that reason or am ignoring it in my attention to other reasons.

Seen in this light, it is obvious that on my neo-Aristotelian account practical reasons can and do motivate us. We can put the matter more strongly: according to Frey's argument above, practical reasons are the *primary* meaning of the term 'motive.' Motivation is (I argue) a fundamentally rational state. It is true that sub-rational animals, plants, and insects are moved about by impulses such as hungers, thirsts, loves, fears, etc. And it is true that human animals are likewise moved about by such impulses. But for rational animals, there is an additional source of motion, namely practical reasons.

Hence, my contention is that our default view of practical reasoning creatures ought to be that practical reason is intrinsically capable of motivating. The whole process of discerning whether or not to ϕ is theoretical in much the same way that the process of discerning whether to believe that p, but it is also (by definition) practical. Practical reasoning is not something one does *before* resolving what to do, as one picks up an item in a store *before* purchasing it. Practical reasoning is the name we give to the process of *resolving what to do*, as checking out from the store is the process of purchasing. Just as the appraisal of overwhelming evidence for p is not utterly distinct from the affirmation that p, the deliberative conclusion that one ought to ϕ is not utterly distinct from the decision to ϕ. To borrow Gibbard's unforgettable phrase, practical reasoning is "thinking how to live."[57]

At the same time, there are goods we may not be pursuing (but ought to be) and evils we may not be avoiding (but ought to be). We acquire new motivations only when we successfully make new evaluative judgments about what is to be pursued and avoided. Our fundamental motivation is to pursue the good and avoid evil. We acquire *new* motivations when we come to identify and affirm new practical reasons. These practical reasons only motivate because they link up with the initial, existing motivation.

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

4.3 On Overriding Reasons

A final challenge that needs a response is this: moral reasons are sometimes treated as "overriding" or "verdictive" reasons that settle the question of what to do. Given the choice between, say, making a bit of easy money by fraud or making the same amount through honest but hard work, the prohibition against fraud is supposed to settle the matter. On my account, do prudential practical reasons weigh just as heavily as moral ones?

My answer is that the practical consideration that one ought never commit fraud is, in such a case, certainly overriding. However, sometimes prudential considerations are overriding, too. To take a different example, suppose Smith comes into a bit of money from an inheritance, and thus has a choice between spending it (innocently) on world travels or allocating it to a solid retirement plan. Even if Smith clearly needs more money in his retirement, the quandary ethicist would have no *moral* recommendation, because neither choice is obviously immoral in the sense that it violates one's duties to others. The character ethicist would: the practically wise person takes the longer-term benefit of saving over the short-term benefit of traveling to be overriding.

A normal human life presents practical reasoners with many situations in which reasons pertaining to moral virtue (narrowly defined) play little or no part. One must be sensitive not only to such reasons but to the broad range of practical reasons. All practical reasons must be ranked and weighed before a final, verdictive reason emerges. Any *reason to* ϕ is a practical reason that can feature in an overall account of *what to do*. What Anscombe calls "the verdictive ought" is simply what Foot calls the thing to do "all things considered."[58] It often happens that one's individual practical reasons conflict. McDowell is incorrect to persist in labeling the broader process of adjudicating such conflicts "virtue." He ought to call it practical wisdom. The practically wise person is the one who coordinates all other virtues and executes them to good ends.

I should respond here to one final objection a reader might have. Has my neo-Aristotelian view of practical reason defined away the possibility of immorality? If everyone who acts is "aiming at the good," doesn't this exculpate an agent's apparently immoral motives or ends? For example, someone might say, 'It's ridiculous to think that I always pursue the good because I sometimes do

58. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 57.

wrong.' This objection misses the point. Of course practical reasoners sometimes do the wrong thing. The proper response is that we perceive the bad *as overall worthwhile.* If the immoral person acts wrongly, then he has misjudged the good. On the neo-Aristotelian view, immoral acts are rational mistakes.

But it remains true that if the immoral person *acts at all* then, according to the argument, he must by definition be pursuing some apparent good. To be practically rational necessarily means to pursue something *as good*, as desirable. Just as an epistemic agent might hold a false belief p without affirming the false *as false*, a practical agent might pursue a bad thing without pursuing it *as bad*. Rather, the immoral person fails in their practical reasoning to correctly rank and order specific goods. The imprudent person, for example, judges that it would be better to eat, drink, and be merry today rather than plan to avoid future ills. The cruel person judges that it would be better to cause suffering than to be kind.

Someone might say, "But sometimes I perceive the bad *as bad* and pursue it anyway." My view is that we are sometimes able to include an end we know to be bad into an overall set of practical reasons, which we still judge is the thing to do, all things considered. One might judge, for example, that smoking cigarettes is bad and still start if one judges (with some conflict) that the potential pleasures overrule. (Having become addicted to nicotine, the smoker's judgment that the potential pleasures *are not worth it* may not necessarily mean the smoker quits.)

I do not wish to suggest that identifying the thing to do is a smooth and easy project. It is no more or less difficult than the project of identifying what to believe is true.

The defendant of the procedural view is liable to point out that reasoning about ends is even messier than such theoretical reasoning. Indeed it is. But we must do it. People regularly argue, debate, and reason about ultimate ends. Suppose Smith says to Jones, "I'm concerned about you. You haven't returned my calls. You lost your job, and you are not eating. What's wrong?" It would be no consolation for Jones to respond, "Nothing's *wrong*. I'm destitute, alone, and unhealthy, but that is what I am *aiming* for." Smith would rightly judge that something had gone wrong for Jones to adopt such unhealthy and ridiculous aims.

Practical wisdom is the paramount virtue of practical rational animals. The upshot is that

the foolish person – the habitually, incorrigibly foolish person responsible for his own folly – is, ipso facto, a bad practical rational primate. He is failing to do *the thing to do*.

What is good in this sense for human beings is specific to our species. The primary good of a kind for us is the human life form. The derivative goods for us are any and all things necessarily related to the human life form. In virtue of what we are, it is good for us to achieve humanity, to become fully human. We aim to become what we are. That is, we aim to become in actuality what we already are in potentiality. Some of these goods are basic human goods toward which we are naturally inclined: food, shelter, companionship, knowledge, etc. They are starting points without which human beings would not be motivated to do anything at all.

I should clarify that a thing's status as a basic good is revisable. The normal process of practical reasoning about what to do can and sometimes does overrule the basic inclination toward a basic good in pursuit of some alternative good. The point is that this overruling judgment is not something over-and-above the practical pursuit toward the good but another expression of the same pursuit. For example, some people overrule their inclination toward the basic good of human companionship by becoming solitary monastics but they only do so in pursuit of *other* goods judged to be *better*.

Since practical reasoning is the process whereby we determine the "sort of life that pertains" to creatures like us, all particular practical reasonings about what to do in a given situation come to light as parts of this whole. This fits with the account of virtue defended above. There we saw that excellence in practical reasoning and rational practice aims at doing well with one's whole life. In other words, every short-term choice fits into a context of long-term projects such as what career to pursue, whether or not to marry, what friendships to maintain, and so on. Furthermore, every long-term project fits into a broader context of one's answer to the maximally general question "how should one live?"

5. Conclusion

This chapter has defended in detail a neo-Aristotelian conception of practical reasoning. It is an intrinsically normative and evaluative process that defines the life form of practical, rational primates. On my account, the structure of practical reasoning is akin to theoretical reasoning. Whereas the-

oretical reasoning is by definition a normative process in which the true is to be believed and the false to be disbelieved, practical reasoning is by definition a normative process in which good is to be pursued while evil is to be avoided. These "first principles" are known by all functioning human adults. And while particular rational inquiries aim at identifying good reasons to believe or disbelieve a claim, particular practical inquires are aimed at identifying basic goods intrinsic to human life. I argued that the procedural view of practical reasoning is itself committed to certain substantive normative judgments, including the judgment that *one ought to do whatever will bring about one's chosen ends*. More to the point, I argued that the substantive view of practical reasoning is more plausible: we reason about apparent goods and bads and act accordingly. Nevertheless, my account leaves room for the commonsense insight that success in practical reasoning (like theoretical reasoning) is by no means guaranteed.

Success in identifying how to live and what to do requires a complex process of adjudicating between all the available goods known to one, sorting them, ranking them with care and wisdom, and forming them into a complete life plan. The virtuous person knows what to do. Hence, contra McDowell, practical wisdom is a kind of *practical knowledge* (a "disposition to act well") while other virtues (as discussed in chapter 4) can include rational practices and habits formed over time that conduce to the realization of one's life form. When practical reasoning is well-functioning, it constitutes part of the natural excellence of creatures like us. The vicious person is hindered by practical error — or perhaps ignorance — of what to do. Success or failure along these lines has a major influence on one's other character traits. So practical wisdom is an essential part of living a fully human life.

How should one live? A virtuous person's answer to this question is not just a proposition but a plan. More so, the virtuous person does not simply *have a good plan* but *enacts* a good life plan. The answer is not just a philosophy but a life.

Chapter 6

Natural Reasoning

> Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even just rest upon the earth. They *are* the earth in one of its manifest operations.
>
> —John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 3-4.

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

The neo-Aristotelian account I have been developed aims to demonstrate how human natural norms are instances of a broader category of natural norms. These human norms are, for us, practical reasons. Human norms are objective in that they provide normative guidance on how to live, regardless of one's awareness of or endorsement of them. Such norms become *for the practical reasoner* when she correctly identifies them as norms *for her*. Unless tragedy, injury, defect, and illness interrupt the process, a young human being naturally matures into the sort of practical rational primate that has at least *one* practical reason: to do good and avoid evil. And every practical reasoner naturally strives to acquire new practical reasons by asking the "how to live?" question, thus adding

to a growing stock of practical reasons.

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

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

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

> What is so helpful for ethics from this kind of biological naturalism is that we find that the normativity of our ethical discourse is not something which emerges mysteriously with humans and can only be projected back, in an anthropomorphic way, onto trees and their roots. Rather, we find normativity in the realm of living things, plants and animals, already. It is part of the great merit of the work of Philippa Foot… to have stressed this point. Like many important philosophical points, it is obvious once pointed out…[2]

1. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 203.
2. Annas, "Virtue Ethics," 13.

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

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

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

Section 3 brings multiple charges of inconsistency against McDowell's account of nature. First, he seems to both deny and affirm that some relational properties (such as *meriting*) are part of primary nature. Secondly, drawing from Hans Fink to distinguish different concepts of nature and scientific reasoning, I argue that McDowell's conception affirms two conflicting concepts. On either of two plausible conceptions of nature and the natural, my account demonstrates that practical reasoning is natural reasoning. Thirdly, McDowell's account unwittingly falls into the very sort

3. Hacker-Wright, "What Is Natural About Foot's Ethical Naturalism?" 308.

of undesirable nature/human dualism he emphatically wishes to avoid. Fourthly, McDowell's intersubjective notions of both scientific and ethical reasoning lead to an incorrigible relativism. For each inconsistency, I show how my accounts of virtue and practical reason (developed in chapters 4 and 5) are more adequate to the task of meeting Toner's fourth requirement. I suggest "recursive naturalism" as an appropriate name for my view, since human beings are natural organisms able to practically reason about nature, about themselves, and about practical reasoning itself.

1. Four Requirements

A recent article by Chris Toner argues that neo-Aristotelians (such as Foot and Michael Thompson) have not yet adequately responded to McDowell's objections and satisfied four requirements "naturalism must deliver if it is to support a revived Aristotelian virtue ethics…"[4] Fortunately, our account thus far has satisfied three of the four.

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

> Although natural inclinations depend upon conceptual apprehension, we should not be tempted to think that they are objects of contemplation. These goods, as first principles of practical reason, are apprehended as ends – as objects of pursuit rather than as objects of contemplative knowledge.[5]

4. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 222.
5. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 88.

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

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

> [Irrelevance] is a more sophisticated presentation of the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy.' But rather than crudely rejecting any move from 'is' to 'ought', it merely blocks the inference at one crucial juncture—the inference from the 'is' of the species, to the 'ought' that governs the rational will.[6]

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

Toner's second requirement is this: *natural norms must be intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearer of the nature.* Natural human norms must not be merely given; they must somehow justify themselves. Reflection must reveal that the norms are *good* practical reasons to all rational agents.

6. Ibid., 14.
7. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."

The norms need not, Toner admits, *automatically* persuade a Callicles to repent of his wickedness. However, they must be *able to* become justifiable motivations under normal circumstances. He says:

> …I say "intrinsically able to motivate or justify" rather than "intrinsically motivating or justifying": the natural norm is such that it can motivate or convince persons, provided they are not in too dysfunctional a state. In the same way a rose is such as to be intrinsically able to convince us of its being red. Its failure actually to do so in my case because I am color-blind or jaundiced does not impugn this intrinsic ability. Natural norms can motivate and convince because they are neither "mere facts" about the way a given species does go on nor "brute desires" a given species happens to have as a result of its evolutionary history.[8]

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

This requirement affords the opportunity to respond to what Elijah Millgram calls the "Pollyanna problem," according to which any honest, empirical assessment of human natural norms would include vicious norms as well as virtuous ones because justice and injustice are both statistically "normal."[9] Anscombe anticipates this worry when she says:

> The search for "norms" might lead someone to look for laws of nature, as if the universe were a legislator; but in the present day this is not likely to lead to good results: it might lead one to eat the weaker according to the laws of nature, but would hardly lead anyone nowadays to notions of justice.[10]

Millgram et al., might object that I was winking at the dark side of human nature when I built my inductive case for the generic that the human beings are practical rational primates. After all, empirical sociology can establish the truth of such generics as: politicians lie, sociopaths murder, businesses cheat, criminals steal, countries wage unjust war, parents abuse their children, and so on.

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

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

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

Likewise, empirical biology shows that some acorns become fully grown, mature oaks, but other acorns become stultified, sickly specimens. (Most acorns never become anything other than acorns before they disintegrate into dust in the soil.) Some animals protect their young while other animals abandon or even consume their young. Are we supposed to allow, then, that "Human beings abandon their young" is a generic truth, indicative of the human life form? Are we obligated to fulfill all such norms? Just some? Which ones?

I think this problem, while important, is ultimately specious. In order to even pose the objection, Millgram et al. have to discriminate between good and bad norms. Millgram cites such traits such as dishonesty, infidelity, and cruelty that are statistically prevalent but obviously immoral. The neo-Aristotelian can agree with his evaluation. Furthermore, good norms are not mere statistical generalizations. When we examine the behaviors of organisms, we begin with making generalizations. Even constructing scientific accounts of organisms, we do not stop there, but sift through them. Some remain mere generalizations about how some creatures happen to behave, while others are classified as essential or natural to how that creature behaves. The latter are natural norms. I have already argued that a good example of such natural norms is that humans are practical rational primates who mature into practically wise and virtuous agents. But I do not mean that every such example is easy. How should criminals be punished? What kinds of sexual practices are acceptable? How should societies relate to one another? Aristotle points out that raiding neighboring tribes is a near-universal form of wealth-acquisition and concludes that it is natural – i.e., morally acceptable. I would object that only mutual respect and arms-length trading (which are also statistically common) are morally acceptable. Natural human norms are not necessarily easy to identify. The point is that disputable cases are disputes over the very question of which behaviors are essential and which unnatural.

Furthermore, we do not need to concede a fundamental discontinuity between the kind of discrimination between good and bad norms essential to ethical reasoning and the kind of discrimination between normal and pathological that is essential to biological and other scientific reasoning. Rather, the process of sifting between various generalizations is one and the same, whether in scientific or ethical accounts. Moral and rational defects can be overwhelmingly common. Regardless of how statistically common the failure to conform to such norms, the discernment between virtu-

ous and vicious is akin to the discernment between healthy specimens and unhealthy ones, normal animals and pathological ones. Indeed, part of having a properly-formed mind is that one can distinguish between natural norms and mere generalizations.

For example, the *National Geographic* narrates how a sloth bear in Washington D.C. gave birth in captivity to three cubs. The first one was immediately killed and eaten by the mother, but the second and third cubs were nurtured and cared for. The zookeepers were appalled. When, after a week of caring for the remaining cubs, the mother killed and ate another, they intervened to save the third.[11] This event posed the question: is something wrong with the mother bear? First, the zookeepers observed the facts: the mother ate one cub and nurtured (temporarily) the other two. Then they made two quite different generalizations: (1) mother bears care for their young, and (2) mother bears kill and eat their young. The contradiction demands sifting. The zookeepers then discerned which is the natural norm. University of Southern California primatologist Craig Stanford points out that the consensus among biologists is to affirm the generic truth: a mother cares for her young. As a normative generic, we can say without a change in meaning that a mother bear is *supposed* to care for her young, and hence that infanticide is pathological. New data can confirm or disconfirm this evaluative judgment. For instance, the third cub of the sloth bear whom the zookeepers intervened to save turned out to suffer an elevated white blood cell count. It is possible that the other cubs were sick as well. The zookeepers speculated that the mother somehow knew this and so killed the ailing cubs. If this were true, it would give rise to a new normative generic: a mother cares for her healthy young. If it turned out that the two other cubs were *not* in fact ailing, the mother's behavior would be classified as pathological.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13. Christine Ann Lawson, *Understanding the Borderline Mother* (Jason Aronson, Incorporated, 2000), 122.
14. Ibid., 122.
15. Ibid., 123.

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

Toner's third requirement is this: *natural norms must be anchored in and express universal human nature.* In chapter 3 I defended a definition of "universal human nature," that we are practical rational primates. And I argued that the natural norm that one ought to become a fully mature practical rational primate (as represented by virtuous and wise exemplars) is successfully "anchored in" that nature. More specifically, all the virtues of rational practice and practical reasoning are examples of such norms. For, as Toner says:

> … the possession and exercise of the virtues is essential to human flourishing as dependent rational animals. Thus natural norms or the requirements of the virtues, in articulating what we need (to have, to be, to do) to flourish, are anchored in and express universal human nature.[17]

There are many examples of natural norms that philosophers plausibly take to be intrinsically justifying to human beings. I mentioned in chapter 4 a few examples from Russ Shafer-Landau, such as that "it is wrong to take pleasure in another's pain, to taunt and threaten the vulnerable, to prosecute and punish those known to be innocent, and to sell another's secrets solely for personal gain."[18] Richard Boyd follows Hilary Putnam in calling such norms "quasi-analytic":

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

16. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 242.
17. Ibid., 242.
18. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, chap. 11.

> rections are all but impossible to anticipate prior to the innovations or crises which precipitate them. The principle that torturing children is wicked and the fundamental laws of quantum mechanics are both candidates for quasi-analyticity.[19]

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

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

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

19. Boyd, "Finite Beings, Finite Goods," 520.

2. First and Second Nature

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

> I doubt whether we can understand a positive naturalism in the right way without first rectifying a constriction that the concept of nature is liable to undergo in our thinking. Without such preliminaries, what we make of ethical naturalism will not be the radical and satisfying alternative to Mrs Foot's targets that naturalism can be. Mrs Foot's writings do not pay much attention to the concept of nature in its own right, and this leaves a risk that her naturalism may seem to belong to this less satisfying variety.[20]

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

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

20. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 167.
21. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."
22. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, preface.
23. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations.* Section 124.

This feature of his thought is liable to puzzle and even frustrate some philosophers.[24] A bit of context can help make his project comprehensible in both its ethical and metaphysical expressions. For example, consider his philosophy of mind. In *Mind and World* he attempts to dissolve the "vacillation" between naive empirical realism (compare with: Footian organic naturalism) and "Rampant Platonism" (compare with: non-naturalism) by arguing that even primary qualities are not given to us in experience without the involvement of spontaneous conceptual capacities. He wants to accept the modern scientific picture of nature as "bald nature," a mechanical "realm of law," disenchanted from values, norms, ends, and reasons. But he does not want to accept that human rationality is likewise mechanical. Instead, he argues that humanity exists in a space of reasons where we recognize reasons for belief and reasons for action.

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

24. For examples of both puzzlement and genuine frustration, see Cynthia Macdonald and Graham Macdonald, *McDowell and His Critics* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

25. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996), 77.

26. *Bildung* (German): formation, education; from *bild*: form, image.

27. Ibid., 84.

have been deeply habituated.

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

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

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

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

McDowell's alternative presents first nature as consisting of both Lockean primary qualities, which are response-independent, and Lockean secondary qualities, which are response-dependent dispositional properties. Colors and values are natural in the sense that they are dispositional properties. Color-properties must be defined partly by their "objective" or response-independent aspects and partly phenomenologically. It makes no sense to speak of what *redness is* apart from perceptions of red *in perceivers*. Similarly, he argues, it makes no sense to speak of "dangerousness" apart from a subject who is potentially vulnerable or "rightness" apart from a subject who potentially judges the value of a thing. Even so the property of "being such as to look red" may or may not *have ever been perceived as red* by any observer (if, for example, the appropriate conditions have never obtained). So a Lockean secondary quality may be response-independent in some sense, but it is not *redness as such*. It is the dispositional property that is disposed to present us with an appearance of a particular phenomenal character. In the same way, goodness, badness, and other values are grounded in "second nature."[33] The space of reasons in which our rational capacities operate makes us sensible to those dispositional properties of primary nature which become, for us, values such as goodness and badness. And, as we saw in chapter 5, he thinks that the normativity of theoretical and practical reasoning is merely grounded in our shared form of life.

3. Inconsistencies

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

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

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

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

3.1 Restricted or Unrestricted?

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

In *Mind and World*, he expresses his view by saying that human beings "partially re-enchant" nature. Perhaps this is why some have objected to McDowell's account of the relation between nature and reason as being insufficiently naturalistic. For example, James Lenman says: "McDowell is certainly pervasively inspired by Aristotle and he describes himself as a naturalist. See especially his 1995. But I suspect many philosophers would find his use of the term 'naturalist' here somewhat

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

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

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

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

Some readers may object to the level of detail at which I attempt to capture a definition of 'nature.' They might insist we must simply stipulate our definition of 'nature' and move on. I rather think it is a scandal that so many writers pass over such weighty matters with pithy commonplaces rather than rigorous definitions. Although Shafer-Landau's discussion of nature and naturalism is exceptionally thorough, he is still forced to settle on a "disciplinary" definition of the natural:

> Naturalism… claims that all real properties are those that would figure ineliminably in perfected versions of the natural and social sciences. Since we don't have any of those versions in hand, we can't be absolutely sure about our naturalistic inventory.[38]

The indeterminacy of such a disciplinary definition of the natural is unsatisfactory for someone defending the 'naturalism' of a theory against the accusation of 'non-naturalism.' When it comes to

36. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism," sec. 4.1, footnote 18.
37. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 58–59.
38. Ibid., 59.

such important and highly ambiguous concepts as nature and science, much more is needed. Hans Fink is right to say that "this is a terminological issue, but it is not easy to resolve simply by choosing one's definition of 'nature' and then sticking to it."[39] Fink continues:

> No account of naturalism should forget the fact that 'nature' is, as Raymond Williams puts it, 'perhaps the most complex word in the language' (Williams 1981: 184), or as Hume puts it, a word 'than which there is none more ambiguous and equivocal' (THN: III.I.II.)…Indeed, it is a deep root of ambiguity that we can talk about the nature of art, law, language, culture, morality, normativity, history, civilization, spirit, mind, God, or nothingness even if we otherwise regard these as non-natural, that is, as not belonging to nature as a realm. There is no contradiction in talking about the nature of the unnatural, the super-natural, or the non-natural, just as it is an open question what the nature of the natural is.[40]

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

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

> [The term 'unrestricted nature'] would express the idea that there is one world only, and that that world is the realm of nature, which is taken to include the cultural, artificial, mental, abstract and whatever else there may prove to be. There are no realms above or beyond nature. To be is to be in nature and to be in continuity with everything else in nature. Even the greatest and deepest differences are differences within nature rather than differences between nature and something else.[41]

The alternative to unrestricted nature is (2) "restricted nature." Restricted nature picks out some subset of things as natural, exclusive of anything 'non-natural,' unnatural, or supernatural. Unrestricted naturalism is ecumenical. Restricted naturalism is parsimonious. Unrestricted naturalism is simple. Restricted naturalisms are legion. For example, Fink lists eight different conceptions by which one can use 'natural' to distinguish from the non-natural: the world unaffected by intelligent intervention (e.g., the arrangement of trees in the Yukon) is natural as opposed to the world so affected (a row of

39. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 206.
40. Ibid., 206.
41. Ibid., 206.

trees along a city street). Or, as Fink says, 'nature' could refer to "the empirical world as opposed to the intelligible world of the abstract, logical, or mathematical." And there are several other ways in which the restricted conception can be cashed out.

The advantage of the unrestricted conception is that it does not try, in advance, to stipulate what is and is not real. This can do the trick of resolving disputes about what is natural. As Fink puts it, "Nothing less than a naturalism that deserves to be presented as absolute could help break the spell of bald naturalism without merely replacing one restricted sort of naturalism with another and thus keeping the oscillations going."[42] On unrestricted naturalism, even culture, art, rationality, intelligent intervention, and so on are parts of reality. Fink's comment on the John Dewey passage in the epigraph above is this:

> On this conception the aesthetical (and the ethical) are not independent of nature, but they are not somehow based on nature or supervening on it either; rather, they simply are nature in some of its manifest operations. To think otherwise is both to mystify the aesthetical (and ethical) and to trivialize nature. The man-made, the artificial, the cultural, the historical, the ethical, the normative, the mental, the logical, the abstract, the mysterious, the extraordinary, are all examples of ways of being natural rather than examples of ways of being non-natural. Nature is never *mere* nature. That which is *more* than *mere* is nature, too.[43]

The disadvantage of the unrestricted conception is that it is tautologous: one can no longer use the accusation of "non-naturalism" as a weapon against opponents with a competing ontology. It obviously makes no sense to criticize someone for positing entities "over and above" nature after defining "natural" as "real" and hence "non-natural" as "unreal" by definition. As Stephen Brown says, "If by 'nature' we mean 'everything that is,' then of course there is nothing outside nature."[44]

The advantage and disadvantage of the restricted conception is the same: on the one hand, we can classify some entities as non-natural in advance, and exclude or bracket them; on the other hand, we are obligated to provide a principled justification for the classification of unfavored entities that doesn't, at the same time, exclude some favored entities. Fink's discussion of Plato's *Laws* shows how tricky this classification can be. In the *Laws*, the Athenian distinguishes three kinds of events

42. Ibid., 219.
43. Ibid., 217.
44. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, 2.

and three corresponding kinds of causal explanation. First, the growth of plants and the orbit of the sun etc., come about by nature (*physis*). Second, anything that does not come about by nature or art comes about by chance, e.g., leaves fall into this or that pattern and mountain ranges form into this or that shape, etc.. Third, houses have roofs and humans wear clothes by art.

The Athenian then asks, which of these three types of events are "natural"? The first hypothesis, which he eventually rejects, is that the first two are natural – namely, nature and chance. They are natural because they come about prior to and independent of intervention from humans or gods. By this classification, however, the natural excludes not only the supernatural but the cultural, the fictional, the aesthetic, and so on. The Athenian calls this conception of nature "dangerous" because it makes everything having to do with intelligence non-natural.

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

> Like in Plato, we find here both a definition of the word 'nature' (an inner source or cause of being moved and being at rest) and two competing conceptions of what that source is, namely matter and form (the material and the formal cause in Aristotle's sense). Aristotle himself finds it most satisfying to regard the formal (and the teleological or final) cause as the nature of x.[48]

If soul is the primary sense of nature, then body is "second nature." Mind (art, intelligence, reason)

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

is the paradigmatic, primary thing against which mere body is contrasted. A final quotation from Fink puts the stakes clearly:

> The Athenian doesn't just leave the concept physis to the 'men of science'. He does not first accept their conception of nature and then confront them with the claim that there is something extra-natural – the soul or the gods – which they have disregarded and which is in fact prior to nature. No. Like McDowell the Athenian is eager to have nature on his side. He therefore challenges the scientists' right to restrict the term 'nature' to the soulless, partly necessary and partly accidental combinations of the elements.[49]

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

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

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

49. Ibid., 214.

or Kantian idealism.[50] It would seem, then, that he has selected the unrestricted view of nature by default.

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

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

What about the various restricted naturalisms? I think the only position excluded by my argument is bald naturalism or classical materialism. Like McDowell, I think the restricted, mechanical conception of nature is refuted by the existence of practical rational primates like ourselves. As Fink says, "McDowell has convincingly shown that what Bernard Williams calls the absolute conception of reality is merely restricted, bald naturalism ideologically presented as absolute."[51] Unlike McDowell, I think bald naturalism misunderstands all living organisms. James Barham captures the

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

51. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism. 219, quoting *Mind, Value, and Reality* 112-31, especially section 5. Roy Wood Sellars provides a pure specimen of such ideological question-begging: "I mean that naturalism takes nature in a definite way as identical with reality, as self-sufficient and as the whole of reality. And by nature is meant the space-time-causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed." (Sellars, "Why Naturalism and Not Materialism? 217) Note that the first sentence explicitly endorses an unrestricted conception of nature while the next sentence secretly slides the ball into the other cup, overtly stipulating that the "space-time-causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed" is "identical with reality." Whether that stipulation is true is the very question at hand. No one disputes that unrestricted nature is all there is; but some do dispute the implicit assumption that the space-time-causal-system is all there is to nature.

dualism into which McDowell unwittingly falls:

> …the philosophical literature tends to work with a scientifically outdated image of living things as rigid "machines." This results in a picture in which only human beings (or at most the higher animals) can be properly ascribed purposes and agency in the full normative sense. From this perspective, we appear to be faced with an unappealing choice between eliminating teleology and normativity from our picture of nature altogether and understanding these phenomena as they are manifested in our own human form of life as floating free from any grounding in the natural world.[52]

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

3.2 Nature/Human Dualism

The inconsistency in McDowell's account causes other problems. For example, he falls prey to the very kind of dualism he explicitly aims to avoid. Namely, despite *calling* exercises of human practical reasoning (aimed at becoming virtuous and practically wise) "second nature," it is clear that he thinks such exercises belong only to human nature, not to the (first) natural world. The result is a nature/human dualism that cuts human beings apart from the non-rational (organic) natural world. As Julia Annas summarizes, non-reductive naturalism risk trivializing moral or normative facts by relegating them to humans alone: "Non-naturalistic accounts of ethical terms assume that their function, prominently their normativity, is something that arises with humans, or is produced by humans, in a way which owes nothing to the nature which we share with other living things."[53]

52. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 1.
53. Annas, "Virtue Ethics," 12.

What's worse, McDowell's unwitting sort of reason/body dualism cuts human beings down the middle.[54] For human beings are also animals, with animal sensations and emotions. If human responsiveness to the space of reasons is utterly separate from emotional responsiveness, then we are left to conclude that emotions are irrational while practical reason is unemotional.

We might express the contrast by saying that McDowell presents human as *practical rational agents* full stop, where I presented humans as practical rational *primates*. I suggested in chapter 4 that this error leads him into the corresponding error of concluding that successful practical reasoning is virtue as a whole; by contrast, I argued that practical wisdom is a virtue of practical reasoning, while other virtues (such as moderation) are virtues of rational practice. McDowell ignores that even "non-rational" phenomena such as emotions and even the human body can be made "rational" in two senses: first, one can take these into account when reasoning about what to do; and secondly, one can direct one's body, emotions, and desires toward good ends. Indeed, forming one's emotional reactions into rational patterns is necessary for the acquisition of certain virtues.[55]

The attraction of my view is that one can see one's own nature as a practical rational primate in continuity with non-human nature. The natural human norms inherent in human practical reasoning are of a piece with the natural non-human norms of all organic life. As Annas said above, "we find normativity in the realm of living things, plants and animals, already." The exercise of practical reasoning is part of the same natural order as our biological life form and function. That we practically reason *is* the natural fact that defines our life form and what we practically reason *about* are the natural facts that already obtain for human beings. Chris Toner argues that, on this view, "the virtues are seen as acquired traits that fit human beings for the exercise of practical rationality toward which their shared nature directs them (thereby rejecting McDowell's sharp separation of first and second natures)."[56] Toner explains why this view is more adequate:

> The acquisition of the virtues not only prevents emotions from interfering with practical reasoning but also, in McDowellian terms, "opens our eyes" to new sorts of

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

55. Cf. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 5.

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

> reasons for action, not visible to the immature, that make the good of others part of our good.[57]

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

3.3 Inside/Outside

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

McDowell is clear that even when a practically wise person actualizes his nature to acquire the moral outlook, any possible examination of that moral outlook will be done from *within the moral outlook* itself. The circularity of this inculcation and new second natural faculty is not accidental to his account. He says that practical wisdom is responsive to reasons and so becomes a prototype "for the…faculty that enables us to recognize and create … intelligibility."[58]

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

57. Ibid., 243.
58. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 79.

I believe Rosalind Hursthouse's account of neo-Aristotelianism falls prey to the same criticism as that I have leveled against McDowell's. Even though she draws heavily on Foot's work, she seems to vacillate between McDowell's and Foot's naturalisms when she says, "Ethical naturalism is not to be construed as the attempt to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature."[59] She claims that her account is, like McDowell's, still loosely naturalistic in that it is based on "human nature" or "second nature." But then hasn't she thereby rejected Footian naturalism? Jennifer Frey also observes:

> On this issue, Hursthouse seems to be speaking out of both sides of her mouth. She wants to acknowledge to Aristotelian critics like John McDowell that naturalistic considerations do not convince anyone to change their basic moral beliefs or motivate them to action. But at the same time, she thinks that she can approach the Humean or the Kantian and argue for "the rational credentials" of our moral beliefs based upon a "scientific" and "objective" naturalistic account. It is unclear how she is supposed to satisfy both parties at once, and the tension remains unresolved in her own work.[60]

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

My conception of nature retains a distinction between human beings (as practical reasoners aware of normativity) and the rest of organic nature (which is normative but doesn't know it). The fundamental distinction to be made is not between rational and non-rational natural entities, but between living and non-living entities, where humankind shares with other living species a distinctive set of rational potentialities that constitute natural normativity. To paraphrase Thomas Nagel, the existence of objective value is coextensive and co-terminal with the existence of living things.[61] I think the common term 'objective value' is an unfortunate way to express the notion of natural normativity. My preferred expression is 'natural norms.' Natural norms such as natural ends exist in all organic life. Natural norms are, for us, practical reasons. The question is not how human beings perceive or create "value" but why they act at all. Put this way, it is clear that every sufficiently matured human

59. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* especially chapter 10.
60. See Frey, "The Will and the Good," 44, footnote 55.
61. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 117.

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

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

> …the ethical naturalist must be able to show how … these two seemingly different senses of good (the good we can derive from an account of what simply is and the good as practical goal) can be unified into one and the same account. That is, we need an account of natural normativity that will show us how the relation between a general judgment articulating some fact about a life form (a judgment about a fact that is potentially known from the outside) and a judgment concerning a particular bearer of that form in a particular situation, can take the form of a practical inference whose conclusion is an action that exemplifies that very same form of life.[62]

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

If both practical and theoretical forms of knowledge grasp the same object, then the putative opposition between natural facts and practical reasons is dissolved. General judgments about a life form unite with practical inferences that are to be acted upon. Scientific reasoning includes both

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

the external, descriptive point of view and the internal, normative point of view. Or rather, the normative point of view simply is one of the scientific points of view. Theoretical reasoning and practical reasoning are both, broadly, scientific.[63] Despite McDowell's concession to bald naturalism that the modern scientific picture excludes the space of reasons, on my account, natural scientific reasoning is no less evaluative than any other expression of reasoning. Hence, the scientific worldview is capacious enough to include practical primates and all that they reason about: chemicals, quarks, mathematical models, biological life forms, or functions. Natural, organic norms (including those of human beings) are part of the modern scientific worldview.

4. Conclusion

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

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

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

natural function is. Having a virtue (in part) enables us to become more virtuous. Being practically wise enables us to discern when and how to pursue more practical wisdom.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

> Not everything that is last claims to be an end, but only that which is best.
>
> —Aristotle, *Physics* 194a.

In this chapter, I briefly take stock of the main argument of this dissertation before examining its broader significance and noting a few connections to other philosophical problems.

The main argument of this dissertation has been that human beings are best understood as practical, rational primates whose natural ends include the acquisition of the traditional list of virtues and (especially) practical wisdom. Since we are by nature practical reasoning animals, we have a natural obligation to acquire practical wisdom and any other trait that the practically wise person has.

In outline, I defended this argument by first laying the metanormative foundation in chapter 2. I developed a novel case for the Footian view I have labeled 'organic naturalism.' In chapter 3, building on this foundation, I made explicit some of the natural norms that pertain to human organisms. I argued that our best understanding – if only partial understanding – of our life form can be expressed in the same sort of normative/descriptive generics by which biologists and other scientists identify the life forms of any organism. In chapter 4, I then showed how the traditional concept of virtue in the Aristotelian tradition falls under the description of 'natural human norms': the virtuous person is the person described in generic statements such as 'human beings are courageous and wise' etc. Virtues are those practices that are beneficial to creatures like us, and that are acquirable under the management of excellent practical reasoning. Virtue and practical wisdom enable us to actuate

our life life form and become what we are. In chapter 5, I returned to the theme of practical reasoning to show how the process is best understood as necessarily involving substantive commitments to pursue good and avoid evil. Some of the mundane facts of nature are, for us, practical reasons that can motivate us to live a certain kind of life. Evaluative mistakes are certainly possible, but my account showed how such mistakes are failures in the attempt to be practically wise. Chapter 6 attempted to rebut the dual charges of bald naturalism and non-naturalism by breaking down the putative contrast between scientific reasoning (about nature) and ethical, practical reasoning (about norms). I suggested that there is indeed a proper distinction between theoretical reasoning (whether scientific or ethical) and practical reasoning (whether scientific or ethical). But the hard line is not between normative and non-normative reasoning, for all reasoning is normative in the relevant respects.

The primary criticism of my sort of Footian naturalism, expressed in various forms by dozens of writers, is that nature (defined in terms of what the sciences study) and science (defined as the study of nature) are fundamentally different from norms, reasons, and ethics. In an effort to dismantle what I take to be an unreflective prejudice, I criticized the picture of organic nature as merely bald or non-normative. On both the unrestricted picture of nature and my version of the restricted conception, norms come to light as natural. I offered 'recursive naturalism' as a name for my view. On recursive naturalism, parts of nature recur within nature: natural organisms (namely, humans) reason about natural organisms; humans reason about humans; practical reasoners think about practical reasoning. Rather than shying away from our best scientific picture of the world – including biological and human phenomena – recursive naturalism whole-heartedly embraces that picture. Indeed, affirming recursive naturalism makes it possible to affirm both moral and scientific realism; denying recursive naturalism seems to require denying both moral realism and scientific realism.

My account cannot pretend to have addressed every incisive objection or to have covered every crucial topic. I have aimed my argument, throughout, at the scientific naturalist who is in some sense already committed to scientific realism. Hence, I have attempted to clarify how my Footian sort of ethical naturalism can be compatible with a plausible version of scientific naturalism. But one possible shortcoming is the quick manner with which I have had to deal with delicate matters of epistemology and (especially) the philosophy of science. Scientific realism is by no means the only

reasonable view, and there are many brands of scientific realism.

Another possible shortcoming is the absence of a discussion about the relation between virtue ethics and religious morality. Virtue ethics is often associated with Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or Taoist religious philosophy. Nevertheless, I have defended (especially) Foot's version of what Murphy calls a "secular natural law theory." Foot, McDowell and others are non-religious philosophers who find in Aristotle an alternative that is neutral with respect to theism. My hope is to play some part in showing the plausibility and practicality of the notion that even "modern knowers and godless anti-metaphysicians" have every reason to pursue virtue and wisdom.[1]

A third possible shortcoming is a fuller discussion of social reasoning. While 'homo sapiens sapiens' is a biological concept that purports to range over all genetically modern humans, the variety and contrast between the ways various cultures conceive of and pursue 'the good life for humans' is daunting. If, as MacIntyre has argued, we learn to reason within a social tradition, the problem of cultural relativism about rationality looms large. A fuller discussion would have to engage thoroughly with recent anthropological and sociobiological literature.

In spite of these admitted shortcomings, my project has been to establish that human beings indeed have natural ends, such as the acquisition of virtue and practical wisdom. Neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism can provide mutually reinforcing accounts of individual concepts such as virtue, practical reason, nature and human nature. When viewed together, these concepts form an interlocking whole that has the potential to solve problems in both ethics and metaethics, and beyond. The attractions of this view are manifold.

First, it is always dangerous to do moral philosophy *without* considering the theories of other times, places, and cultures, for we are liable to overemphasize pet virtues (or ignore pet vices) peculiar to our time and place. Neo-Aristotelianism draws on the ethical writings of other cultures and other times and so promises to correct lopsided ethical developments in our own time.

Secondly, neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism provides a satisfying possible answer to the problem of the relation between nature and reason. It pictures facts and norms as an organic whole, presented to us by the world and studied by all the sciences, including formal or abstract sciences.

1. Paraphrasing Frederich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, section 344.

It even suggests that Aristotle was right to classify ethics as a different sort of science with its own subject matter, its own standards, and its own aims.[2]

Neither subsuming ethics under (merely descriptive) disciplines nor subsuming descriptive disciplines into normative categories, neo-Aristotelian theory holds great promise for coordinating the descriptive and normative dimensions of ethics, biology, and other sciences. Perhaps this is part of the explanation why the Footian sort of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is rightly enjoying a renaissance in contemporary analytic ethics and beyond. In my view, it is both perfectly compatible with the modern scientific worldview and also useful in political life, bioethics,[3] business,[4] education,[5] and everyday life. 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.

Virtue, practical reason, and nature are age-old themes which demand more work than I can claim to have done here adequately. As Glaucon said to Socrates, "The measure of listening to such discussions is the whole of life."[6]

2. Cf. "For a well schooled man 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." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I.3

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

4. Ron Beadle, "MacIntyre's Influence on Business Ethics," in *Handbook of Virtue Ethics in Business and Management* (Springer, Dordrecht, 2015), 1–9.

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

6. Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato*, *Republic* 450b.

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Vita

Keith Buhler

Department of Philosophy

University of Kentucky

Lexington, KY 40506

EDUCATION

1. M.A. Philosophy, University of Kentucky, 2014
2. M.A. Orthodox Theology, University of Balamand, 2012
3. B.A. Humanities, emphasis History, Biola University, 2004

EMPLOYMENT

1. Postdoctoral Lecturer, University of Kentucky Spring 2017
2. Instructor of Philosophy, Asbury University, 2013-2017

RESEARCH

1. Specialization: Ethics
2. Competence: Philosophy of Mind, History of Philosophy, and Philosophy of Religion

UNIVERSITY TEACHING

1. Business Ethics (Fall 2016, Spring 2017 UK)
2. Health Care Ethics (Spring 2015, Fall 2016, UK)
3. Introduction to Philosophy (2013-2014, UK, 2014-2017 Asbury)
4. Introduction to Ethics (Fall 2013, UK)
5. Introduction to Logic (Spring 2013)
6. Philosophy of Religion (Summer 2016, Asbury)
7. Philosophy of C.S. Lewis (Fall 2016, Asbury)
8. Virtue Ethics, Ancient and Modern (Spring 2016, Asbury)
9. Introduction to Logic (Spring 2013)

10. Introduction to Logic (Fall 2012, UK, under Bob Sandmeyer)
11. Philosophy of Science (summer 2004, Biola University, under Nancy Pearcey)

SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHING

12. Introduction to Philosophy (online course, Freedom Project Academy, 2017)
13. Humanities: 20th Century British Thought (Veritas Academy, KY 2013)
14. Philosophy: Plato on Being and Knowing (Torrey Academy, CA 2011)
15. Philosophy: Traditional Logic (Torrey Academy, 2009-2010)
16. Humanities: Foundations of American Thought (Torrey Academy, 2009-2012)
17. Humanities: Ancient and Medieval Thought (Torrey Academy, 2008-2012)
18. Humanities: 20th Century British Thought (Torrey Academy, 2007-2012)
19. Philosophy: Great Books Tutor, GATE Program (Willow School of Long Beach, CA 2001-2002)
20. Spanish Tutor (Torrey Academy, Private Tutoring, 2007-2008)
21. ESL Tutor (Etum Academy, CA 2010-2012)
22. ESL Tutor (Biola University Abroad, Ulaambatar, Mongolia, 2001)

PRESENTATIONS

1. "Natural Teleology without Theology in Thomas Nagel's *Mind and Cosmos*" Society of Christian Philosophers, University of San Diego, 2016.
2. "Fairy Tale Nihilism: The Empty Hero in *Kung Fu Panda* and *The Great and Powerful Oz*," Faith and Film Conference, Baylor University, 2014.
3. "Is the Cosmos Causally Closed?" Ian Ramsey Centre, Oxford University, 2014.
4. "Socratic Therapy," SOPHIA Conference, Spring Branch, TX 2014.
5. "Virtue and Imaginative Resistance," Midsouth Philosophy Conference, Rhodes College, 2014.
6. "Virtue and Imaginative Resistance," South Carolina Society of Philosophers, University of South Carolina, 2014.

COMMMENTS AND SERVICE

1. Comments on David Skowronski's "Inductive Reasoning in Naturalism and Supernaturalism." Society of Christian Philosophers, University of San Diego, 2016.
2. Session Chair, Ian Ramsey Centre Conference, Oxford University, 2014.
3. Comments on Andrew Greenlee's "Combating the Normativity Challenge to Virtue Ethics," Midsouth Philosophy Conference, Rhodes College, 2014.
4. Referee for Kentucky Graduate School Conference submissions, 2013.

AWARDS AND HONORS

1. Travel Funding, University of Kentucky Philosophy Department (2014, 2015, 2016)
2. Travel Funding, University of Kentucky Graduate School (2014)
3. Teaching Assistantship, University of Kentucky (2012-2016)

4. Perpetual Member of the Torrey Honors Institute, Academic Honors Society (2014)

ADMINISTRATION AND LEADERSHIP

1. Director of High School Studies (Veritas Academy, 2013-2014)
2. Master Tutor (Torrey Academy, 2010-2012)
3. Lecturer (Wheatstone Academy, 2006-2011)
4. Assistant Director (Wheatstone Academy, 2004-2005)

INVITED PUBLIC TALKS

1. "Morality: Rule-following or New Life?," Wesleyan Society, Lexington KY, 2014.
2. "Reading Great Books in Classical Education," Veritas Academy, Lexington KY, 2013.
3. "The Goodness of the Tao: CS Lewis' *Abolition of Man*," Torrey Academy, CA 2012.
4. "Is Vainglory Pride? Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night*," Torrey Academy, 2012.
5. "The Philosophy of Pain," St. Barnabas Church, CA 2011.
6. "Hope and the Cycle of Desire," Hope Academy, 2011.
7. "The Art of Conversation: Conversation with Art," Wheatstone Academy, La Habra, CA 2011.
8. "Goodness, Truth, and Beauty," St. George Church, CA 2010.
9. "The Virtue of Constancy," Hope Academy, Yorba Linda, CA 2009.
10. "Life Experience as a Text: Learning From Initiatives," Biola University, CA 2007.

GRADUATE COURSEWORK

(Professional Development Courses, University of Kentucky)

1. Proseminar on Teaching Philosophy, David Bradshaw.
2. Preparing Future Faculty, Morris Grubbs.

(Philosophy Courses, University of Kentucky)

3. Seminar on Post-Kantian Ethics: Fichte and Hegel on Right. Dan Breazeale.
4. Seminar on Metaethics: Moral Motivation. Anita Superson.
5. Seminar on Ethics and Bodily Autonomy. Anita Superson.
6. Seminar on Metaethics: Normative Language. Tim Sundell.
7. Metaethics (Dissertation residency). David Bradshaw.
8. Ethical Naturalism (Independent study). David Bradshaw.
9. MacIntyre and After Virtue (Independent study). David Bradshaw.
10. Ethics from Hobbes to Feminism. Anita Superson.
11. Seminar on Plato's Forms and the Death of Gods (audit). Eric Sanday
12. Seminar on Plato's *Philebus* and Timaeus. Eric Sanday.
13. Seminar on Plato's *Parmenides*. Eric Sanday.

14. Aristotle and Aristotelians on Mind (Independent study). David Bradshaw.
15. Ancient Greek Metaphysics. Eric Sanday.
16. Seminar on Mind and Imagination. Clare Batty.
17. Seminar on Kantian Idealism. Stefan Bird-Pollan.
18. Seminar on Metaphysical Naturalism. David Bradshaw.
19. Philosophy of Religion. David Bradshaw.
20. Symbolic Logic. Tim Sundell.

(Taken at Biola University)

21. Philosophy of Mind. JP Moreland.
22. Metaphysics of Substance and Property. JP Moreland.
23. Philosophy of Cosmology and Quantum Physics. John Bloom.

LANGUAGES

1. Ancient Greek (proficient)
2. Spanish (fluent)
3. HTML, CSS, and LaTex (basic)

AFFILIATIONS

1. Society of Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy, 2012-present
2. American Philosophical Association, 2014-present
3. Society of Orthodox Philosophers in America, 2014-present
4. International Society for MacIntyrean Enquiry, 2015-present
5. National Association of Scholars, 2016-present