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NATURE'S GOODNESS: AN ARISTOTELIAN ACCOUNT

by

Nathan Metzger

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2014

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Abstract

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Neo-Aristotelians have made major headway in moral theory, and it is now commonplace to find philosophers defending the reality of goodness through a teleological analysis of human being. Whatever the merits of this approach, it has suffered from a lack of a sustained defense of its pre-modern metaphysical panorama: the Aristotelian conception of the human good gets traction only if its decidedly pre-modern and 'robust' philosophy of nature is defensible in its own right. In this dissertation, I aim to give a partial breakdown of the particular sort of metaphysical project that the Aristotelian moral theorist assumes, but does not always explicate. In particular, I aim to show how neo-Aristotelians rely on a particular view of *substance* that, while certainly challenging contemporary naturalist construals of the same, is nevertheless defensible in its own right. Moreover, it might well be the case that even 'liberal' contemporary naturalist construals of 'moral facts' face difficulties that cannot be overcome; for they might only be able to countenance the less deflationary moral ontologies they desire by first assuming a view of substance that puts pressure on the entirety of the 'modern' project. The first part of this dissertation will focus on the ways that an Aristotelian nature is defensible. The second part will show in more detail how this pre-modern vision of reality helps to locate and in some cases even 'solve' certain metaethical conundrums. The goal is to show why

an Aristotelian moral theory can offer a credible alternative to the usual ‘moral realist’ positions in contemporary metaethics, by offering not just a more plausible view of human goodness, but a more plausible view of nature as a whole.

Acknowledgements

This modest work represents the end-result of a philosophical conversion. I wouldn't have put my name to any of these ideas at the start of my graduate career—back when I knew a thing or two. I am grateful to Peter Simpson, not just for his own work, which played a part in my change of views, but also for our many conversations over the course of my graduate tenure, and for his help with this project. He patiently put up with many inchoate attempts at making my new-found point, he dogged me to be clearer and more charitable, and he pressed me to investigate my own arguments and their implications more deeply. I couldn't have asked for a better advisor. I'm also grateful to my two readers, Douglas Lackey and Jesse Prinz, for their generous, kind, and challenging comments on these pages.

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Lastly and most importantly, I must thank my wife, Elizabeth. I don't know where I'd be without her angelic patience and extraordinary help. If I were to begin to delve into the ways that I've leaned on her during these years, I'd have another book on my hands.

I'd like to dedicate these pages to our three boys—Peter, John, and Charlie.

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Chapter One

Preliminary Reasons for Accepting Substantial Form

1.1 Introduction

In this first chapter a preliminary argument will be presented for the truth of Aristotelian value realism, and the reality of natural human goodness. The argument is based on the Aristotelian idea that facts about human value reduce to natural facts, because it endorses the Aristotelian idea of substantial form: we can rightly speak of natural goodness because nature is inherently normative.

The greatest obstacle to this conception of value realism comes from the contemporary naturalist's insistence that formal and final cause—that is, the ways in which a substantial form has both an essence and an aim—are remnants of a philosophy of nature that have been falsified by modern science. Therefore, the bulk of this thesis will try to show why these naturalist arguments can be overcome. This must be done, not only because the naturalist's criticism of the Aristotelian philosophy of nature—the very philosophy that grounds this moral theory—is impressive, but also because some of the most prominent defenders of the Aristotelian metaethical account, like Philippa Foot's (cf. 2003), do not address these impressive naturalist arguments at any length.¹ Indeed,

¹ Certainly, there are impressive modern defenses of Aristotelian or quasi-Aristotelian notions of substance (cf. Wallace 1997, Klima 2002, Oderberg 2008, Feser 2013c, Tahko 2012, Boulter 2012), but Aristotelian-minded *moral theorists* do not always elaborate on an Aristotelian philosophy of nature when explicating their own Aristotelian *moral theories*. This can unfortunately give the impression to critics of the view, that the metaphysical leg-work in fact has not been done by these moralists, and that naturalist criticisms are being ignored, or that they are seen as trivial or unimpressive. Partly as a result of this, many overviews of Aristotelian moral theories give glosses to the effect that, whatever the merits of the theory, its reliance on immanent teleology, etc., is a point

for a long time, many philosophers on both sides of this debate have implied that those who accept an older ‘teleological’ view of nature, and those who do not, are at an impasse.² Moreover, while I call the criticisms of the naturalists the greatest obstacle to an Aristotelian account, such criticisms might in fact be the only obstacle. If an argument can be motivated for substantial form, and if it can be shown that contemporary naturalist accounts need not falsify it, it should be possible to show how value realism follows without much further elaboration.

In this initial chapter, a brief explanation of Aristotelian notions of objective goodness will be given. Then will follow a brief explanation of why this form of realism is more satisfying than some modern rivals in moral theory. The main reason, it will be argued, that we should prefer Aristotelian value realism over contemporary versions of the same, is that the Aristotelian construes goodness teleologically. Then, a brief analysis will be offered of what is a weak argument against Aristotelian moral realism. It will be pointed out that sometimes, contemporary naturalists too hastily dismiss teleological conceptions of nature because they see it as relying on the scientifically dubious notion of *design*. However, a substantial form is different than a designed thing. This is because a designed thing has only an externally rendered ‘purpose’, whereas, by contrast, the

against it, given what modern science supposedly says to the contrary. See for example the SEP article on Moral Naturalism, section 4.1.

² See, for example, Mortimer Adler’s *The Difference of Man and the Difference it Makes*, (1967) where he both argues for an Aristotelian conception of human nature, but also despairs at it ever being widely accepted in the Academy, given its contentious metaphysical starting point. We can also see this pessimistic attitude conveyed in a letter by Etienne Gilson: “What separates us irreparably from [modern philosophers] is the Aristotelian and common sense notion of Substantial Form...It is not the word ‘philosophy’, it the word ‘nature’ that separates us from our contemporaries. Since I do not have any hope of convincing them of the truth...of hylomorphism, I do not believe it is possible to propose our hypothesis to them as scientifically valid.” (Gilson 1971, as quoted from Dewan 2007: 23)

purposeful nature of a substantial form is immanent to it. Then a brief outline will be given of the stronger and more impressive argument against substantial form. This argument says that the Aristotelian metaphysics of substantial form, while different than design, is still scientifically dubious. The Aristotelian insists on teleological analyses of natural things, and insists that nature is composed of organic wholes that are irreducible to the parts that make them up, and that they have efficient causal powers that transcend what could be accounted for by mere system-level emergence or Newtonian mechanics; but the naturalist insists that there is no reason to look at nature this way, since reductive explanations of reality are more responsible in obeying Ockham's Razor, and more responsible in following from what we know about the bottom level of reality. Chapters Two through Five will be devoted to offering an argument against this stronger and more impressive argument. Chapter Six will provide an elaboration on Aristotelian moral theory, by comparing it with some rival accounts both in the realm of metaethics and in normative theory. First, however, the basic, or short form argument for Aristotelian value realism must be given.

1.2 A Short-Form Argument for Aristotelian Value Realism

To advance an Aristotelian account, use will be made of some of the same general points advanced by many others, including Simpson (1992), David Oderberg (2000), Julia Annas (2011), Rosalind Hursthouse (1999), Michael Thompson (2012) and especially Philippa Foot (2003), despite the differences that these thinkers have with each other.³ An

³ One major difference between Simpson and Oderberg on one hand, and, e.g., Foot and Hursthouse on the other, is that the latter thinkers seem to argue for the merits of a virtue theory given what nature manifestly shows us is for our good. Simpson and Oderberg, by contrast, further insist that we cannot in fact know what the real virtues are unless we

effective way of wording this general argument is this: since the existence of substantial form entails the existence of inherent—or natural—normativity, the human substantial form entails inherent human normativity. Facts about human goodness reduce to natural facts about the human person. A substance is to be construed as an entity that has formal and final cause. To speak of ‘immanent’ aims and goals is to say that such a substance has real and intrinsic aims and purposes relative to the nature of that thing, and that these aims are imposed and advanced from *within*, by its very nature. A substantial form is therefore irreducible. To speak of inherent normativity is to say that a thing *ought* to conform to that thing’s nature. The Aristotelian assumes that normativity, precisely because it reduces to a thing’s nature, also reduces to that thing’s flourishing. A substantial form’s true natural or ‘goal’ state is its flourishing state, and its flourishing state is the way a thing really ought to be.

Philippa Foot (2003) has articulated the notion of inherent norms by speaking of the flourishing of a plant. We can speak rightly of what is *good* for a plant, in that we can rightly differentiate how we use a plant for decoration from what is in fact good for the plant’s own intrinsic flourishing. Whereas using a plant as a decoration will involve situating it on a shelf in a pleasing manner, considering that plant’s own flourishing will by contrast involve giving it light and water, and perhaps Mozart. For us to speak of a plant’s flourishing, so as to make sure that a plant receives certain things and avoids other things, is to assume that a plant *ought to be* a certain way as opposed to another way. It is to imply that a plant is a substantial form in its own right, and that its life cycle, development, and reproduction are all factors relative to its form and flourishing, and

have been habituated to them. That is, for these thinkers, our real ends are not as *prima facie* transparent as they seemingly are for Foot and Hursthouse. As it will be argued in Chapter Five (5.7), we must make sure to construe ‘second nature’ in a particular way.

therefore its real goodness. We might say the same thing about a mosquito. We seem to be able to quite easily talk about what is good for a mosquito in a way that brackets the human interest. Clearly, what is good for *us* is that a mosquito be squashed, lest it bite us. But this is not good for the *mosquito*. What is good for a mosquito is, in fact, to bite us. What holds for plants and bugs, then, holds analogously for humans. As Foot words it, “For all the diversities of human life, it is possible to give some quite general account of human necessities, that is, of what is quite generally needed for human good, if only by starting from the negative idea of human deprivation.” (2003: 43) A natural human being, or a human being acting fully in accordance with its nature, is a good human being. The Aristotelian insists that if one lives in full accord with one’s nature, one is therefore living in a way that is rational and virtuous.

Rosalind Hursthouse (1999) words Aristotelian moral realism this way: “...any form of [ethics] that takes its inspiration from Aristotle, is usually taken to be a form of ethical naturalism—broadly, the enterprise of basing ethics in some way on considerations of human nature, on what is involved in being good *qua* human being.” (1999: 176) Yet Aristotelian ‘naturalism’, as spoken of by Hursthouse, is quite different than the sort of ‘scientific’ naturalism espoused by most philosophers today. In contrast to the contemporary naturalist, the Aristotelian insists that we can construe a human person normatively insofar as he is, like other things in nature, a particular sort of biological, substantial form, and therefore an entity with a real nature, ‘in its own right’, irreducible to its parts, and having its own intrinsic aims and ends on the level of the thing. We can therefore say that a human being is *good* insofar as he acts in accordance with his nature. That is to say, he *fulfills* his own nature in order to be good, which is to

flourish. Facts about human goodness reduce to natural facts, precisely because nature itself has real aims and goals and inherent norms.

Of course, when we consider a human form as opposed to a form of a flower or a worm or a dolphin, we are speaking of a particularly advanced sort of rational, intelligent agent. But the human form is not different in idea from these other entities, despite these robust mental features. The human form is different in kind from the form of a worm or dolphin because they are different things. But ‘form’ as such is playing the same role in each case: it states the nature of the thing, which is also the end of the thing. We cannot say that, just because the human being displays a complex sort of rationality, that he is therefore outside of the normative web of nature. He is a natural thing just like other natural things, and so his norms and goodness are analogously found in his very nature.

So even though we are talking about an advanced animal, or what might be called a universal animal, we can still speak of its inherent normativity. We can clarify this idea through what Michael Thompson (1995), in his seminal article, “The Representation of Life,” calls the argument from the ‘Aristotelian Categorical.’ An Aristotelian Categorical is a way of speaking of the nature of a thing, or the essence of a thing, in a way that fits more accurately with what a substantial form actually is and therefore what the thing ought to be. Often, especially since Kripkean-style essentialism has become more popular, we say that if a thing has an essence, then there is a property that this thing has in all possible worlds (for all x in all worlds, if x is A , then x is F). An Aristotelian Categorical conceives of real natures differently. The Aristotelian says: it is right to say that a dog has four legs. But certainly, we do not have to say that, for all x , if x is a dog, then x has four legs. Neither is the Aristotelian’s claim about doggy nature merely taken

from statistical norms. Yet we still want to say that having four legs is part of the nature of a dog. As Thompson words it, “A system of Aristotelian categoricals for a certain kind of subject provides...a standard separate from our own interests by which to make normative judgments about particular subjects of that kind, according to the following principle of inference: From ‘the S is F’ and ‘This S is not F’ to infer, ‘This S is defective in that it is not F.’” (Thompson 1995: 295) Insofar as a thing can be defined through a system of Aristotelian Categoricals, we can speak rightly of how a thing *really* ought to be. A human being, as part of the same biological world as any other biological thing, can therefore be thought to contain immanent ‘oughts’. (see also Oderberg 2008 and Klima 2002)

Some version of Aristotelian value realism is our best option in moral theory. Indeed, on the level of metaethics, there might not be any other options as satisfying. In fact, if we want to make sure that our moral theories do not result in a Cartesian dualism or eliminativism, it might be the case that we *must* choose between some version of Aristotelian moral realism. This is a strong claim, but it can be defended and it will be defended in the course of this dissertation.

1.3 Why an Aristotelian Account is More Satisfying

In two keys ways is the Aristotelian picture more satisfying than alternative visions of the good. One reason is that it gives us a more elegant, reasonable, and responsible ontology, since it can avoid Cartesian-style dualism. It can stay properly ‘physicalist’ and ‘naturalist’ (though these terms will be duly modified in the following pages) without relegating facts about human goodness and human normativity to something illusional,

fictional, or constructed. The other reason is that it can more naturally, and less arbitrarily, articulate our real responsibilities to the non-human and non-sensate natural worlds (human or otherwise). Since the Aristotelian avoids Cartesian dualism about mind vs. body, he is also avoid drawing problematic ontological distinctions between humans and other animals and plants. He does not have to hold out human consciousness and rationality as the sole home of purposeful behavior, since he does not think that physicalism need imply a mechanical, push-and pull conception of non-mental nature. We often look at proto-intentional behavior in the non-human world and then argue that, since humans are organic entities like any other, that if this proto-intentional behavior is read mechanistically on lower levels, it must then be read mechanistically on our level, *unless* we construe the human being (and perhaps other intelligent animals) as special in ways that suggests a dubious ontological dualism. Such a dualism seems to suggest itself in many modern moral theories, from the constructivist theories of Rawls (1980) and Korsgaard (1996), to the expressivist theories of Blackburn (1993, 1998) and Gibbard (1992). While these latter two thinkers argue that moral thought and talk is not truth-functional, they still rely heavily on qualitative features of the mind that are problematic within a mechano-atomist⁴ conception of nature that is implicitly accepted.

But we can avoid the incipient dualism of intentionality, if we remember that the very continuity between the human and non-human organic worlds that motivates *both* ‘reductionism’ *and* dualism should *also* motivate what may be called an ‘inflationary reductionism’—or the idea that aims and ends are part of the very nature of material things. The Aristotelian joins the growing list of contemporary philosophers who want to reassess what it truly means to be a physicalist and naturalist (cf. Strawson and Freeman

⁴ The term ‘mechano-atomism’ will be explained in more detail in the following pages.

2006, Montero 2005, Skrbina 2007, Mathews 2002 & 2003, G. Rosenberg 2004, and A.D. Smith 2012). If we attend to the problems of mechano-atomism, as soon to be explained, we can see that Aristotelianism need not pit itself against physicalism *per se*. In fact, the Aristotelian is, in a relevant and important way (as will be argued in subsequent chapters), a ‘physicalist’.

As I have said, the Aristotelian holds that any substance, by virtue of having a formal and final cause, has a real nature and real aims and ends. A human ought to act according to its nature in order to flourish just as an amoeba or a monkey or a flower ought to act according to their natures in order to flourish. As will be explained in more detail in Chapter Six, moral facts are just eudaimonistic facts for humans. Mary Midgley (1996, 2002) and Alasdair MacIntyre (2001) have emphasized the need for human norms to be situated inside a ‘metaphysical biology’, whereby human norms are rightly situated in relation to the norms that we ascribe to other biological entities. These moves seem vital for robust ethical theory. Following Hans Jonas (2011), Mary Midgley (2002), and Freya Mathews (2002, 2003), I would suggest that the signs of intentional behavior and normativity on the human level can be analogously ‘pumped downward’ to other phenomena in the organic world.

It is precisely because the Aristotelian sees nature as inherently evaluative ‘all the way down’ and eschews a mechano-atomist construal of nature, that his version of natural goodness provides a more satisfying version of *moral naturalism* than those offered by, e.g., Nicholas Sturgeon (1988), David Brink (1989) and Peter Railton (1986), and also one that is more satisfying than, e.g., Russ Shafer-Landau’s *non-naturalism* (2005). This is because the Aristotelian does not need to rely on potentially dubious

supervenience principles, nor does he need to align moral with natural facts through a-posteriori identity relationships, in order save moral facts from elimination at the hands of anti-realists such as J.L. Mackie (1988) and Gilbert Harman (1988).

In the following pages, the arguments from physicalism will be discussed, and it will be shown why they fail to falsify substantial form. In this way certain questions in the philosophy of biology can largely be set aside. Yet some things will be said about it, in order to show that only if evolution is interpreted through the lens of mechano-atomism should it give the Aristotelian pause. Owen Flanagan (2007) insists that the key feature of the naturalistic position is what follows from our commitment to evolution. He argues that, since the discovery of evolution, we know that there is nothing particularly special ontologically about the human person. Man is an animal, argues Flanagan, and can trace his lineage back to the same primordial swamp, just like his closest of mammalian kin. But these facts are incidental to the Aristotelian. In fact, it is not a 'concession' at all to admit to the truth of the Darwinian story. Quite the contrary: as many philosophers have argued, it is only if we accept an Aristotelian metaphysic that the evolutionary process is possible at all. (cf. Lennox 1993, Gilson 2009, Midgley 2002 and 2010, Oderberg 2008, and Cunningham 2010) The 'argument from evolution' against substantial form can be shown to be actually just the argument from physicalism-cum-mechano-atomism hidden under biological dressing. Evolution is not, therefore, an independent critique of substantial form in its own right. Those who want to argue against substantial form using Darwin first need to reinterpret the evolutionary process as mechano-atomism (cf. Dennett 1996 and A. Rosenberg 2011), whereby the rich, dynamic, and messy process of natural selection, one which acts on substantial form as its

unit of selection and sees 'selfishness' as derivative and secondary, is interpreted as something reductive, 'blind', and mechanistic. This will be talked about more in Chapter Five.

Furthermore, the Aristotelian can much more naturally construe our moral responsibility to the non-human and non-sensate worlds in a way that is not merely affective or human-centered. As Freya Matthews argues, "The blindness and deadness, the bruteness of matter in the mechanistic scheme of things, robs us of our respect for Nature. In pre-scientific thought, Nature had been richly informed with telos, and with principles of spirit and agency. Human beings existed in an intricate web of spiritual and teleological relations with the natural world. From the mechanistic point of view however, Nature consists of matter, and matter is insensate, dead, drab, unvarying, devoid of interests and purposes. This draining-off of spirit from matter was naturally expressed in mind/matter dualism." (2002: 31) While the Cartesian argument of substantial mind as ontologically independent and immaterial has been rightly shown to be problematic, we have not yet truly overcome the most salient feature of Cartesianism, and this is the construal of the physical as mechanical. Therefore, as long as Cartesianism's most defining feature is assumed, we have not yet truly overcome the problems it has generated for our conception of the natural world, despite our discovery of late of the necessity of treating nature with care. In fact, the insistence by many naturalists today that phenomenal consciousness *alone* survives the mechanistic construal of nature has arguably made matters *worse* for the very environment they want to protect, and has furthermore affected how we conceive of our moral commitments to the non-human and non-sensate worlds (human and otherwise). This has in turn made matters worse for our

own kind, especially those of our own kind at the beginning, end, and shadows of life. Thus, while the metaphysical and not the ‘applied’ part of the Aristotelian moral picture will be concentrated on here, the suggestion will also be made that the particular philosophy of nature that Aristotle gives us might steer us to particular moral conclusions in the realm of bioethics and environmental ethics.

1.4 Arguments Against Formal and Final Cause

Any moral theory that is committed to the idea that morality is part of the furniture of the world, whether of the Aristotelian version or otherwise, faces a list of well-known criticisms; these criticisms come not just from hard line naturalists, but also from expressivists, constructivists, and other moral anti-realists. Whether the anti-realist assumes a wholesale eliminativism, the anti-realist nevertheless insists that there are no such things as moral facts in the scientific picture of reality. Yet there are also criticisms specifically aimed at the Aristotelian version of ‘moral realism’. While not explicitly made, the usual assumption among naturalists is that scientific discoveries since the time of the Enlightenment have shown that, despite the claims of the Aristotelian, there is no such thing as formal or final cause in nature. But as all Aristotelians insist on pointing out, there has been no scientific discovery, nor *could* there be any scientific discovery, that falsified formal and final cause; on the contrary, even while teleology is formally denied to exist, it is all the while tacitly assumed in the scientific community, and the language of agency and purpose is used frequently to describe the workings of the natural world.

This isn't to say that there is no way to falsify Aristotelian metaphysics; but it will have to be shown false by *metaphysical* arguments. However, as mentioned earlier, in the philosophical literature, the metaphysical argument against formal and final cause is not usually explicitly made. Nevertheless, one can find attempts among naturalists to address Aristotelian ideas, even if the words 'teleology' and 'form' are not said in the argument. To the extent that Aristotelian ideas *are* addressed, not all arguments are of equal strength. Generally, one can detect two sorts of arguments against formal and final cause. One of these arguments is quite weak and can be readily dismissed, since it is based on a misunderstanding of the Aristotelian view. However, the other argument is more impressive and worth dealing with at length.

1.5 The Weak Argument: Substantial Form and Design

As for the weaker argument. Naturalists sometimes argue that modern science and Darwinian evolution have shown that there is no 'design' in nature (e.g., Dennett 1996, Flanagan 2007). But the discovery that there is no *design* in nature is not a problem for the Aristotelian, especially since talk of design tends to reduce the teleological to the artifactual, whereby entities with immanent purpose and inherent normativity are reduced to artifacts following a set pattern of action and reaction, or input/out relations, as imposed (or programmed) from *without*. In other words, to insist on design is to potentially reduce-organic entities with immanent drive, agency and striving, into brute, mechanical artifacts. While it is true that an artifactually designed thing has functions or purposes, those purposes cannot rightly be thought of as natural. In other words, if we are talking about things that are the product of such design, 'intelligent' or otherwise, then

we might merely be talking about an *externally* established function, and therefore we are not necessarily talking about an irreducible whole with intrinsic drive. A designed artifact, for example, has no natural ends, only ends from the perspective of the designer. There is nothing *really* intrinsically normative to a wristwatch. It ‘ought’ to tell time only because we humans have interpreted its programmed, mechanical movements in a particular way, relative to our own desires. A watch has a final cause, namely the one imposed by the artisan. But a watch does not have a substantial form and so no *natural* telos because a watch is an accidental whole and not a natural whole. It is an accidental substance, therefore; not a real one.

James Barham (2004) puts the difference well in speaking about the problem of ‘intelligent’ design: “Intelligent Design and the Mechanistic Consensus agree that organisms are machines...consisting of matter that is inert insofar as its function is concerned. Both schools of thought view biological functions as something imposed on inert matter from the outside, by the hand of god or by natural selection, as the case may be. But what if the analogy between organisms and machines were fundamentally flawed?” (2004: 211)

The Aristotelian insists that the analogy is indeed flawed: a substantial form’s *telos* has nothing to do with how ‘complicated’ it is; it has nothing to do with ‘irreducible’ complexity; it has nothing to do, moreover, with *parts* at all. As I explained earlier, substantial forms are irreducible *wholes*, and therefore ontologically different than amalgams of parts. The naturalist is right to be wary of design. The main problem with design is that it makes the existence of substantial form problematic or at the very least incidental. A world of designed things isn’t necessarily a world with natural and

immanent ends and aims. A world of design therefore might not necessarily have natural goodness or morality as part of the furniture of the world.

As James Barham (2004, 2007) also reminds us, mechanisms as systems of ‘cybernetic control’ are very poor models of living things. The substantial form, in contrast to a designed thing, acts from an internal principle of self-organization and internal striving. We might say that there is an ‘inside’ to a substantial form, in that a form strives to unfold according to its inherent goal. We cannot rightly speak this way about even the most complicated mechanism. John Searle (1986) has effectively showed how an ‘input/output’ mechanism, however complex, is precisely that entity that has no immanent aims or goals. An equally important point concerns what Searle in a different place (1997) says about the ‘construction of social reality’: green papers bills, for example, are declared to be money and to have purchasable power, merely because *we* give to money these normative features. This makes a piece of paper different than a flower, which has aims and goals whether or not human beings were around to observe these aims and goals. As such, a mechanism is an entity that has merely socially constructed, and therefore contingent, normativity. This is not to say that Searle would endorse giving an ‘inside’ and an inherent purpose and drive and internal agency to the entirety of the biological world. Moreover, while Searle (2002) has denied being a property dualist, much of his writing seems to suggest that mind is the curious holdout of mechano-atomism. But Searle’s insights can be exploited to show that we should in fact endorse an Aristotelian conception of form, and that we should therefore give to nature inherent normativity.

1.6 The Strong Argument: Ockham's Razor and Explanatory Success

Naturalists assume that, since Aristotelianism relies on teleological norms, and such norms have been shown to be obsolete, first through the Newtonian, and then again through the Darwinian revolutions, that Aristotle's notion of the 'naturally' good man is obsolete. Aristotelianism, despite calling itself a naturalism, seems antithetical to *scientific* naturalism, the current ontological and methodological starting point for most all work in contemporary moral theory. As just stated, accusing the Aristotelian of offering a world of design is a weak argument; but the stronger and more impressive critique of substantial form says that there is *just* mechanism in the natural world, and that mechanistic explanations are entirely successful without teleological considerations.

The criticism here is that the Aristotelian is wrong not because he posits design, but precisely because he *doesn't*. For, as Searle argues, what is 'designed' can be shown to be extrinsic and without natural meaning. For the scientific naturalist, this meaninglessness comes through *reduction* and *elimination*. And this is what I mean by saying that the naturalist is beholden to mechano-atomism. Since there is no God holding together the push-and-pull mechanism, this mechanism can be reduced to parts, which can in turn be reduced to the bottom rung of reality, whatever this is. In other words, only the bottom level is ontologically real, and higher-level features, precisely because they are construed mechanistically, have no ontological standing in their own right. The scientific naturalist claims that a mechanism is an extrinsic collection of parts with no 'inside', and that what the Aristotelian sees as an irreducible substantial form with inherent normativity in its own right is actually but a complicated machine, having no 'inside', and having no 'real' purpose or aims of its own. The difference for the naturalist

between a flower and a watch is merely the arrangement of parts and their differing ‘functional roles’. Neither entity is a substantial thing in its own right. Both are ‘accidental’ substances. As Barham puts this view: “According to the Mechanistic Consensus, the things that happen in organisms do not really happen for a purpose; it only looks that way.” (2007: 45)

The strength of this argument lies in its parsimony. It sees no difficulty in positing a wholesale eliminativism, and it sees no problem in giving nominalistic renderings to form. And in so doing, it maintains a position logically consistent with a bottom-up view of reality and with the application of Ockham’s razor. If the mechanistic worldview can give us everything we need without ever positing substantial formal and final cause, we should not bring in these Aristotelian metaphysical remnants. It was suggested earlier that many moral theories rely on a tacit dualism, and that we can avoid these tacit dualisms by accepting the Aristotelian view of nature. Yet as mentioned, we might also be able to avoid dualism if we accept wholesale eliminativism. This eliminativist argument against substantial form is a more impressive argument. Many moral theorists wanting to distance their own views of moral obligation from robust ontological commitments have offered arguments consistent with this naturalist critique of form, even if they do not see the eliminativist implications of the view. These moral theorists, whether they construe morality objectively or not, think that they can keep practical reason safely housed inside a mind that is explicitly considered as categorically different than the mechanistic nature around it. (cf. Rawls 1980, Korsgaard 1996, and Putnam 2005) Yet most naturalists, including most moral theorists who have gone this route, do not seem to have realized the power of their own argument against substantial

form, or its implications. The argument against form is an impressive argument precisely because no moral theory that criticizes Aristotelian substantial form can itself withstand scrutiny without positing a Cartesian-style mind/body dualism. For what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander: to insist on 'ethics without ontology', as Hilary Putnam words it, is to potentially leave practical reason as vulnerable to elimination as the substantial form that houses it. If an irreducible substantial form cannot withstand the naturalist critique, then most moral theories would seem incapable of withstanding it, unless these theories make explicit their dualist commitments. In other words, unless the moral theorist who eschews Aristotelianism posits a mind/body dualism, whereby he places 'practical reason' in some mental realm, away from a nature of mere mechanisms, he should be forced to adopt a strict naturalism and a radical eliminativism, and thereby forced to falsify his own anti-Aristotelian theory of moral obligation.

1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, reasons have been presented for accepting substantial form and for conceiving moral facts teleologically. Aristotelian moral realism assumes that substantial forms are irreducible wholes and have formal and final cause at their own level. A major component of Aristotle's version of realism is its construal of the human person as a substantial whole with a substantial form that is continuous with the natural order of natural forms as a whole. For as Thomas Nagel reminds us in *Mind and Cosmos*, "The entire animal kingdom, the endless generations of insects and spiders in their enormous, extravagant populations, all pose this same question about the order of nature." (2012: 55) In fact, it is only *because* we can speak of the inherent goodness of *every* substance

that we can speak of an inherent goodness of *any* substance, and therefore of the human substance. Of course, when we consider a human form as opposed to a form of a flower or a worm or a dolphin, we are speaking of a particularly advanced sort of rational, intelligent, intentional agent. But the human form is not different in idea from these other entities, despite these robust mental features. We cannot say that, just because the human being displays a complex sort of rationality and intentionality, that he is therefore outside the normative web of nature, for the same reason that we cannot say that natural normativity arises only on the human level. The human is a natural thing just like other natural things, and so his norms and goodness are analogously found in his very nature just like the norms and goodness of a mosquito are found in *its* nature.

Yet the Aristotelian needs to deal with naturalist objections to substantial form and the corresponding teleological conception of nature. In the next chapter, the strong argument just outlined will be examined in more detail, beginning with the claims of strict naturalism. Strict naturalists insist on physicalism and eliminativism. After some preliminary discussion of how a physicalist needs to not just properly reduce, but actually altogether *eliminate* higher-level features, an argument will be given that the liberal naturalist can only with difficulty save phenomenal consciousness and intentionality. Once these points are made, an argument for Aristotelian moral realism, one that relies on irreducible, substantial form, is more easily in our reach.

Chapter Two

Substantial Form and Mechano-Atomism

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will be devoted to an analysis of and response to the strong argument against substantial form. It will begin by discussing the difference between strict naturalism and liberal naturalism. Strict naturalists insist on eliminativism, whereas liberal naturalists agree that an acceptance of a scientifically responsible ontology need not force eliminativism upon us. After some preliminary discussion of how a physicalist needs to not just properly reduce, but altogether *eliminate* higher-level features, it will be concluded that liberal naturalism is a problematic view, and that only strict naturalism is consistent with the bottom-up commitments espoused by all naturalists.

Once these arguments are made, an argument for Aristotelian value realism, one that relies on irreducible, substantial form, is more easily in our reach. It was argued in the last chapter that the Aristotelian alternative can best be defended thusly: facts about the goodness of the human being reduce to natural facts inherent to the human form, precisely because we can read the human being as containing immanent aims and ends. If a conception of nature that necessitates seeing natural entities as analyzable through formal and final cause can be defended over and against an eliminativist view of the same, then a defense of Aristotelian realism about the good can more clearly present itself. Thus, it needs to be shown that reductive and eliminativist conceptions of nature are problematic and incomplete.

It can be shown that reading nature as containing, at bottom, substantial forms, is the right way to go. But my way of showing this is ecumenical. For it can be argued that, *for the most part*, eliminativist readings of nature are adequate. This equality in explanation is seen even if the strict naturalist necessarily concludes that reductive readings of nature entail nominalist construals of natural kind terms.

As for the necessity of nominalist readings: if natural kinds are but mechanisms, then they are not irreducible wholes. As such, the reductive reading of nature cannot properly endorse an *ontology* of natural kinds, making the words we use to refer to such things mere placeholders for the amalgams of parts that constitute the ‘thing’ in question.

This argument does not by itself disprove an a-teleological reading of nature. After all, there are many naturalists who endorse ontological eliminativism. Thus, the Aristotelian can concede that nominalist readings of natural kinds ‘work’, and that, therefore, the mechanical reading of nature can hold its weight, as long as its endorser accepts eliminativism and nominalism.

Nevertheless, the reductive reading of nature faces two further problems. For firstly, the mechanical reading can only explain *for the most part* what needs explaining: it cannot, even by its own starting points, explain consciousness. Mechanical readings of nature fall short of making sense of phenomenal properties. This has been argued by many in the naturalist camp; however, I mean to show that more might be concluded than what usually is (by, say, ‘property dualists’, etc.). Secondly, even when explaining the workings of entities that presumably aren’t conscious, the mechanical reading of nature must constantly make use of a *semantics* of agency and teleology, and deny that purpose is actually observed. But purpose clearly is observed.

So the mechanical reading of nature must make use of two sorts of unfulfilled promissory notes. First, when it comes to the powers of the mind, it must promise to explain—at some point—how phenomenal properties identify with a mechanical materiality: that is, it must close the ‘epistemic gap’ (Montero 2003), or what is also called the ‘explanatory’ gap, a gap that is left open after an insistence by physicalists on the closing of the ontological gap. If a physicalist feels that the epistemic gap will forever stay open, he must concede ‘mysterianism’. But the Aristotelian has equal right to suggest a reading of nature that relies on irreducible substantial form, if the physicalist must call upon promissory notes regardless. And he must. Thus, the Aristotelian simply has no reason to move a metaphysical inch if advocates of the mechano-atomist view must themselves resort to mysterianism and unfulfilled promissory notes.

Secondly, a mechanical reading of nature must promise to eventually ‘cash out’ its explanations by incorporating the language of agency via the language of mechanism, and at the same time deny that we observe purpose in nature. After all, it cannot rightly conclude the falsity of the Aristotelian system if it must constantly make use of the very teleological and goal-saturated vocabulary assumed by the Aristotelian. But, as many naturalists concede, natural explanations are unfortunately tied to the language of teleology and agency. As James Barham argues, “Although biologists may *say* that it is only a matter of convenience, the fact is that biological treatises and textbooks are saturated with teleological, normative, and even intentional terminology of every sort, and it would in fact be impossible to discuss the phenomena of life at all without recourse to such descriptors.” (2007: 36) And even if teleological language can eventually be

replaced, the naturalist still has to explain why a mechanical reading is better, even when it requires an insistence that our common sense observation is in error.

Thus, both sorts of promissory notes, I argue, are unable to be fulfilled. So, *even if* mechano-atomism accepts the reductionist, eliminativist nihilism that is forced upon its own view, it still can only for the most part give the sorts of explanations that are needed for that view to be true and for the Aristotelian alternative view to be false. We should not be content with promissory notes or ‘property dualism’ or mysterianism. Reductive conceptions of reality force us to give unsatisfactory descriptions of nature--descriptions that leave wide epistemic gaps, and descriptions that force us to accept on faith that they are the correct interpretation of nature, despite their inability to avoid, both semantically and observationally, the very teleology they deny exists in nature. Yet, precisely because there is equity in explanation *otherwise*, we therefore have every reason for preferring the Aristotelian reading of nature.

2.2 Naturalism is Strict Naturalism, and Strict Naturalism is Eliminativism

One can say without much controversy that naturalism is the canvas upon which nearly all professional philosophical work has been painted for some time, with some going so far as to say that our current age is “reductionist and naturalistic to a fault.” (Setiya 2012) A respectable argument in the philosophy of mind or morals—two of the busiest areas in the discipline—can hardly fail to pay allegiance to a naturalist worldview; one looks in vain for a widely-read philosopher of mind or morals who rejects naturalism *tout court*. That is to say, while many reject what is sometimes referred to as *strict* naturalism, or ‘scientism’ as it is sometimes called, few will go so far as to qualify their rejection as

anti-naturalist, or in outright opposition to the naturalist project. Instead, many adopt what is called *liberal* naturalism. (cf. De Caro and MacArthur 2007 and 2010) Liberal naturalism can best be defined as an accommodationism. The liberal naturalist rejects supernaturalism, Platonism, and Cartesianism, and he rejects any attempt to posit an ontology apart from what the sciences have shown us exist. Most importantly, the liberal naturalist accepts the bottom-up picture of the world: all that exists is built up from what physicists tells us exists at the bottom-most layer of reality. Yet the liberal naturalist rejects eliminativism and reductionism about mind and even sometimes about morals. Liberal naturalists argue that a scientifically responsible picture of reality can make room for those features of our common sense experience that a strictly scientific picture of reality seems to eschew. Thus, the liberal naturalist says that a bottom-up picture of the world can accommodate, e.g., moral realism (e.g., Brink 1989 and Shafer-Landau 2005) and ‘robust’ theories of mind (e.g., Chalmers 1997).

Yet liberal naturalism, properly considered, is not a valid option for the naturalist. To be a naturalist is, in the end, to be a strict naturalist. To see why, a description of strict naturalism is in order. The strict naturalist’s position might be best described as radically revisionist, in that it holds that folk psychological intuitions are in need of radical revising, and their contents explained away or eliminated. Daniel Dennett (1992), for example, has famously argued that any philosophy of mind that leaves either of its most noticeable features—qualitative states and intentionality--irreducible to physical, non-intentional, non-phenomenal, mechanical entities and processes, cannot properly consider itself an *explanation* of those very mental features. Stephen Stich (1998) has argued that, whereas we previously gave animistic explanations to, e.g., lightning and trees, we now

know that those explanations are ‘screamingly false.’ Likewise, whereas we currently give explanations that rely on consciousness, intentionality, and even irreducible substantial form, we should now say that these sorts of explanations are also wrong. As C.S. Lewis once worded it, “We, who have personified all other things, turn out to be ourselves mere personifications. Man is indeed akin to the gods, that is, he is no less phantasmal than they.” (2002: 81-82)

Strict naturalism might be captured by the slogan: ‘The bottom-level is the only level.’ This is to say that, while both the strict naturalist and liberal naturalist, along with many philosophers outside of the mainline naturalist milieu--like Aristotelians--all agree that macro-level objects and higher-level properties are constituted by the physical entities on the lowest level of reality, the strict naturalist does not think that any amalgamation of these bottom-level entities gives rise to *additional* ontologically worthy entities. Strict naturalism is therefore an explicit Laplaceanism, in that it holds that, if, for example, we wanted to give a complete and exhaustive explanation of mind, the physicist would not need to consult a neuroscientist, who in turn would not need to consult a psychologist, in order to get this complete explanation. Richard Rorty endorses strict naturalism this way: “Every speech, thought, theory, poem, composition, and philosophy will turn out to be completely predictable in purely naturalistic terms. Some atoms-and-the-void account of micro-processes within individual human beings will permit the prediction of every sound or inscription which will ever be uttered. There are no ghosts.” (from Taliaferro 2010: 76) But the strict naturalist denies more than ghosts. He seems to imply that it is only *because* of a (false) belief in ghosts that the man on the street can account existentially for those higher-level features of reality that seem, *prima facie*, to

resist reduction. According to the strict naturalist, it could only because of an immaterial substance or force that, for example, an organic living thing becomes an irreducible whole, over and above its parts. It is the immaterial entity that ‘holds together’ such entities. But precisely because there are no ghosts holding these higher-level features in place or together, we should be able to ‘cash them out’ entirely from our ontology. The strict naturalist argues that when we take away things like immaterial minds, soul, vitalist principles, other supernatural entities, that we are left with merely *mechanically* rendered macro-level entities where what looks like organic, substantial forms, and these mechanisms, being just amalgamations of lower-level entities, are therefore not entities in their own right.

Once these explanations and reductions have been successfully made, we are left with a picture of the world that is remarkably different than what our common sense tells us is so. Alex Rosenberg argues, “Science--especially physics and biology—reveals that reality is completely different from what most people think. It’s not just different from what credulous religious believers think. Science reveals that reality is stranger than what many atheists recognize.” (2011: 25) For this revised picture of reality speaks only of the existence of this bottom level, making it necessary to construe higher-level features *nominalistically*. When I speak of a ‘nominalist’ construal of a thing, I mean that it is given a fictionalist construal based on an uncomplicated mereological reading of the lowest level entities. In other words, if we were counting all of the objects in a room, and that room contained a single person, I would not count all of the atoms making up that person’s cells, and then all of the cells, and then the *person* himself. To count in this way would be redundant for the strict naturalist. There are just atoms, and that’s it--though,

one should not even speak of atoms, since they are themselves reducible to smaller things.⁵ Thus, there are no people. There are only (nominalistically-read) ‘people’.

For the strict naturalist, the atomistic and mechanical bumping and amalgamating—while interesting and important from our perspective—is the only reality. So not only does the strict naturalist argue that there is no *natural* purpose to a person’s life or to anything else, but just as relevantly, a ‘person’ and ‘life’ should properly be eliminated and explained away, and their linguistic referents be ‘looking-glassed’, or given nominalist rendering. Thus, since folk psychological intuitions concerning mind and purpose need revising by the strict naturalist, so obviously must our intuitions concerning the reality of goodness and value, since the positing of natural human goodness relies, at the very least, on teleology, intentionality, irreducible human form, and phenomenal consciousness—all things that the strict naturalist’s revised ontology leaves out. Thus we *must* say that the strict naturalist holds to a *radical eliminativism*. The most charitable reading of radical eliminativism is to say, as argued, that the eliminativist wants to give nominalist readings of higher-levels of reality. In fact, this seems to be the only way to construe the strict naturalist’s position in a coherent way.

2.3 Physicalism as Mechano-Atomism

Naturalists of all sorts, whether liberal or strict, assume *physicalism*. What is important about physicalism as currently understood is that it relies on what Freya Mathews calls ‘mechano-atomism’. Mathews explains: “The fundamental feature of mechano-atomism, logically and metaphysically speaking, is that it is an ontology of *discrete material*

⁵ While acknowledging the decomposability of atoms, I will continue to use the phrase ‘mechano-atomism’ as a way of describing the reductionism that mechanistic explanations of nature call for.

substances--atoms—which are in themselves inert, that is they embody no principle of agency; their motion is imparted to them via the agency of external forces, and in no way represents an ‘unfolding’ of their own inner nature.” (2002: 30) The phrase ‘which are themselves inert’ is important here. It is a *mechanical* view of nature. Mechano-atomism is the view that nature is made of bits that obey a stupid, push-and-pull, desultory bumping, combining, and swirling. Thus Richard Rorty writes that we live in the time of the “..triumph of *mechanistic* materialism,” who in turn quotes Philip Petit saying that “...a naturalistic, more or less *mechanical* image of the universe is imposed on us by cumulative developments in physics, biology and neuroscience...” (De Caro 2010: 84) Many naturalists might balk at the outdated talk of ‘atoms’ and ‘mechanism’ to describe their own, contemporary physicalist view. After all, talk of atoms and such might be merely the refuse of a defunct Newtonian ‘materialism’. *Physicalism*, the successor to materialism, does not commit itself to Newtonian conceptions of inert matter and force, but merely to whatever in fact it is that the bottom-level of reality is like and what it really does.

The problems with the revised view will be spoken of more in section fourteen of Chapter Six. But for the moment, we should point out that while it is true that the physicalist is not historically committed to Newtonianism, and is instead open to accept strange conceptions of the bottom-layer, he still needs to hold, it seems, that the basic level of reality is inert and mindless, made of discrete bits, with the bits individually not having any intrinsic aim or goal—even if some of these bits can go through walls. The physicalist seems committed to the idea that there has been, in the words of Thomas Nagel, an extraordinary “...formation from dead matter of physical systems.” (2012: 9)

John Searle words it best, when arguing in the introduction to his book *Mind, Brains, and Science* that, "...our basic explanatory mechanisms...work from the *bottom up*." (1985: 5) And later, "...we think of ourselves as conscious, free, mindful, rational agents in a world that science tells us consists entirely of *mindless, meaningless physical particles*." (1985: 5, my emphasis) After explaining throughout the book how it is that we are indeed conscious intentional agents *anyway*, he closes his book by telling us that throughout the book he has "[tried] to characterize the relationships between the conception that we have of ourselves as rational, free, conscious, mindful agents with a conception that we have of the world as consisting of *mindless, meaningless, physical particles*." (1985: 105)

The (rare) anti-naturalist J.P. Moreland words views like Searle's in this way: "Prior to the emergence of consciousness, the universe contained nothing but aggregates of particles/waves standing in fields of forces relative to each other. The story of the development of the cosmos is told in terms of the rearrangement of micro-parts into increasingly more complex structures according to natural law. On a naturalist depiction of matter, it is brute mechanical, physical stuff." (2009: 25) Mechano-atomism seems to be assumed when David Levine speaks of the 'basic' properties of the bottom level: "Only non-mental properties are instantiated in a *basic* way; all mental properties are instantiated by being realized by the instantiation of other, basic non-mental properties." (2004: 21) Gregg Rosenberg (2004), a philosopher who wants to challenge this view, helpfully describes the base level of physical reality as encompassing what he calls 'bare difference' between basic entities. The physicalist, he argues, needs to work under 'purity conditions'. He warns that if we give 'intrinsic' or 'robust' properties to base-level entities, this makes it impossible for synchronic causation (bottom-up causation) to be

‘pure’. And once the synchronic causal process has been sullied by occult features on the lower levels, we cannot rightly speak of logical derivation, deciphered a priori. In which case, we cannot maintain consistency between lower and higher levels of reality across possible worlds. But if we cannot maintain this sort of consistency, we seem to be assuming a ‘specialness’ to our own colloquial, physical stuff, making it, to steal the famous words of J.L. Mackie, utterly different than anything in the universe—or at the very least, utterly different than anything in any other possible one. The strict naturalist just insists that, precisely because such purity conditions hold, no amalgamation of discrete bits adds up to an ‘irreducible’ macro-level property ‘in its own right’, let alone a macro-level *entity* with intrinsic aim all its own.

2.4 *Ceci n’est pas une table*, or The Problem of Making Distinctions that Matter

An easy example of a higher-level *property* that seems to derive purely and consistently from discrete, inert bits, is *solidity*. Philosophers as early as Arthur Eddington have pointed out that, once we accept an atomist, mechanistic ontology, we have trouble making sense of an ontology of artifactual objects, along with the properties they exhibit.⁶ For macro-level entities and properties should be ‘cashed out’ through an identification with combinatorial and locomotive entities of the atomistic (or lower) base level. Recently, Trenton Merricks (2003) has made similar arguments about such objects. Solidity is a property that logically derives from an atomistic base that is not itself solid. Thus, there is no possible way (or there is no ‘possible world’) for atoms to fail to display the feature that we call solidity *if* the atoms are in a certain combinatorial and locomotive amalgam. If you have certain atoms moving in a certain way in a certain physical

⁶ For a discussion of Eddington’s view, see Strawson 2006, p. 9-12.

combination, you will necessarily get what looks like and feels like a solid thing. Yet solidity is *nothing but* certain atoms behaving in a way that brings about a certain feature—hardness. Thus, argues Merricks, *properly speaking*, solid structures like tables aren't *really* part of the furniture of the world--not 'in their own right'--for 'tables' display features, like hardness, that can be entirely 'cashed out' by the behavior and causal bump-and-grind efficacy of the atoms that are arranged table-wise, and all of the causally efficacious properties that a table might have are likewise cashed out in terms of the causally efficacious nature of these same atoms. To add a table to one's ontology in addition to all of the atoms making up that table would be redundant.

So that is how the strict naturalist⁷ cashes out much of the furniture of the world. But if strict naturalists are only saying *this*, then this might not be a troubling idea to the man on the street. After all, while we say that solidity isn't 'really' there, this analysis won't turn a table into sand, or make it gooey. It's still solid from our perspective. And its solidity is not a 'secondary' property, imposed on the world by us. The atomic movement and amalgamation logically produce what we *all* experience as solidity. Such an analysis doesn't stop anyone from easily picking out tables from the other atomic detritus surrounding the table. Nor can anyone say that picking out tables from among the other atomic debris nearby is merely an ad hoc activity, or because our minds are causing us to see something that isn't really there. The table is there because of atomic forces *out there*, behaving in certain ways. In the movie *Moneyball*, Brad Pitt's character, Billy Beane, throws a table through his office window in a moment of rage. Say you were watching this movie with a strict naturalist, and he turns to you and says, "Now, you probably think

⁷ Of course, Merricks himself is not a strict naturalist, because he thinks that mind is an exception to this reductive picture.

that there is this solid thing called a *table*, and this macro-level hard thing caused the window to break. But actually, what caused the window to break—and let's remember that there really are no such thing as windows either—were the configured motions of particular atoms, and the events involving them. No 'thing' that was 'solid', technically, broke anything." We should probably respond to him by saying that he was making a distinction that was no distinction at all. It is difficult to see how a solid object isn't *really* there, since it clearly *is* there. After all, we have to refer to *it* in order to deny its 'real' existence.

2.5 Eliminativism About Organic Substantial Form

These points about solidity are perhaps uncontroversial, and they are certainly uninteresting. The strict naturalist may seem to be splitting hairs by drawing up his ontology of tables differently than the man on the street. But these same arguments *might* prove devastating when applied to other more contentious and cherished parts of our lived world, like organic entities. It's one thing to reduce windows to bits. It's another thing to reduce flowers and yaks in the same way. For the strict naturalist's eliminativist arguments to be disillusioning or truly revisionist, he needs to show that a feature of the world that seems to resist elimination, and that we rely upon for making sense of our world, is not really there in its own right. And it is precisely because the strict naturalist says he can do to life, substantial form, mind, meaning, and value, what he did with tables, that the man on the street should be worried.

For example, the strict naturalist thinks that we should construe *a living thing* as merely the mechanistic, combinatorial, and locomotive powers of certain inert bits on the

bottom-level. If discrete bits are arranged in a certain pattern, argues the strict naturalist, then we'll necessarily get those features that we associate with a living thing. That is, life is not the product of the 'breath of God' over and above the discrete bottom bits. No vitalist force holds together a flower, making a flower a substantial form, irreducible to its parts. Life just *is* the bottom-bits working in a certain, complex pattern.

Nancy Murphy explains. "In the early years of the twentieth century there was a controversy in the philosophy of biology between vitalists and emergentists. The vitalists took an Aristotelian line: there must be something—a vital force—to direct the formation of an organism and to account for its being alive. The emergentists replied that all one needed was the proper functioning of a suitably complex entity and it would be alive. Life is an emergent property that is dependent on complex organization, not on an additional entity or non-material stuff. So this was the last gasp of the ancient and medieval ideal of the soul as a life force." (2006: 45) Strict naturalists will deny the existence of a vitalist force. But they also want to temper the excitement over talk of emergence. The first 'life forms' were not radically or substantially new kinds of things over and above the inert bits around them; they were just particularly interesting amalgams of amino acids. And things have merely *mechanically* unfolded (or evolved) from these first simple 'life' forms (read: amalgams of amino acids). With this new explanation of life, the strict naturalist asks us to agree with Michael Ghiselin, who writes, "When does human life begin? Never, for it is part of an unbroken series of generations that goes back to Darwin's warm little pond," (Cunningham 2010: 154), and with Nobel Prize winner François Jacob, who argues that, precisely because logical derivation describes the difference between inert bits and 'living' things, that technically

speaking, biology no longer studies life. (S. Smith 2010: 189) There is no such thing as life, it seems, precisely because there is no such thing as an organic substantial form. After all, there could only *be* such an irreducible entity if it were ‘held together’ by an immaterial force that, as it turns out, doesn’t really exist. So there are no living things, technically speaking. There are just interesting, moving and sometimes even ‘thinking’, but very much lifeless, *mechanisms*.

What’s important here is this talk of mechanism. For otherwise, the man on the street should be confused by the conclusion that there is no such thing as life merely because there is no vitalist force. For certainly, while vitalist forces have been explained away, we can still draw a distinction between living things and dead things. Upon hearing that mere material forces make living things possible, the man on the street who thought that a vital force or ghost was needed to bring about the features of a living thing would not cease believing that things were alive—for this is rather impossible—but instead he would come to realize that it is *matter itself* that has the *power* to bring about an irreducible, living thing. Not disillusionment, but awe and wonder, would and should be the response. In fact, the vitalist’s ontology is rather *less* interesting and fantastical. It is as if God needs to ‘cheat’, and bring in an extra spiritual substance, to bring about a living thing from the now mechanically rendered dust whence it came.

We also need to remember that when Nancy Murphy describes vitalist forces as an ‘Aristotelian’ suggestion, that this was merely a strange way of interpreting Aristotle in that historical era mentioned. Vitalism is not *truly* an Aristotelian explanation; for it is a way of explaining life that is only required once we accept a mechanical picture of nature. In other words, vitalism follows from and is parasitic on Newtonianism and

Cartesianism, not Aristotelianism. Freya Mathews explains the lineage of this view when it comes to mind and life: “An immediate prima facie consequence of mechanism is, as Descartes demonstrated, dualism with respect to body and mind. If matter is dead, inert, lifeless and blind, and if the human body is material, then it looks as if some extra principle must be present in the body to render it animate and conscious. This extra non-material principle was identified by Descartes as the principle of spirit or mind...” (2002: 40) In the ancient or medieval world, the man on the street would not have been particularly troubled by the strict naturalist’s insistence that life was not a whirling of *élan vital*. We need to remember, argues Murphy, that ancient, medieval, and ‘religious’ metaphysics are sometimes interpreted through a paradigm that is alien to those very systems. So, in an important way, the naturalist’s insistence on the removal of immaterial minds and vital forces is actually to get us *closer* to the Aristotelian vision of the world. The Aristotelian views nature as a continuum, and not as a split between mind and matter.

2.6 Aristotelianism is a Physicalism

So, strict naturalism’s understanding of life merely exemplifies its rejection of a ‘supernatural’ or ‘immaterial’ principle that the Aristotelian himself has no use for. By their own insistence, naturalists can be more generally seen as rejecting miracles or special creation. Many essays and books on naturalism begin by noting that naturalism is the doctrine that rejects the supernatural, ‘gods’, and fairies. It is the idea that naturalism might be just all about making sure we have a causal story for everything that we need a causal story about, and that this causal story cannot rely on entities that seem to transcend

the material order. Owen Flanagan, for example, suggests that, “Naturalism’ names a modest position. It serves primarily to mark [an] orientation off from non-naturalistic and especially *super-naturalistic* views.” (2007: 2) Likewise Mario De Caro argues that if one’s commitments are ontologically naturalist, then “no entity or explanation should be accepted whose existence or truth could contradict the laws of nature, insofar as we know them.” (2010: 171)

If this is how we are to view naturalism, then it might both be against the positing of mystical entities that serve as an *explanans* for an outstanding *explanandum*, and also against all *further* scientific research. In this sense, naturalism is against the scientist in the famous comic strip showing a professor who, after detailing a long math equation on a chalkboard, writes “...and then a miracle occurs.” Naturalism is thus against *special creation*. But so is Aristotelianism.

Naturalism construed as an anti-supernaturalist argument is perfectly consistent with Aristotelianism, and it makes naturalism something that, *methodologically*, has no bearing on the question of the existence of substantial form. For the Aristotelian is just as eager to ban Cartesian souls and the sort of ‘intelligent’ designer much maligned in the biological community, and he is just as hesitant to suggest special creation to bring us to a total explanation of that which needs to be explained. Aristotelianism argues for a hylomorphist conception of the human form, for instance, and insists that the soul is the form of the human body. Thus the form and matter of the human substance are not ontologically distinct. Leon Kass makes this point well, writing, “Study, as such, dissolves the unity of the living being. Although soul-and-body or form-and-matter are,

in being, concrete, grown-together and as inseparable as the concave and the convex, speech divides them and cannot bespeak their true unity.” (Kass 2002: 45)

So we do not need to accept any special reductive ontological commitments merely by being physicalist. Moreover, if ‘methodological’ naturalism is merely thought of as a harmless research agenda that *precedes* any such metaphysical declarations, we have no reason to ban formal and final causality. Cries of ‘God did it’ aren’t helpful, but as Conor Cunningham writes, “To invoke matter today as the most basic term of our philosophical worldview is equivalent to saying ‘God did it,’” (2010: 200) because, of course, mere matter leaves explanatory gaps, as noted above. And for this reason, we should therefore be wary of views that, as an a priori posit (and not as a provisional research program), prohibit, a richer, teleological conception of nature.

2.7 Substantial Form vs. Mechanism

The Aristotelian thinks that Rorty is partly right: there are no ghosts when it comes to life. Yet he is wrong to think that a living thing is nothing *more than* a collection of parts. A substantial form is not ‘held together’ through a vitalist force, so therefore the only way that the strict naturalist can shock the Aristotelian is if, in addition to eliminating vitalist forces, the strict naturalist also somehow effectively shows that people are just ‘people’, as in, purposeless mechanisms reducible to parts, and not existent in their own right, or on the ‘level’ of the person. For the only way that the eliminativist can truly give a nominalist reading of what clearly *looks like* a substantial and irreducible living form with its own immanent striving and inherent normativity, is by construing it *mechanistically*. The difference, says the strict naturalist, between (on one hand) a watch,

and on the other hand, a kidney or a human being, is merely the complexity of organization. Everything in the natural world, argues the strict naturalist, should be given an 'intentional stance' the same way that we give one to a watch. A watch is but an amalgamation of atomic bits. There is nothing irreducible about it. What goes for watches goes for organic things, argues the strict naturalist. There is no difference in *ontological kind* between a watch and a flower; there is only a difference in degree. But no matter the degree of complexity, a complex thing is still able to be 'cashed out' and eliminated by way of its parts the same way that a table is.

If the strict naturalist can effectively show that a living thing is reducible to parts and therefore not ontologically relevant in its own right, then he would have good reason to think that we need to doubt our common sense intuitions. This brings with it a slightly different worry than the removal of the vitalist force. For actually, when the strict naturalist says that life is a logical derivation from inert bits, and when Francois Jacob says that we biologists don't really study life anymore, they are actually saying something about what mere mechanical atoms properly amalgamated can give us, and what they cannot give us. Just as a watch is but a mechanism and not alive, neither is a flower. And just as there is no 'point' to a watch other than one we ascribe to it, there is no *inherent* purpose or goal to a flower. And just as a watch can be 'cashed out' by way of its discrete bits, so can an organic entity.

So we *might* have a real difference: the man on the street seems to believe in irreducible, organic, substantial forms; the naturalist by contrast believes that the world is made up of lifeless mechanisms reducible to parts. But the strict naturalist doesn't really give us reasons for doubting substantial form. The problem for the strict naturalist,

however, is that he might not be able to effectively convince the man on the street that a revision of his common sense intuitions regarding substantial form are necessary. The only argument in their favor is the argument from logical derivation: from inert bits we do not get irreducible organic substantial forms.

But this argument alone does not seem to give us reason to doubt the existence of such forms. An interesting example by Aristotelian philosopher Edward Feser (2012a) helps explain why. He recounts a short horror film called *Cool Air*. In the film, a young woman visits an old friend of her father's—a scientist--and she finds that this mysterious scientist likes to keep his apartment at a particularly cool temperature. The climax of the film shows the woman discovering the man taking a 'motion elixir' in his bathroom. An obituary of the man from twenty years earlier hangs on the wall. The man confesses to the woman: he has been dead for over twenty years. The scientist explains that it was only through a combination of elixirs, homegrown chemicals, and cool air, that he had kept himself from decomposing. The woman leaves the apartment in horror, knowing that the undead reside inside.

While this is a fun story, it also makes no sense, if we rid our minds of the idea that a living thing must be 'held together' by a vitalist force or an immaterial soul. The man in the apartment *had* all of the relevant features of a living person, and therefore certainly *was* an irreducible form in his own right. While 'dead', he still—it seems—was self aware, aged, got hungry and thirsty, ate and digested food, gained and lost weight, went to the bathroom, walked around, thought about things and acted for reasons, shed and grew skins cells, and talked about things with purpose and meaning. To say that the whole time this was going on, he was actually *dead*, makes no sense. It doesn't start to

make sense, moreover, if we explain the horror of the film by saying that the man twenty years earlier lost access to an additional immaterial entity, like a vitalist force or the breath of God or some such thing, making him ‘truly’ alive. If the scientist was ‘dead’ but doing everything that a person alive would do, then the vitalist force is clearly epiphenomenal and useless anyway, even if it existed prior to his ‘death’. So if the man taking elixirs was really ‘dead’ or was a zombie, it is difficult to tell how he was different than a regular ‘living’ human being.

So the key is whether 1) we can construe the man in the cool room as a mechanism, even though he displays all of these features, and 2) *if* we construe him as a mechanism, we are therefore allowing him to be reduced to parts, precisely because the man will no longer display any features that cannot be explained through logical derivation of the original purity conditions of the bottom level. If we can do this, then we’ll see that what *prima facie* looked like an irreducible form with immanent aim and inherent normativity, is really but an amalgam of interlocking parts with no inherent purpose or meaning—an ‘accidental’ form. If we can do this, then the strict naturalist might be right to say that, since there is no vitalist force, we are all like the scientist in the apartment.

But here’s where the problem arises for the strict naturalist. The Aristotelian should only concede the mechanistic construal of a living thing if the strict naturalist can definitively show that what *looks and appears to be* an irreducible substantial form, with immanent aim and inherent normativity, is really but a complicated machine with none of these natural features. I submit that the strict naturalist cannot convincingly make this argument.

2.8 Irreducible Consciousness and The Sliding Tile Puzzle

There are several reasons why a substantial form cannot be construed as a mechanism. A defense of irreducible substantial form will involve explications of some well-known thought experiments in the philosophy of mind—ones involving bats, zombies, Chinese Rooms, and a Twin Earth. While to use these experiments is to go down a well-trod path, one can squeeze out of them some implications that haven't yet been properly addressed—implications that push us towards an Aristotelian view of form, and therefore an Aristotelian view of value.

To start off: mechano-mechanism arguably cannot account for phenomenal consciousness. And if this is true, we have ample reason to doubt the mechano-atomist worldview altogether, or at least reason to think that our common sense picture of the world, one involving irreducible living things with formal and final cause, need not be radically revised. If mechano-atomism fails to account for a key feature of the natural world, we have reason to think that it is a problematic conception of the world. But it seems as if one of the major roadblocks, or perhaps the only roadblock, to accepting the existence of substantial form is mechano-atomism. Once this roadblock is removed, we have much more reason to believe that substantial form exists, and therefore much more reason to believe that the nature of the human substantial form entails a certain sort of normativity, and therefore much more reason to be realists about value. The failure of phenomenal consciousness does not make merely a 'hard problem'. It shows us that the mechano-atomist paradigm should be abandoned entirely.

David Chalmers (1997) famously argues that phenomenal consciousness shows a feature (or *is* a feature) that is not logically derivative of any combination of discrete physical bits. So a world only displaying the sort of synchronic causality that is not in violation of the purity conditions of physicalism would not generate a phenomenally conscious being. But, he argues, such a world *could* nevertheless produce entities that, while not phenomenally conscious, would outwardly *behave* just like conscious beings. Chalmers calls such a being a zombie. In assuming that this sort of world is possible, Chalmers is assuming a reductively behaviorist conception of human psychology, whereby it is possible to ‘cash out’ immanently human *psychological* intentionality (including beliefs, etc) through human behavior, whereby the human agent turns into an input/output *machine* to which we merely attribute an ‘intentional stance’. And while Chalmers himself does not further insist that this input/output mechanism is reducible to parts making up the bottom level of reality, we should see now that, as soon as we have conceded a mechanistic universe, we have accepted an atomistic universe as well.

Chalmers concludes that our world is a combination of 1) logical derivation, which fixes, atomistically and mechanistically, human ‘beings’ and therefore human *behavior* on a functionalist and behaviorist theory of mind, and also fixes mechanistically other ‘organic’ forms, like flowers and frogs, *and* 2) a radically emergent property--phenomenal consciousness—that supervenes on humans and dolphins and frogs (and as Chalmers argues, also flowers and thermostats). Since logical derivation can explain all *causal interaction* and all human and non-human ‘organic’ behavior, then phenomenal consciousness, as an addendum to an otherwise physicalist, mechano-atomistic world, merely epiphenomenally supervenes on mechanisms in that world. And that’s what our

world is: we are reducible mechanisms that are epiphenomenally conscious. It seems, that is, as if Chalmers assumes that we are only alive because of an epiphenomenal property that supervenes on an amalgam of parts.

We should understand, first off, that Chalmers is endorsing property dualism, in the style of Descartes' own substance dualism. Chalmers' endorsement of property dualism stems from his insistence that phenomenal consciousness, when duly separated from animal behavior (that can itself be cashed out functionally and mechanistically), survives the reduction of logical derivation. Chalmers also seems to be assuming, like the writers of *Cool Air*, that a living thing is only 'alive' if it contains a vitalist force. Since Chalmers does not believe in such forces, he seems to be working under the assumption that a zombie isn't really alive. Like Descartes, Chalmers seems to be working under the assumption that self-motion and self-repair, among other features of organic things (Oderberg 2008), are not marks of life. I will return to this facet of Chalmers' thinking in a moment. For now, we should see that, for Chalmers, it seems as if phenomenal consciousness gets its existential fitting through what Chalmers dubs *metaphysical* supervenience. This sort of supervenience, as opposed to mere logical supervenience, gives rise to features that transcend a mere logical ('every possible world') derivation from a subvenient base. If something metaphysically supervenes, its emergence or realization is, while dependent on the physical base, also dependent on a metaphysical story that does not carry across all possible worlds. But while Descartes gives the status of immaterial *substance* to mind, whereby *all* of mind's features are housed in this autonomous, immaterial substance, Chalmers insists that physicalism is true of the whole of reality, and that the only feature that should be construed immaterially is phenomenal

consciousness. But since physicalism entails monism, phenomenal consciousness is not situated as a substance against this mechano-atomist nature. It is instead treated merely as an immaterial *property* of an otherwise physical-cum-mechano-atomist world.

By making these arguments, Chalmers is one of the many philosophers who are placed in the ‘liberal’ naturalist tradition. For Chalmers is one of the many philosophers of mind who are trying to avoid substance dualism about mind while also trying to avoid the eliminativism that physicalism seems to entail.

But I don’t think this is right. For Chalmers is most assuredly a *Cartesian* in that, like Descartes, he construes nature mechanistically, and does not see self-motion and self-repair as signs of living things with formal and final cause. More interestingly, Chalmers seems to work with the exact same template as the *strict* naturalist. It’s just that, whereas the strict naturalist thinks that every feature can be cashed out physicalistically, Chalmers thinks (like Merricks) that a *single feature* withstands physical reduction. However, the strict naturalist is right to see Chalmers’ property dualism as suspicious. Much earlier in the century, J.J. Smart had written in *Sensations and Brain Processes*: “[S]ensations, states of consciousness...seem to be the one sort of thing left outside the physicalist picture, and for various reasons I just cannot believe that this can be so....That everything should be explicable in terms of physics...except the occurrence of sensations seems to me frankly unbelievable.” (from Lycan 2010: 6) But Smart’s ‘should’ is not strong enough. They *must* be explicable by way of the mechano-atomistic base, meaning that we *must* posit a radical eliminativism if physicalism, construed as mechano-atomism, is true. If we find a *single* feature that withstands the

eliminativist construal of nature through mechano-atomism, then we have found a reason to question the entire paradigm.

If Chalmers is right in thinking that he has found such a feature, he might therefore be wrong in thinking that some sort of property dualism, a dualism seemingly faithful to naturalism, is a viable option. For we should doubt that the myriad 'liberal naturalist' options are our best routes. This is merely to leave the entire mechano-atomist story intact, when it has shown itself, at least to property dualists like Chalmers, to not be up to the ontological task. If a naturalist sees consciousness as irreducible, he should also find property dualism problematic. But rather than endorsing 'mysterianism' about the mental, like (e.g.) McGinn (1999), whereby it is declared that consciousness is physical, but that we will never be able to figure out how this identification works, the naturalist might instead see valid reasons for doubting the naturalist paradigm altogether. As Lewis Lycan (2008) argues, in an interesting paper called 'Giving Dualism Its Due,' neither mysterianism or promissory note physicalism are options that a Cartesian mind/body dualist should have to take seriously either.

Lycan's own insistence that we should 'give dualism its due' is preferable, but it should be qualified. If we are forced to posit property dualism or mysterianism, or even promissory note reductionism, we could also say that the mechano-atomist interpretation of physicalism is problematic. But therefore, we should agree with Freya Mathews that Cartesian dualism is problematic as well. For it is only if mechanical readings of nature are right that Cartesian dualism gets off the ground to begin with. The Aristotelian can rightly argue, given the difficulties that face the naturalist, that a different metaphysical paradigm is preferable.

The liberal naturalist analyzes ontological questions as if we have completed a whole jigsaw puzzle save for a single piece. But Gregg Rosenberg is right to see our ontological problems not as a jigsaw puzzle with a missing piece, but as a sliding tile puzzle that has been put together wrongly. Rosenberg explains: “Sliding tile puzzles contain a trap, a seductive property that lures the unsuspecting. Often the puzzle solver can bring order to *almost* the whole puzzle, perhaps fitting every piece into its proper slot except the last two tiles...Seduced by the order already in the puzzle, the puzzle solver searches desperately for a minimally disruptive solution, one that places the pieces without disturbing the rest of the puzzle very much. Unfortunately, the puzzle solver cannot usually solve the tile puzzle this way. To fit the final pieces in place, one has to regress first and rebuild the old order from a new direction.” (2004: 12)

If Chalmers has good reason to think that consciousness in no way can be reduced and cashed out via the purity conditions that mechano-atomism seems to require, this might mean that mechano-atomism is not the preferred way to look at reality. Mechano-atomism might not be right if it leaves dangling the most ‘phenomenal’ aspect of the world. We are ‘seduced’ into thinking mechano-atomism works, because on levels lower than phenomenal consciousness, it *seems* to work. We *seem* to be able to give mechano-atomist construals of chairs and flowers. But if mechano-atomism really *did* explain these non-conscious parts of reality, it should be able to explain every part of reality. But prominent naturalists have offered reasons for thinking that such a total explanation is not possible. The Aristotelian simply suggests that, given the problems that naturalists themselves have raised about their own theory, we might have reason to consider another one.

2.9 Substance Dualism is Parasitic on Cartesian Dualism

If mechano-atomism does not capture reality properly, we have good reason to think that no bottom-up picture of the world can properly so capture it. And therefore we have good reason to think that *liberal* naturalism will also fail to properly carve reality at the joints. One might reasonably ask, how far can we move the goalposts before we are no longer even playing the same game? Not far. If naturalism is to have any coherent demarcation at all as a worldview, then liberal naturalism, the view that tries to keep our folk psychological intuitions intact, might actually be a version of dualism. If any version of naturalism is correct, it is most probably the eliminativist version espoused by Alex Rosenberg. There is a singular reason for this argument: liberal naturalism ends up positing relationships between higher and lower levels of reality that rely on the very thing that naturalists deny: brute emergence, or what might be more accurately called *special creation*.

The failure of phenomenal consciousness to fit into the mechano-atomistic system gives us good reason to think that mechano-atomism is the wrong picture of reality. For this reason, we have good reason to think that there are irreducible substantial forms with formal and final cause. In order for the liberal naturalist to say that only phenomenal consciousness doesn't fit in an otherwise complete picture, he should have to show that the man on the street is *clearly* mistaken to think that substantial form exists. But this cannot be done.

Liberal naturalists argue that, since consciousness has been left dangling in the current explanations of the world, it has proven itself to be the lone 'hard problem.' The

easy problem, it seems, is giving an atomistic and mechanical explanation of everything *else* in the world. Gregg Rosenberg wants to articulate Chalmers' position by arguing that we can see life as a genuine possibility inside the physicalist framework, even with its insistence on 'purity conditions': "Life itself can exhibit phenomena of indefinite complexity. For instance, because we already know that life may contain self-replicating phenomena, we cannot rule out that it could exhibit some kind of *genuine* life. Because life supports the existence of objects that dynamically evolve, it is at least an epistemic possibility that these entities might eventually lead to the existence of animate objects. We also have to hold as epistemically possible that these objects might metabolize elements of their environment, *act in a goal-directed manner*, adapt to be increasingly complex, and generally possess a suite of functional properties sufficient for regarding them as alive." (2004: 45) I suggest that Rosenberg is here giving us a good description of the man from *Cool Air*. That is to say, he is wanting to stay consistent to the mechano-atomist story about everything but consciousness, yet giving us no reason to think that living things are not entities in their own right.

2.10 Substantial Form and Observation.

So the question to ask is whether Chalmers' zombie has a formal and final cause. It would seem at first glance as if a zombie for Chalmers is clearly not alive, because he has no phenomenal consciousness and, according to Chalmers, is not *really* acting in a goal directed manner. Thus, even though the zombie *seems* different than a watch or a thermostat, it still is precisely like a watch or thermostat. And that seems to be Chalmers'

point too. Chalmers insists that the zombie world is *exactly like our world*, sans phenomenal consciousness.

But is this the case? As David Oderberg (2008) notes, an organic substance with formal and final cause “does things to itself and for itself, such as nutrition, growth, reproduction, appetite, self-maintenance, self-repair, locomotion, and related kinds of behavior.” (2008: 91) Thus, in organisms, immanent aim and goal are readily apparent; and it is here, as many Aristotelians insist, (e.g., Foot 2003 & Hursthouse 1999) that we can most easily uncover the special normative features of the substantial form. When a watch is nicked in any way, those nicks remain. But when an organism is wounded, the wound usually heals. Yet, presumably, the *zombie* has a minimal amount (a zombie amount) of self-repair *in order* to remain in accordance with its *substantial* form—at least, if the zombie world is supposedly ‘just like our world in every way’ except for consciousness. If a zombie scratches his knee, presumably the skin would grow back. Zombies have working lungs, and presumably breathe *in order to* maintain sufficient oxygen levels. Moreover, presumably a zombie would age: it would unfold according to a *teleologically* described form. An embryo zombie would grow to be a baby zombie would turn into a toddler zombie would turn into a teenage zombie would turn into a middle-age zombie—but it would be the same zombie throughout these changes. A zombie could also shed skin cells and grow new skin cells. Moreover, the zombie’s organs would work as human organs would work. The heart would pump blood, the kidney would regulate the body’s acid/base levels and maintain healthy blood pressure, and the liver would detoxify the body—all *in order* to maintain a zombie’s healthy form. If the zombie world is supposed to be exactly like our world, save for phenomenal

consciousness, then all of these things should hold. But all of these features *should* be able to be cashed out mechanistically and therefore existentially eliminated. More to the point, flowers in the zombie world would presumably be exactly like flowers in this world. The same ‘agency promissory notes’ that Barham insists are in play for the biologist is in play for the ‘zombie’. It’s a living thing with immanent purpose and drive, that is, like a flower, not self-aware.

We should note that the reductive, mechanical explanation of human form is difficult to pull off. For substantial form is something clearly *observed*, since we can clearly observe the purpose of irreducible forms and in nature. As James Barham puts it, “Living things give every *appearance* of purposiveness,” (2004: 211) and it also seems as if things *appear* to us as irreducible wholes. As such, explanations that insist on mechano-atomism eschew common sense observation. The strict naturalist, like Rosenberg, will of course argue that such revisionist readings are necessary for our explanations to fit with what science tells us is true. Yet, as many Aristotelians point out, while formal and final cause are considered scientifically obsolete, they still find a way into our natural explanations. Leon Kass rightly notes that, “[t]he emphasis on mechanism is an expression of the non-teleological character of modern biology....[but] living things must be regarded as purposive beings, as beings *that cannot even be looked at, much less properly described or fully understood, without teleological notions.*” (2002: 45, my emphasis) In fact, as A. Scott Turner (2009), Conor Cunningham (2010), and Barham all insist, scientists themselves *clearly* observe purpose and value, since they themselves *describe* the behavior of entities in the biological world through the language of agency, purpose, and value. This is especially ironic, since some of these same

biologists insist that the entities they are observing are merely complex mechanisms. J. B. S. Haldane famously quipped, “Teleology is like a mistress to a biologist. He cannot live without her but he is unwilling to be seen with her in public.” (from Turner 2009: 45) And Barham echoes this thought: “Although biologists may *say* that it is only a matter of convenience, the fact is that biological treatises and textbooks are saturated with teleological, normative, and even intentional terminology of every sort, and it would in fact be impossible to discuss the phenomena of life at all without recourse to such descriptors.” (2007: 36) This dissonance between theory and description among biologists is handled, argues Oderberg and Barham, by the offering of promissory notes for a future time when descriptions through teleological language will be ‘cashed out’. But there doesn’t seem to be any reason to analyze nature in a way that eschews common sense observation and appearance, especially since to describe entities through the language of agency is actually to wield Ockham’s razor, if we consider the sort of baroque explanations that would be required (but as yet not given) to describe teleological entities through the language of mechanism.

So the problem for Chalmers is this. If consciousness *alone* is supposed to survive as an epiphenomenal residue in an otherwise mechanical and reductive universe, then Chalmers’ thought experiment cannot ever get off the ground. For his thought experiment *assumes* teleology anyway—non-conscious teleology. If we peered into the zombie world, we’d observe purposeful beings that repaired themselves, and we would have to resort to the language of agency to describe their motion and activity, *even if we knew* that nothing in that world was self-aware. Chalmers’ thought experiment is only consistent with the mechano-atomist picture of reality if he assumes that, apart from the

epiphenomenal residue of consciousness, we are merely *robots*. After all, robots are designed things with no immanent purpose and drive, and they would be observed as robotic accordingly. Robots merely follow externally imposed programs. They do not grow and develop according to a telos. A zombie, however, would be observed to do be doing all of these things. A biologist describing a zombie would have to resort to the same language of agency to describe its behavior as he would any flower or cell, and he would have to issue promissory notes, therefore, for his thought experiment about *zombies* to get going. Chalmers simply *cannot* be talking about zombies if he wants to stay true to the worldview that would render only consciousness an epiphenomenal residue in a mechanical world. For even though the beings in the zombie world are not conscious, they are still beings with self-motion and repair, unfolding according to a natural telos. As such, Chalmers might need to resort to promissory notes in order to keep from accepting teleological conceptions of nature, even while he accepts property dualism.

The Aristotelian does not think that promissory notes need be issued, precisely because purpose is *observed*. Yet it is precisely through the observation of substantial form that we have good reason to doubt naturalism. And we also have good reason to doubt those naturalists who insists that facts about human goodness and human norms are problematic because they seem to be unobservable. As said in the previous chapter, moral facts are just natural facts for the substantial form called the human being. As such, we can actually *observe* natural goodness simply by observing then purposiveness in the human being. This is not to suggest that we can easily ‘read off’ of the human person its rules and procedures (we will say more about this in Chapter Six). We cannot even read

off the true and complete formal and final causality of lesser entities, like flowers; so given the sort of entity that the human person is, we should not expect that a *complete* understanding of the human form will be a matter of a quick look see; nevertheless, we should be wary of arguments that conceive of moral facts as being something entirely ‘unobservable’ or ‘non-empirical’. As Mark Brown (2010) argues, when we conceive of ‘observation’ through the language of a-teleological ‘empirical data’, we are abstracting away from what is actually observed and experienced. This sort of abstraction is fine for the purpose of empirical study, argues Brown, but it can too easily lead to a conception of observation that is at odds with our lived experience of the world, and it makes our moral reality too easily disconnected from our own formal and final causality, which are lived aspects of our natures.

Yet explications of moral facts as wholly different from ‘observed facts’ are typical in the metaethical literature. Consider Russ Shafer-Landau, for example, who writes, “Botanical facts are facts about plants; geological facts are facts about rocks. In botany and geology, evidence is supplied by three-dimensional, tangible, physical stuff. We can taste it, smell it, touch it, and see it. We can’t taste wrongness or hear rightness. Moral facts, if they were to exist would have to be quite odd sorts of things.” (2004: 91) It is relevant that Shafer-Landau thinks moral facts are ‘odd’ because they are not ‘observed’, even though “facts about plants” *are* observed. But what we *observe* in living things like plants are purposes, aims, and goals. Julia Annas, Hursthouse, and Foot rightly insist on the immanent normativity of plants and animals. Annas (1999) writes, “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.” (1999: 5) The ‘facts’ that we observe about plants are facts about the formal and final causes of specific sorts of plants—the *purposeful* nature of plants. It is a fact about plants that they need water to survive, for example, and we know this ‘fact’ from *observing* the purposes, goals, and strivings of plants. It is true that formal causes do not have a smell or a taste. Nor can we touch final cause. But we can clearly *see* final cause, even if not perfectly or completely, for we *see* things change. We see a living world in motion. To suggest otherwise is to conceive of observation in a way that is completely removed from our lived life. We do not receive the world in a series of lifeless and motionless snapshots; rather, we observe the world in motion, and we observe entities acting towards their teleological ends. As it will be argued later, philosophers like Gilbert Harman are going to exploit this ‘time-spliced’ conception of empirical observation to insist on anti-realism. Yet we have every reason to think that the time-splice view of observation is mistaken, and that it is parasitic on an original teleological understanding of nature. This is because, quite simply, we do in fact observe teleology across the lived world.

2.11 Conclusion

Naturalism is appealing because it avoids immaterial substances and vitalist forces in its explanations of the nature of reality and the human person. But Aristotelianism also avoids these things. Aristotelianism is, in the relevant sense, a ‘physicalism’. The difference between Aristotelianism and naturalism is that Aristotelianism insists on

irreducible wholes. It argues that nature is composed of substantial forms with immanent aims and ends all the way down, and it is through this insistence on substantial form that it can posit moral facts; for moral facts are just facts about the formal and final cause of the human being.

Naturalism, by contrast, posits a physicalism that is better construed as mechanostatomism. While this reductive approach to nature has explanatory power, it inevitably must posit properties that dangle, given its own assumptions as to what nature must be. Yet if naturalism necessarily leads to property dualism, we have little reason to think that it is a successful theory of nature. For the failure of naturalism to accommodate phenomenal consciousness is not merely a single plausibility point against it. It is, instead, a reason to reject the theory entirely. Yet we have another reason to reject the theory: we *observe* substantial form. As Alex Rosenberg himself admits, for naturalism to be true, we must reject what our common sense tells us is true. To accept Aristotelian conceptions of the moral fact simply requires confirming a common sense view of the world. Yet, as Kit Fine (2012) has recently noted, cultural prejudices have made it so that the 'radical' view is now ironically the one that follows from and is faithful to common sense. This is all to suggest that we can overcome the insurmountable problems alluded to by Nagel if we either 1) consider what our common sense experience tells us is so, or 2) accept a wholesale nihilist revisionism. We have good reason to go with the first option.

Chapter Three

Consequences of Mechano-Atomism

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will continue and further a response to the strong argument against substantial form, and in the process, it will speak a bit more as to what the teleological view of nature entails. In the last chapter, it was argued that we have good reason to see naturalism as problematic because it does not seem to be able to stay consistent to its own axioms. Since mechano-atomism cannot accommodate phenomenal consciousness on the bottom-up picture of reality, we have good reason to think that the mechano-atomist view as a whole is wrong. Consider this the negative argument for substantial form. Toward the end of the last chapter it was argued that formal and final cause are not only clearly observed, but that the language of teleology permeates our descriptions of the world. This chapter will continue with this thought in mind. Consider this the positive argument for substantial form. It will be argued here that, regardless of the flaws of naturalism on its own, we have good reason to accept a common sense view of the world, by which we affirm the Aristotelian argument for substantial form. We therefore have good reason to accept an Aristotelian analysis of our moral reality.

To begin, it will be shown that, even though teleology is different than mentality, the language of agency and drive are appropriate to our analysis of substantial form, and that it is the necessity of this vocabulary in our explanations of nature that show why mechano-atomism is problematic. The Aristotelian wants to insist, by contrast, that teleology permeates nature all the way down. Nevertheless, the sort of substantial forms

existent on the lowest level are different from the sorts found on the level of living things, and the language used to describe the lowest level cannot be used to describe living organisms; more importantly, an organism is irreducible to its parts. Yet we should be cognizant, given the differences between intentionality and teleology, that we have more reason than mere phenomenal consciousness to posit irreducible form instead of mechano-atomism. For phenomenal consciousness is not, contrary to what some non-naturalist philosophers argue, the only thing holding an organism together, or keeping it from a reductive analysis.

3.2 Intentionality, Teleology, and Mentality

It was suggested that with the examples of solidity, the eliminativist cannot make a distinction that truly mattered. To ‘cash out’ solidity by way of its parts does not adequately ‘remove’ anything that wasn’t there before. With *life*, the eliminativist’s job might be equally difficult. The eliminativist initially suggests that his ontological construal takes away a vitalist force. But the Aristotelian believes in no such thing to begin with. What the Aristotelian believes instead is that a living thing has immanent aims and ends and therefore inherent normativity on the level of the thing. A substantial form *reduces* to its construal as a teleological entity, meaning that what makes a living thing alive and something ‘in its own right’ is simply that it acts for aims and goals on the level of that thing. The immanent aim and purpose, and the inherent normativity at the level of that thing, disappear upon that thing’s disassembly.

The strict naturalist might here argue that since the Aristotelian does not rely on an immaterial entity or force to explain the existence of form or how such a form ‘holds

together’, that he is therefore not giving any reason to think that a form is different than a reductive mechanism. But the differences are great.

Consider, firstly, that to speak about a substantial form with immanent aims and drives is to speak about an agent that can only be helpfully described through the language of agency, even if the substantial form doesn’t have a mind or is self-aware. For we should make a distinction between teleology and *intentionality*. Let me explain. All substances have final causality. The purposes and goals of a substance inhere in the substance by virtue of the thing being the thing that it is. For example, the *purpose* of the heart is to circulate blood. This is what the heart is *supposed* to do (and this is what we *observe* a heart doing).⁸ If a heart circulates blood, it is acting according to its end and fulfilling its natural purpose inherent to its form. To put it another way, *the reason* that a heart circulates blood is that this is what a heart *is*, by virtue of its formal and final cause. We can also rightly speak of the purpose of the circulation of blood by way of the larger organism—the animal--that is kept in its own flourishing state because of the action performed by this part of the organism--the heart. This is to say that a heart ‘acts for reasons.’ Leon Kass has described this as the “inwardness of the agent,” and goes to say that “living things display directedness [and] inner ‘striving’ toward a goal.” (2002: 48) Plants learn by changing information flow via chemical communication much as social insects do. Even cells learn by changing direction of information flow through signal transduction pathways. As biologist Anthony Trewavas notes, “The evolution of intelligent behavior is found in all forms of life, and thus becomes a central theme in the evolution of life.” (Conway-Morris 2008: 89) As James Barham argues, while it may

⁸ See also Turner 2009 for a description of various entities and *systems* in the biological world that display obvious *teleological* behavior.

trouble the naturalist committed to the mechanistic consensus, we must nevertheless try to, "...understand the sense in which living things *are not indifferent to their own continued existence* as living, organized beings," (2007: 35) whether or not the thing is *conscious* of its own activity and striving. Stuart Kaufmann, additionally, goes so far as to describe the teleological striving of organic wholes, whether these wholes are conscious or not, by the way of the "autonomous agency," they possess, and we should describe all organic substances as "acting on their own behalf." (From Barham 2007:41) There is an 'aboutness' to the actions of the heart: it acts towards a future state of affairs and has goals. But while we have introduced an irreducible language of agency, reasons, striving, aboutness, concern for its own continued existence into the future, goal, drive, and even 'autonomy', in order to properly explain a formal substance, we should still differentiate the notion of teleology from *intentionality*.

Intentionality is usually defined as the aboutness of *thought*. This aboutness is usually clarified through the language of mental representationalism. To say that we are *intentional* beings is to say that we are beings that mentally *represent* the world in a certain way. Thus, intentionality is parasitic on a theory of mind, and for this reason, it seems anyway to be a feature that is unavailable to entities that do not have minds. Yet, as my example of the heart makes clear, it would not be false to say that natural entities that do not have conscious minds still have an 'aboutness' and inherent purpose to their behavior. A flower might not consciously 'represent' its goals to itself, but it is still an entity with a purpose and a goal—that is, with teleologically rendered aims it means to fulfill and act towards. It acts for *reasons*, even if these reasons—namely, the fulfillment of its *telos*—but these reasons are not mentally represented to it: most probably, a flower

is not a phenomenally conscious agent and it is not aware of itself. Yet a substance can act for reasons and have an ‘aboutness’ even if these reasons are not felt. And we need not shy away from this seemingly strange way of talking.

This is why the language of ‘aim’ and ‘goal’ and ‘end’ as opposed to ‘intentionality’ is proper, even though many other Aristotelians in moral theory and biology themselves use the language of intentionality to describe the behavior of non-mindful substances (e.g., Turner 2009, Talbott 2010). To speak of substantial form is to speak of an entity with agency and drive, and it is therefore to accept a view of nature that is far different than the mechano-atomist construal of nature. But it is nevertheless important to clearly differentiate between intentional and teleological goal when iterating Aristotelian notions of substantial form. For one reason, Aristotelian value realism is reliant on teleology as much as it is on intentionality. *Our* natural flourishing, on the human level--that is to say, our natural human good and our real moral oughts--are products of our *teleology*. Our moral oughts are the product of our formal and final cause. While we are intentional beings that represent our aims to ourselves, we are first and foremost *teleological* beings. Our natural flourishing does not *necessarily* match up with any mentally represented intentional object or conscious reason, even though, of course, it should. In fact, in many cases, it does not line up. After all, as Rosalind Hursthouse emphasizes (1999: 15) a key component of Aristotle’s eudaimonistic notion of the human good is that the human being can falsely represent to himself a goal, or a conception of happiness, that is not his true, naturally flourishing state. In other words, intentional objects and teleological goals do not necessarily align. We flourish when they do; but given that we are the sort of beings that we are—namely, beings with (imperfect and

corrigible) intellect and will--we have the ability to deviate from our telos.

All this aside, what is important is that to speak about teleology is already to speak about features that are only with difficulty captured by the reductive approach. In fact, some of the same arguments that motivate non-reductionism in mind can help clarify the difference between substantial form and mechanism. Consider the well-known Chinese Room Argument. Searle asks us to imagine a man in a room who receives instructions in Chinese characters through a slot in the door. While not understanding Chinese characters, he still has the ability to 'answer' the instructions in Chinese characters, and stick these answers back out through the same slot that the original instructions came in. He can answer the questions adequately by consulting the right rule from the myriad list of rules books in the room with him. If a Chinese speaker were to read the answers coming through the slot in the door, he would rightly assume, not knowing that the room contained a list of rule books, that the man inside the room understood Chinese. But the man inside the room clearly does not know Chinese. Nor will he eventually learn Chinese merely by repeating the rule-following process ad nauseum. Searle concludes that this thought experiment shows that there is a *categorical* difference between a computer and a human mind. A computer merely follows complicated rules. It is a mere 'syntactic' engine. But human minds understand things. We are 'semantic' engines. More importantly, no amount of complexity will ever make a syntactic engine a semantic engine. We are talking here about a difference in kind, not in degree.

It is important to remember that, since originally offering this argument, Searle has since insisted that 'computationalism' is *doubly* removed from mentality: "Ask

yourself what fact about [a computer] makes its operations syntactical or symbolic. As far as its physics is concerned it is just a very complex electronic circuit...we have designed...these systems so we can...use these things as symbols. Syntax, in short, is not intrinsic to the physics of the system...computation...is not an *intrinsic process in nature like digestion or photosynthesis, but exists only relative to some agent* who gives a computational interpretation to the physics.” (1990: 18) Searle here seems to be hinting at the difference between a process that is a result of substantial unity as opposed to accidental unity. A computer isn't ‘really’ processing information; it only is relative to an agent that does. But there is nothing ‘simulated’ about the ‘information processing’ that a plant performs, as mentioned above. A substantial form with natural unity, even if that entity isn't conscious, isn't ‘simulating’ anything, nor is its function merely a matter of our interpretation. Substantial teleology, while different than intentionality, is yet a feature that is categorically different than mechanically generated ‘purpose’. As such, the Aristotelian has recourse to the Chinese Room argument. For the same categorical divide that separates a ‘symbolic’ agent and a mechanism separates a substantial form from an accidental one. Just like a computer only ‘thinks’ from our perspective, a *mechanical* heart only performs a teleological function in the sense that the natural movement of its parts explains the ‘purpose’ of the thing (which is then reducible to those parts), whereas a real heart is an entity that is irreducible. As such, whereas a pace maker's ‘purpose’ is a result of the amalgamation of its parts, the natural heart's purpose is the result of its substantial teleology. Just as the man in the Chinese room will never learn Chinese however long he is in the Chinese Room, there is no amount of technological advancement that can produce a substantial form irreducible to parts, with substantial

teleology. There is an unbridgeable, *ontological* divide between a reducible mechanical heart and an irreducible natural heart. If something does things for a purpose inherent to the form of that thing on the *level* of the thing, it is categorically different than a mere mechanism. And no amount of complexity will change a mechanism to a substantial form.

The Aristotelian and the strict naturalist *agree* that no amount of mechanical complexity can bridge the ontological divide between a substantial form and a machine. The difference is that the strict naturalist insists that there are therefore no substantial forms. Consider Daniel Dennett. He writes, “We have ceased to shudder, perhaps, at the scientific vision of viruses and bacteria busily and mindlessly executing their subversive projects—horrid little automata doing their evil deeds. But we should not think that we can take comfort in the thought that *they* are alien invaders, so unlike the more congenial tissues that make up *us*. We are made of the same sorts of automata that invade us—no halos of *élan vital* distinguish your antibodies from the antigens they combat; they simply belong to a club that is you, so they fight on your behalf. Can it be that if you put enough of these dumb homunculi together you make a real conscious person? The Darwinian says there could be no other way of making one.” (from Taliaferro 2010: 80) In this passage, we can see the strict naturalist agreeing with both the Aristotelian and Searle: you can never get teleology from a mere ‘intentional stance’. Dennett concludes from this that therefore we must mechanize the world *all the way up*. The Aristotelian, however, concludes that we must instead give immanent aim and purpose and normativity to the world *all the way down*.

3.3 More is Different

The physicist P.W. Anderson has famously noted that it is simply impossible for ‘scientism’ to be true, or the idea that all existent things can be *causally reduced* to the lowest level of reality. For, as Anderson argues, the *sort* of ‘reduction’ that is wanted varies inversely with the explanations needed on the ground level. In fact, as he argues, in so far as biological entities have powers irreducible to their parts (and their biological parts to physical bits), the laws of, say, particle physics, become completely *arbitrary* vis a vis ‘higher levels’ of reality. In an influential article called “More is Different,” (1972) Anderson argues that, “The behavior of large and complex aggregates of elementary particles, it turns out, is not to be understood in terms of a simple extrapolation of the properties of a few particles. Instead, at each level of complexity entirely new properties appear, and the understanding of the new behavior requires research which I think is as fundamental in its nature as any other.” (1972: 393) While these thoughts are important, the Aristotelian wants to emphasize that ‘complexity’ has little to do with whether a living thing has formal and final cause. Instead, he wants to say that each level of reality introduces new *forms*. James Barham agrees, writing, “It is increasingly recognized today even within the physics community itself that reality is essentially layered, in the sense that each of the various levels of structure in the world enjoys a large degree of autonomy and stability. Let us call this the ‘emergentist’ view of the world.” (2007: 45) But, as most liberal naturalists insist, we must understand these ‘layers’ of reality as being the product of *strong* emergence. As Michael Flynn (2012) notes, “Living beings have an integrated wholeness and possess inner principles that inanimate bodies do not. A petunia is a bag of chemicals; but it is not *only* a bag of chemicals. For so long as it is alive, it

does things that a bag of chemicals cannot do. This is why biology at one and the same time ‘is not a hard science’ like physics and chemistry, and also ‘a much harder science’ than physics and chemistry.” (2012: online) As Conor Cunningham also notes, “In science in general, what plays a causal role also plays an explanatory role: it determines what comes to exist in the biosphere. Those things that are causes and are essential for scientific explanations are things scientists are justified in treating as existing. Hence the emergence [of form] is *ontological*.” (2010: 120) Cunningham goes on to quote biologists Hans Westerhoff and Douglas Kell, who argue, “Much of biology depends on dynamic phenomena that emerge in nonlinear interactions. These cannot be understood by the simple addition of the behavior of the components in isolation. ...Certain causal powers are lost upon disassembly...” (2010: 155)

I will argue in the next chapter that what distinguishes the Aristotelianism from ‘liberal’ naturalism is the Aristotelian’s insistence that strong emergence is metaphysically impossible. For the moment, we should see that the ‘layers’ of reality show that reality contains substantial forms all the way down. That it contains ‘wholes’ irreducible to parts, all the way down. The ‘wholeness’ of a thing has to do with its formal and final cause, and these explanations are not dependent on the complexity of the thing. In other words, substantial form has irreducible features. It is precisely these features that make moral realism true and anti-realism false; it is also precisely these features that make the mechano-atomist construal of physicalism and naturalism wrong, and therefore that make the sort of property dualism that liberal naturalists rely upon unsatisfying.

3.4 The Problem With Nominalist Readings of Form

Like the man outside the Chinese room, we cannot tell from the *outside* what is going on the *inside*, so as to distinguish from the outside the difference between a mechanism and a substantial form. A purposeful entity does not display features that cannot be *interpreted* as ‘blind’ and mechanistic, even if purpose is *observed*. After all, while unsatisfying, the mechano-atomist could still just give a promissory note. The strict naturalist then constructs an argument as follows. 1) We assume physicalism-cum-mechano-atomism. 2) I can imagine that a flower is merely a purposeless mechanism and lose nothing from what is displayed to me observationally, or in how I go about explaining how a flower functions. 3) An immanently intentional entity is categorically different than a mechanism. 4) A mechanism called a ‘flower’ can logically derive from discrete physical bits, but a flower-as-substantial-form cannot. 5) Therefore, we have much better reason to construe flowers as ‘flowers’—that is, as mechanisms reducible to discrete bits. 6) What holds for ‘flowers’ holds for all other organic entities. //: Therefore, the world contains no inherent normativity.

The weakest step in this argument is number two, because the Aristotelian can say the same thing in reverse. Precisely because the mechanistic construal of a flower *displays* itself no differently than how a substantial form would display itself, the Aristotelian has good reason to think that there is indeed a substantial form present. The strict naturalist himself admits that the eliminativist viewpoint is *revisionist*. As argued in the last chapter, we *observe* substantial form, and behave as if things have inherent normativity. Moreover, throughout the strict naturalist’s gestalt-shift vision of flowers, he still behaves in a way that gives to these entities inherent norms. He waters them, gives

them light and Mozart, and speaks of what is good for them. But all of this behavior is more reasonably interpreted by way of substantial forms. The strict naturalist, as argued, needs to show that an eliminativist construal of the flower *changes things* in a relevant way. But the only thing that the strict naturalist's construal has 'removed' is something that his own *thinking about* the flower—even upon making a gestalt shift—fails to notice. In the same way, we *do not* say that there is anything that is 'good' for a watch (or not anything good which is not relative to our desires for what we want out of the watch), or any other mechanism.

In other words, while the gestalt shift is possible when it comes to things with substantial form, it is not a vision that can be truly believed or made sense of. I contend that when a strict naturalist says, "you say that a 'flower' 'ought' to have light, and 'ought' to have good soil, and 'ought' to have Mozart, but I say that there is no such thing as a flower, not really, anyway," that he is talking just as our friend talks during *Moneyball*: he is making a distinction that is no distinction at all. For it is a distinction that does not alter how we look at plants, and it does not alter how we treat them.

This is in fact a stronger suggestion than the one made by the philosopher of law Joseph Vining, though Vining's argument is relevant here too. Vining argues that the revisionist talk of the strict naturalist does not withstand scrutiny. Vining takes the standpoint of the trial lawyer, and argues that when a strict naturalist 'takes the stand,' his beliefs do not maintain credibility. No jury, argues Vining, would believe the testimony of a strict naturalist. Lets say that the strict naturalist construes *love* nominalistically, whereby it cashes out a "temporary chemical imbalance of the brain induced by sensory stimuli." (from Smith 2010: 166) Vining words the problem of this analysis this way:

“When presented in law with this sentence about love, there would be interest in what this same individual said at home, what he meant when heard to say, ‘I love you’ to his wife, child, friend, or sister. Putting the two statements together, the one made at home and the one made professionally, as would be done in cross-examination on a witness stand, a lawyer or jury would conclude either that the word ‘love’ in the one statement, made in class when teaching the penguin’s love as a textbook example of a system operating in an adaptive way, means something different from ‘love’ in the other statement at home; or, if the two words are meant to convey the same, that he does not believe what he is saying in class.” (from Smith 2010: 167) If we treat the strict naturalist as an expert witness, we can see that their ‘totalistic’ views are not really believed. As Steven Smith words it, “theorists may *say* they believe in a merely naturalistic universe. But their genuine beliefs are better than their theory-driven professions.” (2010: 180) The Aristotelian agrees with Vining and Smith: he does not think that what the strict naturalist says about form can really be believed. However, the Aristotelian can do more than question the strict naturalist’s beliefs. For the analysis above can allow us to question whether the strict naturalist is in fact referring to anything different than the Aristotelian, regardless of what he believes to be the case.

Consider the differences in meaning that the strict naturalist and Aristotelian are supposedly working with. The Aristotelian says, “x is a flower if x has features a, b, and c.” (Remember that a, b, and c are Aristotelian categoricals: they describe what a thing is, but not in a way that implies statistical norms or ‘every possible world’ essentialism.) The strict naturalist also says, “x is a flower if x has features a, b, and c.” But he then qualifies his view by saying: “But really, there is no such thing as a flower, since we can

collapse these features once we disassemble a flower to its discrete bits.” But the Aristotelian would say the same thing. So we still have no difference. So the naturalist, wanting to distance himself from the Aristotelian, says, “When I speak of a ‘flower’, I am referring to ‘a logical amalgam of discrete bits blindly and mechanistically arranged in a certain fashion.’ When the Aristotelian speaks of a ‘flower’ he is referring to ‘a substantial form following immanent ends.’ He is speaking of an entity that is irreducible to its parts, and one that acts for reasons on the level of the thing. I do not believe that such immanent agency exists, and furthermore, I do not think that there is such thing as a flower. Thus, I am talking about a different thing than the Aristotelian. Moreover, my reference is real, whereas the Aristotelian’s reference is not.”

Here, we finally have a *referential* distinction, it seems. But do we? We might learn how to proceed in this debate by considering some arguments put forward by Hilary Putnam, in his famous ‘Twin Earth’ thought experiment from 1975. Putnam asks us to imagine a planet exactly like ours in every way. The only difference is that, whereas on Earth, the liquid cold and wet stuff we call ‘water’ is the chemical compound H_2O , on Twin Earth, the liquid cold and wet stuff *they* call ‘water’ is the chemical compound XYZ. Putnam argues that when a person on Twin Earth thinks and talks of water, their referent is XYZ; whereas, here on earth, our referent is H_2O . Putnam concludes that even though both Earthlings and Twin Earthlings think and talk about ‘water’, that Earthlings and Twin Earthlings are really talking past each other. We mean different things than the Twin Earthling by the term, it seems.

Similar thoughts have been advanced by Saul Kripke. (1980) Kripke argues that the difference between ‘fool’s gold’ and real gold is not with the differing nominal

features of the two, *since there are no differing nominal features*, but instead with the real respective referents of these substances. Fool's gold might have surface-level features similar to gold, but given that fool's gold and real gold have different chemical identifications, we therefore know that a person who calls fool's gold 'gold' isn't really referring to *gold*. Meaning, it is said, ain't in the head.

We have good reason to see these thought experiments as potentially problematic, and for this reason, we have good reasons to think that the strict naturalist cannot really avoid positing substantial form. Firstly, consider the difference between fool's gold and real gold. While it is true that they share some surface level features, it is also obvious that any expert can, simply by examining them closely, tell the difference between fool's gold and real gold. After all, long before gold was given the moniker 'Au' and assigned number 79 on the periodic table, experts could distinguish real gold from imposters. Thus, it is *redundant* to say that that real gold is rigidly 'fixed' by its chemical identification. Or, to put it another way, precisely because gold and fool's gold have different chemical constitutions, they have different surface level features, even if these features are not readily apparent to the fool.

Jerry Fodor (1989) has argued something along these lines in his criticism (since rescinded) of Putnam's Twin Earth thought experiment. Putnam insists that their 'water' and our water *share every surface level feature*, and that the *only thing* that differentiates our water from theirs is that ours is rigidly fixed by H₂O, whereas theirs is rigidly fixed by XYZ. But to take the notion of the 'surface level feature' might mean that there's no difference in the two stuffs after all. We assume that we can *drink* XYZ and it will quench our thirst. We assume that we can replace the 60% of our body and the 70% of

our brain that is made up of H₂O with XYZ, and it will produce no ill effects on our body or mind. We assume that XYZ, like H₂O, is miscible with ethanol and immiscible with oil. And so on. If the two substances are different chemically, then they *have to* somehow diverge in their features and functions. Otherwise, they aren't really different.

But the same problem confronts the strict naturalist when it comes to substantial form. He has to say that the referent of the Aristotelian—substantial form—is different than the referent of the strict naturalist. But the strict naturalist has no way of construing this difference that isn't arbitrary. In order for substantial form to be analyzed mechanistically and therefore nominalistically, the strict naturalist cannot simply say that, when a form is disassembled, its surface level features dissolve. The Aristotelian can say the same thing. It is true that, unlike phenomenal consciousness, the illusion is not the reality. But it is not clear that the strict naturalist has a right to say that substantial form is mere illusion, since even after he *assumes* illusion, he cannot offer a way of construing form that does not assume everything that the Aristotelian assumes. For the 'burden of proof' is clearly on the strict naturalist, precisely because the language of agency is still used by him.. The prevalence of promissory notes gives evidence of where the burden lies. The only argument available to the strict naturalist is the one offered earlier: namely, that, *a priori*, we can see that that logical derivation from the bottom-level of reality does not give us substantial form. But logical derivation does not give us consciousness either. So the Aristotelian has plenty of reasons to doubt the eliminativist story.

The naturalist has to show that, by countenancing a nominalistic substantial form, we take away from our ontology something that the man on the street assumes is there to explain that which he *observes*. In effect, we should agree with Quine. Here's Hilary

Putnam describing the Quinean insight: ‘If you are going to claim that talk of so-and-sos...is a mere ‘manner of speaking,’ then show me how to *replace* the manner of speaking. If you can’t, you are cheating.’ (2005: 80) Certainly, both Quine and Putnam want to go a different direction, ontologically, than the Aristotelian. But the Aristotelian can agree with this insight. For strict naturalists not only can’t successfully avoid using teleological and normative language to describe what they *say* are mere mechanisms, but they cannot truly *believe* that these things are not substantial forms, nor can they construct a theory of meaning that successfully avoids *referencing* Aristotelian categoricals.

Moreover, one might suggest that, since the strict naturalist cannot successfully do what the Quinean insists he do, there is a sense in which naturalism, construed as mechano-atomism, isn’t falsifiable. But as Popper taught us, if an argument cannot be falsified, it is only an ideology.

3.5 What’s it Like to Be a Form?

One of the reasons that might motivate the strict naturalist to construe substantial forms mechanistically is because of our tendency to think that if something is irreducible to its parts, that it must then have an ‘inside’ that it cannot be captured by third-person analysis. I contend that a substantial form does indeed have an inside, and that a mechanism, by contrast, has no inside. Indeed, as mentioned in this chapter and the last, we have good reason to describe substantial forms through the language of agency. There is, to adopt Paul Weiss’s language from his *Nature and Man*, an ‘inner’ and an ‘outer’ to every organic entity. (Weiss 2011 (1923)) But I do not think that this inside need be

given a phenomenal construal, nor be *assumed* to *necessarily* resist heterophenomenological analysis. Indeed, some philosophers think that there is good reason to give a flower some sort of phenomenal consciousness and that some sort of panpsychist story is correct (cf. Skrbina 2007 and Mathews 2007). Others, like Kass (2002), Barham (2007), Cunningham (2010), Midgley (2010), Turner (2009), Talbott (2010) and many other Aristotelians (e.g., Feser 2012, Oderberg 2008, Boulton 2012) argue that, while not necessarily a conscious process, teleology is an ‘acting for an aim’ and is a ‘striving’ and therefore substantial forms have a real ‘rationality’, and that these terms that cannot be cashed out metaphorically. So immanent aim and goal *need* not be accompanied by phenomenal consciousness (or at the very least, we might say that there are different ways to be conscious), nor must the Aristotelian construe the ‘striving’ of the form as something ‘mindful’. We do not need to think that the inside of a flower is such that it is *noticing* its own striving. We therefore need not assume that the existential ‘inside’ striving of a flower is a robust ‘what it is like’ for that flower, whereby we save its collapse into mechanism *only* because we stave off heterophenomenological analysis. This is another interesting way in which the Aristotelian and the strict naturalist are in partial agreement.

Thomas Nagel (1991 [1974]) for example, has famously argued that, since a phenomenally conscious entity has a ‘what it is like’ to be that thing, and since this ‘what it is like’ is only known *to that thing*, that therefore no third person analysis of such a thing can ever truly exhaust our description of this thing. A necessary (but certainly not a sufficient) condition for eliminativism is that an exhaustive third person analysis is possible. Thus, for example, since a bat has a way of looking at the world that can only

be known to the bat (a bat uses sonar to get around), it therefore contains a fact about it that resists third-person construal. Frank Jackson's example of Mary the Color Scientist (1991 [1982]) is supposed to show the same thing. In this thought experiment, a colorblind color scientist, only able to see black and white, but who has an exhaustive descriptive knowledge of color, would nevertheless learn something new if she regained her ability to see color. But since this further fact can only be known from a first-person perspective, we therefore can't get an exhaustive third-person analysis.

We might assume that an entity's failure to be given an exhaustive third-person analysis can show that phenomenal consciousness alone is able to 'hold an object together,' such that—for that reason alone—we can declare it irreducible. Some liberal naturalists seem ready willing to adopt a theory of substantial form through such an analysis. Trenton Merricks (2003) for example, argues that the ontologist should be ready to eliminate many macro-level entities from the furniture of the world, for reasons similar to those that the strict naturalist advocates—namely, that a world of discrete bits does not generate a substantial form 'in its own right'. Merricks argues that this sort of eliminativism should proceed uninterrupted *unless* an entity contains a property that is not properly accounted for by the causal powers of the bottom level entities. Merricks argues that if an entity contains a property that resists reduction, then that entity as a whole resists reduction. Merricks suggests that phenomenally conscious entities, therefore, cannot be eliminated by reduction to discrete bits. Therefore, they are substantial forms.

But this construal of substantial form might be cold comfort to the Aristotelian moral realist. If phenomenal consciousness is the only thing that prevents eliminativist

reduction, then we have merely shifted from positing vitalist forces to mental forces: the two are doing the same thing. This is another case of the liberal naturalist setting the bar too high, and forgetting the burden of proof should not be on the person who does not have to give revisionist readings of the world—especially when this revisionist reading, as I’ve argued, 1) is only accepted when one wears one’s ‘theorist cap’, and 2) can only arbitrarily posit a different *referent* of the Aristotelian realist.

3.6 Conclusion

The above arguments might give us good reason to at least initially start thinking that what we see as being there—substantial forms--really *are* there. Kit Fine (2012) has recently argued that philosophy should start with common sense and end with common sense. We observe substantial forms. But to move from the positing of substantial form to the insistence on moral realism is a short one: precisely because the human being is a substantial form, it is therefore a being with a natural goodness. Therefore, moral goodness is real.

It might seem odd to the naturalist that the Aristotelian feels the need to defend teleology in the non-human and non-psychological worlds. Should not the Aristotelian be content to show that the substantial form of the human being’s mental life is inherently normative? I don’t think so. If the arguments above are successful, then this shows that, for one thing, phenomenal consciousness alone cannot hold a thing together as a thing. The property dualist can too easily construe phenomenal consciousness as an epiphenomenal property on an otherwise meaningless mechanism. This is what David Chalmers does, for example. But this is just another way to be a mechano-atomist.

For another thing, we should be able to rightly give final cause to non-sensate things, for the reasons explained here. Lewis Lycan argues that intentionality on the level of human psychology should be given its due; but we should be able to see flowers as having an aboutness, even if this aboutness is not represented to it. After all, as Foot rightly argues, it is because of the inherent normativity of plants that the inherent normativity of the human beings gets its footing. This is to say that the Aristotelian is the only moral theorist who really avoids Cartesian dualism safely and unambiguously. If liberal naturalists assume that *only* some feature of the mind (usually phenomenal consciousness) withstands the reductive power of physicalism, and if they assume mechano-atomism is true, then they have made no progress over Descartes. Naturalists must realize that even if the ‘non-physical’ property left dangling is construed epiphenomenally, whereby the causal closure of the physical can be maintained, that mechano-atomism is threatened. Some strict naturalists have in fact argued that even if consciousness dangles epiphenomenally, the naturalist has failed to account for it. But the Aristotelian disagrees with Mario de Caro (2010), and other liberal naturalists, who argue that, so long as a feature of reality does not *contradict* the laws of nature, then their ontological merit is not in jeopardy. This line of argument tries to situate those higher-level features that are difficult to reduce (like consciousness) by making them epiphenomenal.

The legacy of Cartesianism might matter little if we are merely having arguments over the status of the mental. But Cartesianism matters a lot in the realm of metaethics, since what goes on at this level affects what goes on at the normative and applied level. Since mechano-atomism has been the assumed starting point for most moral theories, that

this has resulted in some objections to moral realism that the Aristotelian can fend off; moreover, he can answer these objections much more easily than other contemporary moral realists in the naturalist tradition.

Chapter Four

Value Naturalism in Light of Aristotelian Philosophy of Nature

4.1 Introduction

It was argued that Cartesian dualism surfaces in a variety of ways in the current attempts by philosophers wanting to stay faithful to the dictates of mechano-atomist readings of naturalism, but still wanting to construe moral facts realistically. In this chapter, it will be suggested that, unless one abandons the bottom-up picture of reality, that a dualism inconsistent with the bottom-up tenants of even the most liberal of naturalisms, is unavoidable. The only solution is to accept a top-down ontology. Aristotelianism is just such an ontology. In this chapter, an analysis of the top-down view will be explored, and it will be shown why it is a preferable starting point for moral theory.

I'll start by giving an outline of the sort of 'naïve' moral realist positions that liberal naturalists want to revise, and then show why Aristotelianism wants to revise this same naïve position as much as any modern moral theorist. This will involve an explanation of what Aristotelianism is in a bit more detail, in order to show why it is not the same as naïve realism, but while it is, nonetheless, a challenge to naturalism—even 'liberal' naturalism. As will be explained, the most common mistake made by modern philosophers, when explaining (and dismissing) Aristotelianism, is to see Aristotle as *basically* doing the same thing as the naturalist, only insisting furthermore on a formal and final cause that are, for the naturalist, causally, and therefore ontologically, redundant. The assumption, in other words, is that both the modern and the Aristotelian philosopher share a similar commitment to what Aristotle calls 'efficient' causality. The

previous chapter argued that the naturalist is wrong to eschew formal and final cause. But this chapter will show that Aristotle's conception of *efficient causality* is actually much different than the one assumed by the naturalist. Aristotelianism insists on a top-down ontology, and this view must be understood in light of the principle of proportionate causality, or what I'm calling the Parmenidean Constraint. This constraint puts real pressure on the sort of 'emergence' stories that the contemporary moral realist relies on to make sense of his moral fact, and it also radically changes our understanding of efficient causality.

4.2 What are the Alternatives to Naïve Moral Realism?

Moral theorists in the naturalist tradition, whether realist or anti-realist, want to distance themselves from what might be called naïve' moral realism, or what Stuart Brock and Edwin David Mares refer to as an 'extreme form' of non-reductionism. So we might best refer to naïve realism as a sort of vulgar Platonism. Brock and Mares describe this version thusly:

“The most extreme form of non-reductivism [sic] is Platonism. According to Platonism, there are concepts or forms that exist outside of space and time. Some of these concepts, such as the form of the Good and the form of Justice are moral concepts. Giving concepts this status makes them opinion independent in a very strong sense.”
(2001: 114)

Just as problematically, the naïve moral realist, it is said, must use an occult epistemic faculty to 'intuit', with his 'mind's eye', these eternal, and immutable moral objects, objects that stand independent of natural facts. “The need to postulate a moral

sense in addition to our normal senses is a serious difficulty for the non-reductivist,” as Brock and Mares argue. Thus, for the naïve realist, both the objects of detection, and the epistemic detecting mechanism, are, in the words of John Mackie, utterly different than anything else in the world.

In his *Ethics Without Ontology*, (2005) Hilary Putnam describes these ‘inflationary’ forms of moral realism similarly to Brock and Mares. He also attributes this ‘inflationary’ view to Plato, but he then says that this version of naïve realism captures what is more or less true about the moral theories stemming from the ‘classical’ tradition as a whole—that is, the metaphysics prior to the Enlightenment. (2005: 15-18) Putnam’s analysis of pre-modern non-naturalist metaphysics is typical of a trend. As both David Oderberg (2008) and Michael Rea (2004) note, contemporary naturalist literature does not often engage directly with Aristotelian ideas of nature. Usually, the foil for the naturalist—whether the naturalist is realist or anti-realist, and whether he is a ‘strict’ or a ‘liberal’ naturalist—is some version of the Platonist, or some version of the Cartesian, or even some version of a theist, endorsing some version of theological voluntarism.⁹ In other words, the naturalist sees himself as positing a scientifically responsible monism over and against the ontological *dualism* and supernaturalism of the (supposedly) older and pre-modern view.

⁹ See Shafer-Landau 2004 for an explanation of what is supposedly ‘the’ theistic justification for moral realism—one that is really just a version of theological voluntarism. We should note that voluntarism is entirely consistent with moral anti-realism. If we merely have to obey the commands of a God who can say and do whatever he pleases, then we are not beholden to the nature of reality, which might then well (in this universe) be made of but amalgams of bits, stupidly bumping, whirling, and grinding. For the same reason that Intelligent Design is consistent with a mechanical world, so is Theological Voluntarism.

Drawing the dichotomy this way, however, usually leaves Aristotelianism out of the discussion.¹⁰ Yet by leaving Aristotelian options off the page, the naturalist often runs the risk of falsely attributing to all thinkers before the Scientific Revolution a *modern* interpretation of nature. For it falsely lumps all pre-modern thinkers together with the first *modern* thinker—Descartes—who is now seen as the main representative of the sort of dualism now under suspicion. But, as has been shown, it is the Cartesian ‘mechanical’ view of nature that leads to the very property dualism that many naturalists admit must be posited to make sense of phenomenal consciousness.

That isn’t to say that a ‘pre-modern’ teleological and hylomorphist reading of nature, one relying on the formal and final causes of irreducible substantial forms, is not also under suspicion by naturalists; but *explicit* critiques of this Aristotelian worldview are difficult to find. As such, one has to dig out from contemporary naturalist writing what is being simply assumed regarding the Aristotelian metaphysical program. Rarely

¹⁰ See Dennett 1991 for a famous example by a ‘strict’ naturalist, of a critique of all ‘folk psychological’ conceptions of mind as described through the ontological categories given by Descartes; and see Putnam 2005 and De Caro and Macarthur 2007 & 2010, for examples of some salient critiques of ‘strict’ naturalism, and the promotion of ‘liberal’ naturalism, where the main demarcation between liberal naturalism and ‘anti’-naturalism is a rejection by the former and an acceptance by the latter, of Platonism and/or Cartesianism. In all of these works, Aristotle’s teleological view of nature is assumed to be wrong, but it is not dealt with directly, or at all. In Alexander Miller’s *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics* (2003), Aristotelianism is vaguely alluded to briefly (on one page) in a discussion of McDowell’s work, but Aristotle’s metaphysics of nature are nowhere described in the entirety of the text, and no contemporary metaethicists in the Aristotelian tradition besides McDowell (who is problematically Aristotelian) get discussed. To cite another interesting example, Russ Shafer-Landau wrote a splendid introduction to metaethics and moral realism called *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?* (2004) In this text, Shafer-Landau masterfully explains a myriad of metaethical topics, terms, and positions, and then goes on to argue why an acceptance of contemporary scientific naturalism need not deter those wanting to remain moral realists. While there is much discussion of Descartes, Plato, Hume, and a host of other historical figures that have shaped metaphysical and metaethical opinions in the West, Aristotle and Aristotelianism are nowhere discussed in the entirety of the text.

does the modern naturalist explicitly *mention* the problems of substantial form, let alone articulate Aristotelianism, as the model of an older, false view of reality being rejected. The explicit criticism is usually always focused on Descartes, Plato, and the theological voluntarist.

Another strange and ironic confusion follows. As mentioned, the Aristotelian rejects mechano-atomism; but Cartesianism is actually *parasitic* on the mechanistic consensus. It is precisely because Descartes accepts the very same mechanistic consensus accepted today by the naturalist that he (Descartes) has to posit mind as ontologically distinct. As many philosophers suspicious of the mechanistic consensus in and outside of the Aristotelian tradition have argued (e.g., Mathews 2002 & 2007, Rosenberg 2004, Feser 2009, Oderberg 2000 & 2008, Bilgrami 2010, & Nagel 2012), naturalism might be parasitic on Cartesianism. For example, Freya Mathews argues that while dualism is seen as a cliff over which to push one's opponents, it can nevertheless be seen most everywhere that the naturalism is accepted but eliminativism and nihilism are not. (Mathews 2003) This is especially interesting, since, as works like *Questioning Naturalism* (De Caro & Macarthur 2007) and *Naturalism and Normativity* (De Caro & Macarthur 2010) make clear, more and more naturalists are hesitant to accept reductionism and eliminativism, and are eager to accept liberal naturalism. Thomas Nagel's 2012 *Mind and Cosmos* is indicative of this trend. Nagel rightly sees physicalism as allowing with difficulty the sort of properties—consciousness and teleology in particular—that are also difficult to deny the existence of outright. Yet, all the same, the Aristotelian alternative way of understanding natural value and hylomorphist conceptions

of the human person—namely, through an acceptance substantial form—is passed over in his book.

4.3 Classical Ontology is Top-Down Ontology

We should begin to see that what is referred to as ‘classical ontology’ by Putnam is really just Cartesian dualism, with its mechanical rendering of the material plain. As such, classical ontologies seem to be themselves versions of the bottom-up view. Yet, in contrast to what philosophers like Putnam describe as being indicative of the classical ontologist, Lloyd Gerson (2001) provides a general definition of what most classical ontologies *actually* are. The main feature of a ‘classical ontology’ is, according to Gerson, its insistence on a top-down worldview. While Gerson explicitly mentions Platonism as the paradigmatic ‘top-down’ ontology, he also argues that Aristotelianism, despite its great differences with Platonism, shares this top-down feature. Here is Gerson: “What is most distinctive about Platonism is that it is resolutely and irreducibly ‘top-down’ rather than ‘bottom-up’. A top-down approach to philosophical problems rejects and a bottom-up approach accepts the claim that the most important and puzzling phenomena we encounter in this world can be explained by seeking the simplest elements out of which these are composed. The top-down approach appeals to irreducible, intelligible principles to account for these phenomena...The top-down approach holds that answers to questions about these phenomena are never going to be satisfactorily given in terms of, say, elementary physical particles from which things ‘evolve’ or upon which the phenomena ‘supervene’.” (2006: 32)

For this reason, the classical ontologist, whether Platonist or Aristotelian, is much different than the Cartesian dualist. We should also notice that the classical ontologist wholeheartedly *agrees* with the strict naturalist in assuming that the sort of higher-level features that the liberal naturalist wants to see emerge from the bottom level of mindless, meaningless bits, cannot so emerge. As a top-down view, Aristotelianism rejects the sort of ‘strong emergence’ stories that the liberal naturalist must call upon to save the appearances.

4.4 Aristotle as an Inflationary Reductionist

So we should notice that the most important feature of Aristotelianism is that it is a top-down ontology. The Aristotelian does not see the bottom level or any level of reality as brute and inert. It does not accept, like Searle, that the bottom level of reality is ‘mindless and meaningless’, nor does it accept that what Nagel calls the ‘dead matter of physical systems’ could give rise to organic substantial forms. Yet we should also see the differences between Platonism and Aristotelianism. For the Aristotelian, nature is the highest reality. The Aristotelian rejects the idea that there are immaterial forms outside of the material plain. Instead, the Aristotelian holds that the material is not inimical to the immaterial. Indeed, as mentioned in chapter two, we can rightly call Aristotelianism a physicalism. Thus, the Aristotelian insists that substantial forms are a product of physical forces, and therefore a product of form and matter; but he also insists that a substance’s form is ontologically prior to its matter.

We can overcome the seeming contradiction between these two concepts if we circumvent the imagery of top and bottom, and merely insist that nature cannot give what

it does not have. So, precisely because he *is* as a physicalist, the Aristotelian cannot accept the sort of ontological mapping that would, for example, create the ‘hard problem’, assuming, in agreement with Montero and Flanagan, that promissory note physicalism and mysterianism are not satisfying conclusions. The Aristotelian does not think that any feature of the world can ‘dangle’ or stand free of the physical world; and vitalist forces, Cartesian souls, and ‘moral facts’ on the ‘naïve’ picture of moral realism, all seem to be autonomous of the material world. But for the same reason that it rejects the ‘hard problem’, the Aristotelian cannot accept many versions of contemporary moral naturalism or non-naturalism.

The Aristotelian can be distinguished from other Platonists insofar as he does not seek further explanations *beyond* the level of *enformed* matter.¹¹ Yet precisely because he insists on a top-down ontology, he takes seriously the idea that a material thing’s *form* is hierarchically prior to a thing’s matter. Aristotle eschewed separate forms because his own advocacy of the ‘four causes’ could do all of the explanatory work that Plato’s forms were meant to do—only better. To speak of a substantial form of a thing is to speak of something that cannot be satisfactorily explained by way of the ‘mere’ material that makes up a thing—for the enformed thing has, as described in chapter one, formal and final cause, on the level of the thing.

4.5 The Parmenidean Constraint

Why does the Aristotelian insist on a top-down ontology, even while eschewing separate ‘forms’ or immaterial minds? The reason is that, built into the ‘top-down’ thesis is what

¹¹ It is true that Aristotle argues for an Unmoved Mover, yet while this is for Aristotle an ‘ultimate’ explanation of the motions of the universe, it is not an entity that fills explanatory gaps on the level of enformed matter.

David Skrbina (2005) has called, in explaining a view common to many philosophers of the pre-modern period, the Principle of Non-Emergence--or what, when situated historically to Aristotle himself, I'll call the Parmenidean Constraint. We might helpfully word Parmenides' basic insight this way: *that which does not exist is nothing at all*. Parmenides insisted: that-which-is-not is nothing at all, and that-which-is-not cannot 'bring about' or 'make true' or 'realize' that which-is. It's a simple metaphysical thesis, but it also does much to demarcate ancient from modern assumptions about the nature of being.

While Parmenides used his argument concerning the salient 'features' of non-being to advocate the impossibility of change and the oneness of being, his argument concerning the (non) relationship between being and non-being was taken on by Aristotle to explain the general structure of the world, and the relationship between form and matter.¹² Thus Parmenides should be rightly seen as laying down the proper parameters for legitimate emergence: that-which-is-not cannot bring about that-which-is. That which is not has no creative power.

The strict naturalist *agrees* with Parmenides here, and therefore Aristotle agrees with the strict naturalist in an important way: both the Aristotelian and the strict naturalist *disagree* with the 'emergentist' conclusions of many liberal naturalists. The classical ontologist, with deference to Parmenides, argues that mental and moral features cannot emerge from the sort of mindless and meaningless 'pure' bottom level advocated by the

¹² Further, Aristotle rejected the univocity of being that seems to follow from Parmenides' insistence that all change is *generational* change as opposed to mere *qualitative* change. This shows that Parmenides failed to distinguish two important and differing ways in which something can *be*. Something can exist actually, and something can exist potentially. Parmenides seems to have rejected the notion of potential being. (Shields 2007: 45-47)

mechano-atomist. The liberal naturalist, by starting from mechano-atomism but wanting to keep these higher-level features anyway—even if they are made epiphenomenal—is relying on a metaphysical explanation that violates the Parmenidean Constraint.

The Aristotelian argues that every case of an organic form is a case of illegitimate emergence, *if* the mechano-atomist construal of physicalism is true. For such a construal would go against the Parmenidean Constraint. Insofar as any organic form is irreducible, it must *precede* its emergence in order of nature. If something is an irreducible whole, it cannot emerge from the parts that make it up. The strict naturalist agrees. The difference is that the Aristotelian, for reasons explained in chapter two and three, has good reason to think that mechano-atomist conceptions of physicalism are false. Thus, the Aristotelian must insist on a position that aligns neither with the liberal naturalist nor the strict naturalist. The strict naturalist wants to eliminate substantial form. The liberal naturalist wants to make sense of such forms through ontological emergence. The strict naturalist is wrong to deny substantial form, but he is right in insisting that if we accept a bottom up picture of the world, we must accept a radically revisionist picture of the world; the liberal naturalist is right to reject this radically revisionist picture, and right to accept substantial form, but he is wrong in thinking that a bottom-up picture of reality could ever give rise to what our common sense observation tells us is there.

4.6 Aristotle's Four Causes Understood in Light of the Parmenidean Constraint

We should begin to see, then, how Aristotle's value theory is linked more generally to how he thought things, in the broadest possible sense, hang together, in the broadest possible sense. And for the same reason, we must understand Aristotle's 'four causes', as

linked together. For Aristotle, there are four ways to explain a thing—the material, efficient, formal, and final cause. (cf. Shields 2007, Lear 1988, Feser 2009)

The material cause of a thing is the matter that constitutes the thing. The formal cause is the ‘whatness’ of a thing—that is, the fact that we pick out a thing *as that thing* (and not via the stuff that make up a thing) is because of its formal cause. Thus, the nature of the formal cause points to the final cause, or that which the thing strives to unfold to be.

As to the efficient cause: it has sometimes been said that what separates Aristotelianism from modern philosophy is that modern philosophy by and large followed Aristotle in accepting efficient and material causality, but rejected formal and final causality. But this is to assume a conception of efficient and material causality that Aristotle would not have recognized. Aristotle argued that a thing’s *efficient* cause was *dependent* on a thing’s formal and final cause. Given that a thing has a certain set of powers and strivings, it therefore has the power to bring about certain things and not other things. Thus, the efficient cause is always a function of the particular powers of the thing in question.

This has sometimes been called the Principle of Proportionate Causality. (Feser 2009; see also Shields 2007: 40ff, and Hoffman 2009) This principle states that a cause cannot give to its effect that which it doesn’t itself have. For example, a match has the power to bring about fire because this is one of the *powers* of the match, combined with the powers of the sulfur. The sperm and the egg can bring about a human *form*, since those are the inherent powers of the sperm when combined with the powers of the egg. For the human embryo has, unlike either the sperm or the egg, the substantial form of a

human being. Yet there's no reason to stop with the egg and sperm. Ultimately, the atomic structure of reality holds *in potential* all of the features that all various forms, once evolved, actualize. The Aristotelian follows the physicist Paul Davies, who writes, "Human beings are products of nature, and if humans have purposes, then at some level purposefulness must arise from nature and therefore be inherent in nature... Might purpose be a genuine property of nature right down to the cellular or even the subcellular level?" (from Cunningham 2010: 257) The Aristotelian answers: yes. Again: this, the Aristotelian insists, is the only way we can intelligibly speak of natural goodness and substantial form. All substantial forms must be part of the very fabric of the universe at the deepest level as potentials, ready to be actualized.

4.7 Mind, Value, and Emergence

For the Aristotelian, Nature is the highest reality. But it is a reality that, precisely because it holds all of the powers that it does, and is a nature that obeys the Parmenidean Constraint, is therefore much different than one the mechano-atomist could ever allow, who insist on a bottom-up picture of reality that starts with what Nagel calls the 'dead matter of physical systems'. For the Aristotelian insists that we cannot speak of physicalism as a bottom level that is 'meaningless and mindless': we must instead speak of the bottom level as meaningful and mindful *in potentia*. For if all irreducible forms, mindful or not, did not potentially exist all the way down, the nature would not have power to bring about all the forms, with their own irreducible causal powers, that ever

have been and ever will be.¹³ Moreover, a particular thing (and thus our periodic table) has *certain* powers and not *any* ‘possible’ powers. Thus, a match, when struck, does not have the power to bring about drops of water, whatever it strikes. This might sound silly, or perhaps merely obvious; but to accept the principle of proportionate causality is to draw distinction between Aristotelian and modern conceptions of causality. The Aristotelian argues that we should properly speak of a thing having causal powers that it might not be actualizing. And it is only if we accept this way of looking at reality that we can avoid collapsing the differences that would otherwise exist between a flower and a watch.

4.8 Potentiality and Actuality

The Aristotelian places those things that do not have sentience hierarchically lower than those things that have it, and then argues that one cannot get higher on the hierarchy, merely if the bits that make up the thing on the lower level are properly arranged. There is, for the Aristotelian, an un-crossable ontological gap between that which is conscious and that which is not conscious, and to suggest that this gap can be crossed through the phenomenon of emergence is to rely on a bit of subterfuge. *Unless*, that is, we give to the periodic table powers to bring about the various mental forms, knowing that such forms are irreducible.

Some philosophers like to compare the relationship between neurons and conscious states as being analogous to the relationship between micro and macro properties of everything else, and contend that such relationships, in the words of John

¹³ We might say, additionally, that Galen Strawson’s own panpsychist view is an updated take on Parmenides’s own arguments, in that Strawson, like Parmenides, seems to reject the distinction between actual and potential being.

Searle, "...provide a perfectly ordinary model for explaining the puzzling relationships between the mind and the brain." (1985: 16) Thus Searle goes on to suggest that, "...the solidity of the watch in front of me is explained by the lattice structure occupied by the molecules of which the watch is composed...Similarly, the liquidity of the water is explained by the nature of the interactions between the H₂O molecules." (1985: 21) Searle writes in another place:

"Because it is a feature that emerges from certain neuronal activities, we can think of it as an 'emergent property' of the brain. An emergent property of a system is one that is causally explained by the behavior of the elements of the system; but it is not a property of any individual elements and it cannot be explained simply as a summation of the properties of those elements. The liquidity of water is a good example: the behavior of the H₂O molecules explains liquidity but the individual molecules are not liquidity."¹⁴ (1990: 18)

The Aristotelian rejects these analogies. The Aristotelian would find much to agree with in the arguments of Galen Strawson. "This all delightful and true," he writes, in speaking of the relationship between water and H₂O and other such macro-from-micro emergences. "But can we hope to understand the alleged emergence of experiential

¹⁴ We might point out that water is *not* H₂O. For one thing, as David Odeberg reminds us, you will never find the sentence 'water is H₂O' in any chemistry textbook. You might read of how various combinations of hydrogen and oxygen molecules *constitute* water, or that water is 'composed' of various atoms, but outside of philosophy literature, you simply won't find the relationship construed as an identity. For another thing, here's Holly VandeWall: "An individual molecule of H₂O doesn't have any of the observable properties we associate with water. A glass of water, pure as water can be, is better understood as containing H₂O, OH⁻, H₃O⁺ and other related but less common ions, and even this is a vast oversimplification (if we could get truly pure water, which we cannot). Our current best understanding of the electron transfers that give water the properties we observe is a statistical average of ever changing interactions so complex as to be quite literally unthinkable." (VandeWall 2007: 912)

phenomena from non-experiential phenomena by reference to such models? I don't think so. The emergent character of liquidity relative to its non-liquid constituents does indeed seem shinningly easy to grasp...You can get liquidity from non-liquid molecules as easily as you can get a cricket team from eleven things that are not cricket teams." (2006: 35)

The non-experiential/experiential divide needs to be made sense of "by an entirely different analogy," and Strawson is right to say that we *have* no analogy that does the trick. The reason we have no analogy is that we have wrongly accepted a bottom-up picture of reality. Susanne Langer is right: "We are actually suffering today from the lack of suitable images of the phenomena that are currently receiving our most ardent scientific attention, the objects of biology and psychology. This lack is blocking the progress of scientifically oriented thought toward systematic insight into the nature of life and especially of mind; the lack of any image of the phenomenon under investigation, whereby to measure the adequacy of theories made on the basis of physical models. In borrowing models from physics, one is apt to borrow its image of reality as well; and that image derives from inorganic nature. It is becoming more and more obvious that it does not fit the forms of life very far above the level of their organic chemistry." (from Taliaferro 2010: 142)

We might invoke Zeno here, who noted that we can't ever cross a bridge, as to get to the other side requires going half way across, which requires going half way to half way, *ad infinitum*. In the same vein, we might notice that any 'halving' of phenomenal consciousness is to have it to some degree, making the difference between *zero* phenomenal consciousness categorically different than any minimal phenomenal state. So

unlike other sorts of emergences, the non-mind to mind emergence is truly an example of an is-from-naught emergence. At least, that is, given the mechano-atomist story assumed.

Therefore naturalism is false if ‘top-downism’ is true, and vice versa. As Nobel Prize winning chemist Christian de Duve writes, “The universe has given life and mind. Consequently, it must have had them potentially, ever since the Big Bang.” (Cunningham 2010: 162)

4.9 Supervenience, Emergence, and Value

Yet, everything that is argued today by philosophers like Strawson about mind, can be said about all substantial forms. All organic forms, as irreducible to the parts that make them up, cannot be the products of the sort of emergence stories relied upon by the liberal naturalist. For this reason, since value realism is parasitic not just on substantial form, but a particular sort of substantial form that has mental features that are themselves cannot be the result of emergence, we have good reason to think that no naturalism could ever make sense of value realism. But since we have, as argued in the previous chapters, good reason to posit substantial form (or in particular, the conscious human substantial form), we therefore have good reason to doubt the truth of naturalism.

We should conclude that, as a top-down doctrine, hylomorphism argues that *mind* cannot ‘emerge’ from a non-mental physical base. ‘Brute’ emergence is but a euphemism for ‘special creation’, and no right-minded ontology—naturalist or not--should allow for such a thing. But since naturalism must countenance a version of *supervenience* that is also ‘realizing’ and not just ‘constitutive’ supervenience, it must therefore advocate brute emergence twice over. When I talk about supervenience, I mean this: if a property

supervenes on another property, then the supervening property changes along with the subvening property, in that the subvening property determines the existence and change of the supervening property. An easy example of a supervening property is talked about in Plato's *Phaedo*—the sound of music supervenes on the playing of strings. Insofar as the strings are moved, the sound changes accordingly. The problem with supervenience, however, is that those who appeal to it often hide its *realizing* aspect. Searle (2008: 279) speaks about this problem, and argues that we must distinguish between 'constitutive' and 'causal' supervenience. Using supervenience as a way of showing a constitutive relationship is not objectionable, but this is only because it does not yet address the *causal* story. It is one thing to say that sound supervenes on string vibration if we simply mean that changes in vibration mean changes in the sound. Not only is this not objectionable, but no violin player would have it any other way. Violinists *count on* a constitutive supervening relationship between sound and string manipulation; it is this very (constitutive) supervening relationship that is rightly exploited by good violinists. But it is another thing to say that we therefore have and metaphysically straightforward *causal* explanation between sound and string vibration.

In Moliere's famous play *Le Malade Imaginere*, a scholastic named Dr. Diaforious argues that opium causes drowsiness because of its *virtus dormitiva*. We might update this by saying that opium makes us sleepy because it contains morphine and codeine--which is to say, the powers of morphine and codeine do certain things to make us sleepy. We could of course pull back yet another curtain by breaking down morphine and then talk about its chemical makeup (it has a benzyloquinoline backbone), and the talk about what these chemicals do to the brain. Thus, we might say that

benzylisoquinoline causes certain things to happen in our brain, and our feeling of sleepiness supervenes on these happenings in our brain. This is constitutive supervenience. But even though we have broken down the *virtus dormitiva* first to codeine and then to benzylisoquinoline, we have yet to give a true *causal* story between our feeling drowsy and those things which are supposed to have the powers to do so. In this respect, our updated story is no more informative than the one given by Dr. Diaforious. Searle argues that when supervenience is only invoked as a constitutive term, it is unobjectionable, but it is also not informative. But if the philosopher uses supervenience to give a *causal* story, he has yet to do so. Those who invoke supervenience so as to give *causal explanations* are relying on a dubious equivocation, therefore.

This equivocation can be clearly seen in the realm of moral theory. It is perfectly unobjectionable to say that moral facts supervene on non-moral facts if we merely mean that insofar as we change the non-moral circumstances, we therefore change the moral circumstances. But the use of supervenience here seems to already assume the existence of a realm of value or morals; invoking supervenience, that is, does not yet tell us *how* a moral realm could be realized from the ‘dead matter of physical systems.’ If invoking supervenience is to also suggest a *causal* story, we should realize that we are relying on a dubious *emergence* story. The problem, however, is that most moral theorists who rely on supervenience do not make clear that they are using supervenience causally—or as a story of emergence—as well as constitutively.

Some moral theorists, however, argue explicitly through the language of emergence. David McNaughton, for example, argues that there is no reason that we

cannot stay physicalists and also remain moral realists, as long as we replace what he calls ‘oppressive physicalism’ with ‘modest physicalism’. McNaughton writes, “Would the adoption of a *physicalist* world view rule out moral realism? Not necessarily. From the fact that all the objects in the world are physical objects it does not follow that all the properties of these objects are physical properties, if by that we mean the sorts of properties that figure in physics. Only if it is held that science gives an exhaustive account of all the properties that exist is there a threat to realism about properties, such as evaluative properties, which do not figure in the scientific story....The existence of states of consciousness provides a well-known difficulty for extreme physicalism...A more modest physicalism would allow the existence of what are often called *emergent* non-physical properties. Thus, for example, when the brain and central nervous system of an organism reach a sufficient complexity there emerge conscious states of awareness...Modest physicalism, which leaves room for emergent non-physical properties in a complete account of what there is in the world, is still a form of physicalism...Modest physicalism...can encompass moral realism. Moral properties would then be seen as non-physical properties which *emerged from* complex interrelationship between flesh and blood physical objects, namely human beings. It certainly seems plausible...to suppose that the moral properties of an agent or action are fixed by its non-moral properties.” (1988: 64)

Yet for the same reason that, as Strawson shows, the naturalist is mistaken in thinking that mental features can emerge on the bottom-up story of nature, the moral theorist is mistaken in thinking that a moral realm could emerge from the ‘mindless and meaningless’, ‘dead matter of physical systems.’ In which case, the moral theorists use of

supervenience is not metaphysically informative. David McNaughton is not alone, however, in his reliance on a dubious emergence story, even if he is unique in actually invoking the term explicitly. Most contemporary moral realists (e.g., Shafer-Landau 2003) use an equivocated use of supervenience to make the same point that McNaughton does. I shall use the next chapter to explain how much contemporary moral theory, therefore, runs adrift of the Parmenidean Constraint.

4.10 Conclusion

I emphasize these points about mind's inability to emerge, once physicalism is construed as mechano-atomism, since many contemporary moral realists want to exploit the 'hard problem' in mind to motivate their own moral realism. In the next chapter, it will be shown that these moves don't work. Phenomenal consciousness's obvious ill-fit into the mechano-atomist framework shows not that merely it is a hard problem to that very framework but that the framework might itself is wrong. Likewise, we can show that the suggestion by moral naturalists that moral facts identify with natural facts, along with the non-naturalist insistence that moral facts are not identical with, but supervene on, natural facts, is a plausible theory only if the very mechano-atomism that drives these theories is *wrong*. So, while one can sympathize with the desire by these modern philosophers to save moral facts, we should worry that they cannot properly do so given the framework under which they work.

Aristotelian value realism begins from the assumption that the human being has both a formal and final cause. It was argued in the first chapter that moral realism follows from this initial assumption, since the goodness of a human being follows from an

analysis of these causes. Thus, if the naturalist is going to falsify the Aristotelian view of value, he must undercut the entire metaphysical apparatus on which it stands—namely, the reality of substantial form. It was argued in chapters two and three that the naturalist cannot successfully do this. Yet we must remember that formal and final cause are not features that, when removed, result in a metaphysical story that matches up with modern naturalist assumptions anyway. For given the Aristotelian's insistence that wholes are irreducible to parts, we can see that the Aristotelian's own notion of *efficient* causality is different than how it is construed under the mechanistic consensus. To insist on Aristotelian notions of efficient causality is to insist on the principle of proportionate causality. Nature cannot give what it does not have. Thus, if the naturalist is right in seeing the bottom layer of reality as mindless and meaningless, or as Nagel puts it, the "dead matter of physical systems," then we must accept eliminativism. But as it was argued in chapters two and three, we have little reason to accept eliminativism. Yet neither, given the principle of proportionate causality, do we have recourse to the problematic 'strong emergence' stories sometimes invoked by the liberal naturalist. Unfortunately, as it will be argued in the next chapter, contemporary moral naturalists offer an example of this sort of liberal naturalists, for they must make use of these sorts of emergence stories to make sense of their realist view. I'll now turn to these views, and show why their conceptions of the moral fact are not as satisfying as Aristotle's own.

Chapter Five

The Legitimacy of Aristotelian Philosophy of Nature

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by giving a summary of what has come so far. After summarizing the defense for an Aristotelian philosophy of nature, there will be a brief defense of Aristotelian substantial form over against potential defeaters from a consideration of evolutionary theory. At the end of this chapter, we will be able to move to consider the differences between Aristotelian value theory and competing metaethical theories. This dissertation began with the claim that we can speak credibly about the reality of natural human goodness and the objective reality of human value through an analysis of an Aristotelian philosophy of nature. It was even claimed that these realities follow from the existence of the formal and final cause of the human person “without further ado.” Yet given the disputed ontological status of substantial form and the contentious nature of the metaphysical project that underlies it--a project that is at odds with the claims of contemporary naturalism--it was necessary to first defend the legitimacy of an Aristotelian philosophy of nature over and against contemporary naturalism, before turning specifically to Aristotelian moral theory. This is to say that the metaphysical underpinning of Aristotelian value realism is by far the most challenging and contentious aspect of this ‘moral’ theory. For this reason, this dissertation has devoted a majority of its pages to the metaphysics behind Aristotelian ethics. Up until now, this dissertation has attempted to show that we have good reason to see the whole of the natural world as confirming an Aristotelian analysis of nature, and therefore good reason for seeing

contemporary naturalism as holding to a *problematic* philosophy of nature. Before continuing to an Aristotelian ‘metaethics’ in Chapter Six, it is imperative that the metaphysical argument up until now be quickly summarized.

5.2 Human Goodness is Not Sui Generis

The Aristotelian argues that we have good reason to be realists about human value, because we see a world that is saturated with irreducible forms, forms with their own intrinsic natures and ends; we see a world that is ‘layered’ with such immanently striving forms--all the way up to largest macro level substances, like whales and planets, and all the way down to the smallest building-block-substances, like cells and bosons. We see a world that is therefore permeated with real value. As Stephen Talbott words it, “There is nothing at *any* level of observation, whether above or below macromolecules, that is not caught up in the meaningful life of the organism as a whole.” (2011: 37) So, precisely because the human substantial form is continuous with a nature permeated with such substantial forms, we do not need to construe natural human goodness as *sui generis*. Rather, human goodness is *analogous* to other sorts of goodness found permeating the universe. Human goodness is relative to the rich, broad, and fixed particularities of the formal and final cause of the human person. And we have every reason to think that this natural human goodness--that is, the formal and final cause of the human person--is a real feature of the universe. For if it is not real, then it cannot be real for the simple reason that *no* formal and final cause exists in nature; for it would be odd if the whole of the natural world were bereft of natural ends save the human animal, and it would equally

odd if the human animal were bereft of natural ends while the rest of nature was permeated with formal and final cause.

Neither of these dualistic views is plausible. Given the implausibility of a dualist construal of human goodness, we are left with two viable options: we can either see all of nature as permeated with value and therefore human value; or alternatively, we can declare that the world is *entirely* bereft of formal and final cause—that is, we can become reductionists and therefore *nihilists*. (cf. Rosenberg 2011, Dennett 1996, etc.) Terrance Deacon (2012) iterates this same dichotomy by arguing that the existence of what he calls ‘wholes’ in nature transcends what could be accounted for through a purely ‘scientific’ understanding of the world. He words the problem that substantial form creates for the contemporary naturalist committed to an exhaustively ‘physicalist’ construal of nature this way: “...our best science—that collection of theories that presumably come closest to explaining everything—does not include this one most fundamental defining characteristic of *being you and me*. In effect, our current ‘Theory of Everything’ implies that we don’t exist, except as collection of atoms.” (Deacon 2012: 1) In Chapter Two, this reductionist implication in naturalism was called, following Freya Mathews, ‘mechano-atomism’.

It was further argued that *strict* naturalism, the version of naturalism that explicitly endorses this reductionist (and eliminativist) idea, is the only *consistent* form of naturalism. This point is important: while contemporary naturalism takes many forms, from ‘liberal’ to ‘strict’, it is only the strict, reductionist version of naturalism that is consistent. Liberal naturalism is actually a form of dualism. Chapters Two, Three, and Four attempted to show why this is the case.

As it was argued in Chapter Two, there are good reasons for thinking that the ‘strict’ naturalist, that is, eliminativist position, is incorrect, and that therefore the Aristotelian alternative is correct. This argument was made by saying that firstly, if there are no instances of formal and final causes in nature, then we cannot even say that the smallest building blocks in nature (cells, leptons, bosons) have irreducible formal and final cause, and we would therefore have to posit an infinitely regressive reduction. This seems implausible, if not impossible. So we have good reason for thinking that irreducible form exists *somewhere*. Yet at whatever level an irreducible form exists, it should be difficult for a contemporary naturalist to accept. So the irreducibility of a *yak* should not strike the naturalist as any less metaphysically problematic than the irreducibility of a cell or a boson.

5.3 Contemporary Naturalism Entails Mind-Body Dualism

Secondly, and more importantly, even if we do say that only these initial building blocks have formal and final cause, and that *nothing else* built up from such building blocks have their own irreducible formal and final cause, then we have no way for accounting for consciousness in those entities that have it (from bugs to dolphins to people). But if this is true, then the thesis that we are ‘projecting’ formal and final cause on these higher levels (that is, that such features are merely ‘illusions’ fobbed on us by our genes) undermines itself, for we have nowhere to place the illusion. After all, presumably the illusion is in our *conscious minds*; but such a conscious mind should be as impossible as the very formal and final causes that are projected by that very mind. As Feser words the problem, “... the reductive method in question is like the method of getting rid of all the

dirt in the house by sweeping it under a certain rug. While this is a very effective way of getting rid of the dirt everywhere else, it is not a strategy that could possibly be used to get rid of the dirt under the rug itself...The mind just is, you might say, the holding tank for everything that doesn't fit [the strict naturalist's] quantitative method. Naturally, then, that method cannot coherently be applied to the mind itself." (Feser 2012b)

The Aristotelian sees consciousness as a product of what Chalmers calls 'strong' or (following James Barham) 'ontological' emergence, meaning that it is the sort of property that is not a *logical* result (at least in part) of the various movements and orderings of its physical building blocks (i.e., neurons in dolphins and humans, and something else still unknown in bugs and worms¹⁵). William Wallace (1997) has described the relationship between consciousness and non-consciousness as being like the difference between a circle and a polygon: however many sides you add to the polygon, you still have something different than a circle. If Wallace is right, then consciousness must be an example of 'ontological' or 'strong' emergence. As it was argued in Chapters Three and Four, such cases of 'strong' or 'ontological' emergence are impossible given the conception of *efficient causation* that naturalists work with—namely, a 'mechanical' and an anti-Aristotelian conception of efficient causation.

This newer and conflated conception of efficient causation stretches only as far back as Bacon, Newton, Galileo, and Descartes. (cf. Bilgrami 2010, D.C. Schindler 1986,

¹⁵ James Ross puts the point well: "It is the business of science to explain how a fly gets hungry and smells, but our way of looking at nature disallows these explanations from ever being made." (Ross 1990: 9) To assume occult causal powers is to assume that neurons are not the only discrete physical bits that have them. We have finally returned to a pre-modern vision of reality to the extent that we concede (to the chagrin of Descartes) that yaks and pigs feel pain and fear and hunger. Naturalists should do the same courtesy to entities lower on the hierarchy of being, especially since they have by and large rejected the identity thesis of J.J. Smart.

Ross 1990, Deneen 2011) As Akeel Bilgrami words it, “The metaphysical picture that was promoted by Newton...and Boyle, among others, viewed matter and nature as *brute and inert*.” (Bilgrami 2010: 31) Yet efficient causation is for these early modern philosophers much like it is for contemporary naturalists—merely a ‘bumping’ and ‘combining’ of various entities, now bereft of formal and final cause and ‘hidden’ dispositions. (Ross 1990, Mathews 1995)¹⁶ D.C. Schindler analyzes the ‘modern’ revision of Aristotelian efficient cause this way: “To put [the] difference [between Aristotelian and modern conceptions of matter] simply, the matter which for Aristotle is a relative concept becomes for Descartes an absolute concept. In other words, the matter which (in any of its actual instances) is understood by Aristotle only (always and already) in relation to a nature whose primary act is formal and final becomes in Descartes precisely identical to a nature from which...anything like forming and finalizing activity...has—always and already—been removed.” (1986: 2) Or, as James Ross words it, “In the Cartesian science, you do not need dispositions in nature because nothing basic does anything different from anything else. Newtonian mechanics had a more refined version of the same idea, where all physical motion is governed by the same simple laws with everything basically doing the same as everything else...As Descartes triumphantly concluded, ‘there are no little minds in matter.’” (Ross 1990: 2) In the world of biology, this difference between Cartesian and Aristotelian readings of efficient causation seem to show up often, even when the biologists making note of the differences are not familiar with the Aristotelian alternative. Consider the biologist Jane Bennett, who writes, “...the

¹⁶ It is relevant here to point out that Darwin articulated his own theory of evolution with this same Cartesian conception of efficient causation in mind. Darwin was of the common opinion of his time that cells were but ‘feature-less’ protoplasm--one indistinguishable from the next and with no ‘inside’—and with no powers other than what could be produced by motion, fitting, and combining. (cf. Behe 2006)

problem of meaninglessness arises only if ‘matter’ is conceived as inert, only as long as science deploys materialism who physics is basically Newtonian...’but’ matter has a liveliness, resilience, unpredictability, or recalcitrance that is itself a source of wonder for us.” (23) The same quote from Etienne Gilson that began this dissertation is helpful to quote here again: “What separates [the proponent of hylomorphism] irreparably from [the proponent of naturalism] is the Aristotelian (and common sense) notion of Substantial Form...*Descartes rid nature of it*. The[e naturalists] understand nothing anymore since they forgot Aristotle’s great saying that ‘there is no part of an animal that is purely material or purely immaterial.’ It is not the world ‘philosophy,’ it is instead the world ‘nature’ that separates us from our contemporaries. Since I do not have any hope of convincing them of the truth...of *hylomorphism*, I do not believe it is possible to propose our hypothesis to them as scientifically valid.” (from Dewan 1997: 23)

For Aristotelians to talk about an efficient cause is to assume the principle of proportionate causality. This principle states that a thing’s form and a thing’s powers are a product of the powers inherent in the things that brought the new thing about. Chapter Four described the importance of this principle by calling it the Parmenidean Constraint: that which does not exist is nothing at all, and you cannot get something from nothing. And in the case of properties like consciousness, we are clearly dealing (given the analysis given by Wallace) with powers that transcend what can be accounted for by their various bumping, pushing, pulling, circulating, moving, and combining. In other words, if consciousness is to emerge from its building blocks (neurons, etc.), then unless we are working with an Aristotelian conception of efficient cause, we are dealing with a property

emerging ‘ex nihilo’. But this is as impossible for an Aristotelian as it is for a contemporary naturalist.

As Chalmers reminds us, the circulating, pushing, and combining of various entities in nature (that is, when we are merely working with a Cartesian conception of efficient cause) can give us incredible things, including things that *could never have been predicted*, given our limited human intellects. Chalmers himself often gives the example of ocean waves. Yet, argues Chalmers, as ‘unpredictable’ as a wave is, it is still an entity that arises through the logical combining and circulating of various water molecules. As such, it is the sort of thing that ‘Laplace’s Demon’ *could have* predicted. But, Chalmers goes on to say, consciousness’ emergence from neurons (etc.) isn’t merely ‘unpredictable’: it is simply more than what can be logically accounted for via the combining and circulating of brain stuff. It is therefore more than what Laplace’s Demon could ever predict. To put Chalmers point in Aristotelian parlance, we might then say that the building blocks of consciousness have ‘occult’ powers.

Of course, most naturalists have accepted a Cartesian reading of nature and efficient causation, whereby all such occult powers were eliminated, and they have thereby accepted the idea that all of nature could be analyzed by what Descartes referred to as “a matter of springs and screws.”¹⁷ But given that the contemporary naturalist has

¹⁷ A good example of this rejection, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is seen in the play *Le malade imaginaire* by Moliere. Dr. Diafoirus argues that opium makes us sleepy because it has a ‘dormative power’. This is meant as a laugh line, but really, the physician is merely conveying (perhaps unknown to the playwright) the Aristotelian insistence that the chemicals in opium have these particular (occult) efficient causal powers. Certainly, we are no closer to understanding the ‘strong’ emergence relationship between such chemicals and the subjective state of ‘sleepiness’ any better today, even if we now have a better idea of what opium is chemically. Another more contentious example is worth mentioning: we might consider the Miller/Urey Experiment in the 1950’s. In 1953, two scientists at the University of Chicago tried to recreate the atmospheric conditions of a

denied the possibility of ‘hidden’ powers, and therefore has denied this richer version of

younger Earth in a test tube. They then continually ‘zapped’ a combination of ‘young earth’ gasses to see if they could ‘create’ life (it is thought that there was much lightning in the sky during earth’s early going). Miller and Urey found that a slight percentage of the created atmosphere, because of the electrical currents, produced the sort amino acids that make up proteins--a basic component of cellular life. The experiment was supposed to show that life was not so mysterious after all, as its basic components could be easily produced artificially. Certain naturalists have argued that these sorts of experiments debunk more ‘fantastic’ stories regarding the origin of life. Yet the Aristotelian would see the Miller/Urey Experiment as doing nothing more than what the students at Harry Potter’s Hogwarts rightly called ‘magic’: they have actualized mysterious and fantastic ‘occult’—that is, the ‘hidden’ powers—of certain elemental components—out of which, in combination with each other and with the electrical current, produced a new thing, with new causal powers that were clearly not the result of a weak emergence from the various gases and the electric current. Certainly, as argued in Chapter Two, we have no reason to think that life is a product of ‘weak’ emergence, even if in saying so, we also deny the Cartesian (*not* Aristotelian) ‘vitalist’ principle. For the Miller/Urey experiment showed us an example of scientists finding a case of *strong* emergence. In ‘creating’ these elemental components, these scientists were doing something analogous to what an obstetrician does when he ‘creates’ embryos in a text tube. He is manipulating the occult powers of an irreducible form. For the same reason that there is nothing less ‘miraculous’ about a test tube baby, there was nothing ‘naturalistic’, in the contemporary sense, in what was proved by Miller and Urey. One more example, for good measure. The Intelligent Design theorist Michael Behe has argued that the ‘irreducible complexity’ of the bacterial flagellum gives evidence of Intelligent Design. He has argued, furthermore, that his ‘Design’ theory is easily falsifiable: stick cells without flagella in a petri dish and see if they grow flagella. If they do, I.D. is falsified, he argues. True enough. But whether or not a cell grows a flagellum makes little difference to the Aristotelian. If it does grow a flagellum, that means that the stuff in the cell had the efficient causal powers to do so. In fact, the Aristotelian should have every reason to believe that such a cell *will* grow a flagella. Moreover, Behe’s assumption that the cell *will not* grow a flagella gives evidence of the Cartesian assumptions (of matter) that Behe is working with. Certainly, if Aristotelian notions of efficient causation are wrong and Cartesian notions are right, then the premise behind Intelligent Design that there is ‘special creation’ over and above the ‘natural’ process would be much more plausible than it is. For in that case, life, mind, and flagella (because of its irreducible *form*, not its complexity--which perhaps is *not* irreducible), water, and much else besides would be evidence of a designer, as all of these *irreducible forms* transcend what a Cartesian reading of matter could ever countenance. As James Ross notes, “Who could predict that hydrogen, a colorless gas, would become a black solid a pressures approximating the center of the earth? Or that hydrogen would boil at four degrees above absolute zero?” (1990: footnote 8) Some of these properties might well be the result of what Laplace’s demon could predict. But many of them simply aren’t. At the very least, if even a single property (and this dissertation has argued that consciousness and form are such properties), we have good reason for thinking that contemporary naturalism is problematic.

efficient causation, the contemporary naturalist must say that all seemingly irreducible 'higher level' phenomena are *in fact* merely products of *weak* emergence after all (like in the case of consciousness); *or* he has to say that the higher level feature that is said to be there really *isn't* there (like in the case of formal and final cause). For if they do not say one of these two things, they admit to a form of dualism--like Chalmers himself does. To avoid such a dualism, most contemporary naturalists say that the features of the world that seem to transcend what weak emergence could ever account for, are indeed *still* cases of weak emergence; it's just that the story of this emergence is as yet unexplained. A good example of this sort of argument is found in John Searle's insistence that consciousness arises from the brain in the same way that solidity arises in closely packed molecules (Searle 1985, etc.). We do not know the details of how this works, admits Searle, but we have no reason to think that these sorts of emergent entities (consciousness and solidity) aren't analogous. Yet the Aristotelian, along with Chalmers, would say that we have *every reason* to think that these sorts of emergent entities aren't analogous. But if we reject the analogy but still accept a Cartesian reading of efficient cause, we might be forced towards a dualism. As Stephen Priest words the problem, "Physicalism either collapses into materialism or collapses into mind-body dualism. Physicalism collapses into materialism if it is, for example, the doctrine that everything is physical or the doctrine that the mental is... 'reducible' to the physical. In those cases physicalism is false because materialism is false. Physicalism collapses into mind-body dualism if it entails even the tiniest bit of mentality... To fail to realize this is to fail to realize that the brain is only billions and billions of atoms in motion in empty space. So-called physicalist views...leave wholly unexplained the relation between thoughts and experiences on the

one hand and billions of atoms in motion on the other. Physicalism presupposes the mind-body problem. It is not its solution.” (Priest 2012: 328)

The Aristotelian therefore sees Chalmers’ own insistence on ‘metaphysical emergence’ as but an articulation of Aristotelian efficient causation under a new name. To concede ‘metaphysical’ emergence is to admit that contemporary naturalism is too limited in its approach to nature, for it still leaves matter as mechanistic. As D.C. Schindler words it, “One’s understanding of physics remains *mechanistic* just so far as one thus continues to treat matter as absolute, in the precise sense of ‘something’ which is taken to be properly understood in abstraction from ...anything ‘more’ such as internal activity (e.g., form and finality).” (1986: 3) To admit to ‘metaphysical’ emergence over and above mere logical derivation is, in fact, to move to the Aristotelian camp, at least to that extent. Of course, the Aristotelian would deny the possibility of Chalmers’ zombies. If zombies display all of the powers of a conscious human being, they *must* be conscious, since many of the powers of the human being are *parasitic* on consciousness. This will be more fully explained when we look at Sharon Street’s ‘Darwinian’ arguments against moral realism in the next section.

The Aristotelian argues that consciousness is the product of occult powers of neurons (at least in part). That is, discrete, physical brain-stuff (in part) has the power to bring about a conscious agent with an immaterial ‘control room’. However, the Aristotelian has good reason for thinking that Chalmers’ *selective* use of Aristotelian notions of efficient causation, (whereby he concludes a mechanistic reading of matter with an epiphenomenally supervening consciousness) is metaphysically suspect. Rather than picking and choosing when to use a Cartesian conception of efficient causation and

when to use a richer Aristotelian conception, the Aristotelian simply argues that we have, from the start, a good reason for thinking formal and final cause are *real*, and therefore good reason to think that a mechanical reading of matter is faulty. The problem for the contemporary naturalist, that is, is not just Ryle's 'ghost': it is also the *machine* in which it is placed. Chalmers would have us be meat robots with an epiphenomenal 'gloss' of consciousness. But the Aristotelian simply rejects this sort of 'property' dualism. For such a dualism still holds firm to a Cartesian conception of matter. In other words, the problems that the contemporary naturalist has with consciousness show that the *entirety* of the contemporary naturalist's conception of nature (given their confused conception of efficient cause) is in jeopardy.¹⁸

Thus, we see that the *main* thing that separates the contemporary naturalist from the Aristotelian naturalist is their respective interpretations of efficient cause. To accept Aristotelian notions of efficient causal powers is to accept a philosophy of nature that puts pressure on contemporary naturalist assumptions. As mentioned in Chapter Four, some scientists and philosophers are willing to consider Aristotelian readings of these building blocks (e.g., biologist Christian De Duve declares: "The universe has given life and mind. Consequently, it must have had them *potentially*, ever since the Big Bang.")

¹⁸ Of course, the Aristotelian also partially agrees with 'non-standard' naturalist philosophers like Galen Strawson (2006) and Thomas Nagel (2012), at least insofar as these two philosophers see consciousness as a feature that could never 'weakly emerge' from lower level features. Nevertheless, Strawson and Nagel, unlike Chalmers, also reject the Aristotelian reading of efficient causation. Thus, both Strawson and Nagel conclude that some sort of panpsychist story must be true (though Strawson argues this much more explicitly and forcefully, and Nagel suggests this much more tentatively). As such, the Aristotelian ultimately disagrees with Strawson and Nagel, but only because the Aristotelian accepts a much richer and much more robust (nay, at times necessarily *fantastic*) view of the fundamental *material* building blocks of life. (This point is also made in a similar way by Priest 2012)

(my emphasis¹⁹)), but they are the exception. Most philosophers either reject William Wallace's imagery and insist on seeing phenomena like consciousness as products of yet-to-be-understood weak emergence (e.g., Searle), *or* they opt for some sort of panpsychist philosophy of nature (e.g., Skrbina 2007, Mathews 2003, Nagel 2012, Strawson 2006), *or* they deny (confusingly and ambiguously) that we even *are* conscious (e.g., Dennett 1991, & Rosenberg 2011).

5.4 Irreducible Formal and Final Cause Cannot Weakly Emerge

This dissertation concentrated on the problems that consciousness makes for contemporary naturalist philosophy of nature in order to justify the use a rival Aristotelian philosophy of nature, one that assumes the reality of formal and final cause. As it was argued in Chapter Two, we have good reason for thinking, *pace* Dennett, et al, that we really are conscious; moreover, we have good reason for thinking, *pace* the 'standard' argument of the contemporary naturalist, that consciousness is an example of 'strong' or 'ontological' emergence and therefore could never arise on the contemporary naturalist's story of nature. Yet we should see that formal and final cause, as Terrance Deacon (2012) and many others have argued, are as problematic for the contemporary naturalist as consciousness. Consciousness, that is, has been dubbed the 'hard problem' only because naturalists have either ignored the problem of formal and final cause, or simply denied their existence.²⁰ But the problems that consciousness makes for

¹⁹ We might also quote Richard Conn Henry: "Physicists are the last people in the world with reason to claim mechanistic behavior at the bottom—and, in fact, some among them have long been driven by their own subject matter to reflect upon the *mindful* universe." (2005: 29)

²⁰ We therefore have good reason for seeing as dubious the claim by Trenton Merricks (2003) that eliminativism is true of a thing that does not have consciousness holding that

contemporary naturalism give us good reason for rejecting naturalism *tout court*. Taking imagery from Gregg Rosenberg, it was suggested that consciousness is not merely the final piece of a jigsaw puzzle that had yet to be properly placed, but was instead like a wrong move in a *sliding tile* puzzle: a failure to place consciousness on the philosophy of nature given to us by the contemporary naturalist, shows us that the *entirety* of the contemporary naturalist philosophy of nature is suspect. For this reason, while the Aristotelian welcomes Chalmers allusion to a richer notion of efficient causal powers under the banner of ‘metaphysical’ emergence, the Aristotelian *rejects* Chalmers insistence on *resorting* to an a-teleological and mechanical concept human *behavior*. We have no reason to see consciousness as merely epiphenomenally resting on a world that could be otherwise explained by a *Cartesian* concept of efficient causation. Chalmers

thing together. We should not think that a substance can be reduced to its parts merely because we can entirely explain the causal behavior of the ‘macro’ thing through the causal powers of the atoms making up that thing. For this is to reduce all causation to Cartesian-style efficient causation, and it is also, as mentioned in Chapter Three, to falsely see the world through a series of snapshots. But we have good reason for thinking that the Cartesian notion of efficient causation is wrong. Laplace’s demon might not be able to see a chair, since he would merely be able to see the bumping and combining of the molecules that make up what is called a ‘chair’. In this sense, the point goes to the demon. But the Aristotelian would not be troubled by this sort of eliminativism. The Aristotelian argues himself that art imitates nature, and that artifacts have mere accidental substance. So eliminativism isn’t proved merely through such replacements; it would only be proved if it could also eliminate natural substances. Yet one should only conclude eliminativism about everything (or everything that doesn’t have consciousness, in Merricks’ case) if Laplace’s demon could make a clean sweep of *predictions* about natural substances. The demon might be able to predict that a wave would result from water molecules. But it is only because of the efficient, formal, and final causes of, say, a *baby yak* that makes it possible to predict that a zygote will transform *into* a baby yak. Unless Laplace’s demon had information about these Aristotelian structures, he could not predict that a sperm and an egg, sufficiently joined, would bring about a conscious, baby yak. If we give Laplace’s demon this Aristotelian ‘inside information’ (an entirely appropriately double-entendre) about the yak zygote, then he’ll be able to make such a prediction. But certainly, the demon’s predictions are less impressive at that point. Thus, while a dualist might say that the demon could give us a what Russell once called the ‘causal skeleton’, but not consciousness, the Aristotelian denies the possibility that the demon could even give us the causal skeleton.

dualism is the result of picking and choosing when he will rely on Newtonian notions of efficient causation, and when he will rely on Aristotelian conceptions of it.

The difference between an irreducible whole—that is, a substance with formal and final cause—and a *reducible* substance (say, a rock or a computer), is as stark as the difference between a polygon and a circle. And just as we need a form of efficient causation that transcends what Cartesian causation could ever provide to give us consciousness, we need this same sort of ‘rich’ causation to give us the ‘layered’ reality of irreducible forms. James Ross argues that we must accept a philosophy of nature that allows for this sort of causation, for we must accept, as he words it, “...that the natures of things...are not simply the local aggregations of matter, the way a pile is resultant from the grains of sand, but that there are as yet *undiscovered* principles of emergence...” (1990: 5)

So, given that 1) irreducible substances clearly *present themselves* to us, and now given that 2) the contemporary reductionist’s philosophy of nature (one which denies the existence of such substances) has been shown to be wrong, we *therefore* have every reason to adopting a *rival* philosophy of nature—namely, the Aristotelian’s—that both *assumes* irreducible substances and that therefore does not give us the ‘hard problem’ of consciousness.

For even if the fundamental building blocks had their own formal and final cause, unless these building blocks *also* contained the occult power to produce irreducible higher level substances, no instances of formal and final cause could ever exist except those found on the bottom level (and it would remain a mystery how the bottom level was itself irreducible). Thus, such irreducible substances, as argued in Chapter Three and

Four, (strongly) emerge from their fundamental building blocks in a way analogous to how consciousness emerges from brain-stuff: through the *occult* powers of their building blocks.²¹ The Aristotelian agrees with Paul Copan, who argues, “If intrinsic value does not exist from the outset, its emergence from nonvalueable processes is difficult to explain. It doesn’t matter how many nonpersonal and nonvaluable components we happen to stack up: from valuelessness, valuelessness comes.” (from Stewart 2008: 146) Yet really, the phrase ‘ontological emergence’ as used by James Barham, might at the end of the day be a poor descriptor of the occult powers of nature, at least insofar as it applies to the way that nature is saturated with formal and final cause. James Ross, for example, argues that, “We cannot be content with the notion of ‘emergence’...[because] we have but need a general account of the *succession of forms* and consequent natures.” (1990: 6) Perhaps the ultimate take-away of an Aristotelian philosophy of nature is gleaned from an idea that Chalmers has hit upon when describing the difference between waves and consciousness, and it is this: the ‘intelligibility’ of nature, made possible by the reality of formal and final cause, is ultimately only partial, precisely because the irreducible natures of the layered ‘wholes’ of reality are contingent on powers of the periodic table that simply transcend what Laplace’s Demon could predict. And it is *this* aspect of Aristotelian philosophy of nature that puts pressure on a contemporary naturalist’s metaphysical assumptions, and ultimately, their ambitions for *understanding* nature in toto.

In short, if an Aristotelian analysis of nature is correct, then we can with good reason think that even the most ‘liberal’ of modern-day naturalist programs is misguided,

²¹ James Ross writes: “Aristotle had only a name for it, ‘eduction from the potentiality of matter’ and offered no explanation. We need one and will have to invent one.” (1990: 8)

precisely because such a irreducibly layered reality could never arise from the ‘bottom-up’ picture assumed by such a naturalist, nor could even the smallest building blocks of reality be described through an Aristotelian analysis.

5.5 Aristotelian Substantial Forms and the Theory of Evolution

Much of this dissertation has been the unpacking and articulation of the impossibility of the ‘bottom-up’ view of the world. Such a thesis might seem to run into difficulties immediately if we consider that the truth of evolution seems indisputable, and evolution seems at first glance to be precisely the sort of ‘bottom-up’ story that would falsify Aristotelian value realism. Yet if the Aristotelian story of efficient cause is correct, then we have every reason to think that a vast array of irreducible forms could emerge from the primordial swamp of single celled organisms.

I am obviously here concentrating on naturalism and physicalism, and showing why these views fail to falsify substantial form *if physicalism is interpreted as mechano-atomism*. I am thereby avoiding the philosophy of biology as best I can. Yet I should briefly enter this fray, in order to show that it is only if evolution is interpreted through the mechanistic consensus that it should give the Aristotelian moral realist pause. Yet there is no reason to pause, since the evolutionary story of our origin *assumes*, even if unknowingly, an Aristotelian philosophy of nature. I want to tentatively suggest that the physicalist-cum-mechanistic reading of evolution is, unfortunately, far-too widely assumed to be true by naturalists, even among forgiving or liberal naturalists, and those philosophers otherwise critical of the ‘strict’ naturalist or eliminativist construal of nature. I also want to suggest, along with philosophers such as Raymond Tallis (2011),

Mary Midgley (1996, 2010), and Conor Cunningham (2010), that this mechanist reading of evolution is, technically speaking, *anti-evolutionary*, and an example of cutting off one's nose to spite one's face. We simply have no reason to see the Darwinism as a 'universal acid'. (Dennett 1995) Just because we might all have our roots in the primordial swamp does not mean that various forms that arose out of that swamp are not reducible to it.

5.6 Aristotelianism and Evolution, Part 1: Teleology and the Scala Naturae

That evolution implies Aristotelianism—this has not always been the consensus.²² Two reasons in particular stand out. Firstly, many people seem to think that the evolutionary story falsifies Aristotle's insistence on irreducible essence and teleology. Many philosophers have argued that the truth of evolution alone gives us reason to doubt a teleological conception of nature. As Nagel famously wrote, "Darwin enabled modern secular culture to heave a great collective sigh of relief, by apparently providing a way to eliminate purpose, meaning, and design as fundamental features of the world" (From Taliaferro 2010: 34)²³ A. Scott Turner puts this point succinctly: "To the essentially atomist mind-set of modern science, the most appealing feature of Darwin machines is their utter absence of intentionality or goal-directedness." (2009: 25) And as A.J. Bernatowicz argues: "Each of us is for good and against evil. For most teachers of science, teleology...[is not an issue] to be debated but to be deplored—we stand against the evil [of teleology]. In keeping with this attitude, I shall not debate with any who may

²² Though, as A. Scott Turner and others point out, the anti-Aristotelian attitude in biological circles is not near as entrenched as it was in past generations.

²³ Though see Nagel 2012. He seems to have changed his mind.

have philosophical convictions in favor of teleology; their concept of good differs from mine.” (From Turner 2009: 25)

Secondly, evolution is supposed to show that the traditional *scala naturae*, a scale that gives special place and purpose to the homo sapiens, is wrong. For example, Owen Flanagan (2007) insists that the key take-away of the naturalistic position is what follows from our commitment to evolution, and this commitment shows that there is nothing particularly special *ontologically* about the human person. Man, argues Flanagan, is but an animal, evolved from other animals, and he can trace his lineage to the primordial swamp as totally and completely as any slug, or his closest of mammalian kin, the monkey. And it is this biological continuity that shows contemporary scientific naturalism to be the correct ontological interpretation of nature over and against versions that rely on what Flanagan refers to by the German “Geist”, or similar “supernaturalist” readings of the human person. (2007: 20) We need, argues Flanagan, to rid ourselves of the idea that the human person is a product of special creation, “endowed with a mysterious ghost/soul” over and above his material parts. (2007: 15)

While Aristotle is not Flanagan’s main target, it is clear that Flanagan’s insistence upon the truth of evolution is also supposed to signal the death of the Aristotelian metaphysical panorama. As such, it seems as if evolution is supposed to have Copernican implications: just as Copernicus supposedly showed that the earth is not in the center of the universe, but was just one of millions of planets in an infinitely expanding and centerless universe, the truth of evolution is supposed to show that the ‘specialness’ of man is an anti-scientific myth.

Yet, as I've shown so far, there is simply no reason to think that the truth of evolution does anything to undermine the truth of the Aristotelian picture of nature. This chapter began by stressing that we are, in fact, animals, and that our theorizing about the nature of the human good must take account of our continuity with the whole of the biological world. In fact, the Aristotelian insists on this continuity, because when it is denied or forgotten (as it is for Descartes, who refuses to give mind to animals) that severe abuse of the animal world can be too easily justified, and environmental destruction made more palatable. As Akeel Bilgrami (2010) and Patrick Deneen (2011) remind us, one of the convenient results of the revision of efficient causation in the modern era was that it made it easier for the new capitalist class to exploit the natural world for personal profit. Bilgrami writes, "Some of the dissenters argued that it is only because one takes matter to be 'brute' and 'stupid', to use Newton's own term, that one would find it appropriate to conquer it with nothing but profit and material wealth as ends, and thereby destroy it both as a natural and a human environment for one's habitation," and that "...[Descartes' new view of matter]...became the orthodoxy not because of any superiority, either metaphysical or scientific [over Aristotle's own more richer conception of it], but because of carefully cultivated *social and political factors*." (2010: 38)²⁴ Indeed, political philosophers writing in the Aristotelian tradition, like Patrick Deneen (2011) and Wendell Berry (2002), have argued that 'Newtonian'

²⁴ In fact, Bilgrami's thesis is rather beautifully described *in toto* in Dick Gaughan's famous song about the Diggers, a song that is metaphysically accurate in its name: *The World Turned Upside Down*. Only if nature is first mechanized and 'turned upside down' can humans themselves later be mechanized so as to create the 'science' of economics and the Law of Rents, as John Medaille argues in *The Vocation of Business* (2007), John Milbank argues at length in *Theology and Social Theory* (2006), and Christopher Ferrara argues in *Liberty, the God that Failed* (2012). As Ferrara specifically argues, if Newton and Descartes lose the metaphysics war, it would be difficult to take seriously something as unnatural as the doctrine of Marginal Utility.

conceptions of matter have made the world all but uninhabitable.²⁵ An Aristotelian philosophy of nature makes it more difficult to see man as ontologically special; but while the strict naturalist would maintain continuity between species by reducing man to the same level as a brute and mechanically driven nature and then by reducing all such mechanically driven things to the primordial swamp, the Aristotelian instead raises up the whole of the natural world by returning to everything in the natural world its own, respective immanent goals, drives, and purposes. As Hans Jonas reminds us, “In the hue and cry over the indignity done to man’s metaphysical status in the doctrine of his animal descent, it was overlooked that by the same token some dignity had been restored to the realm of life as a whole. If man was the relative of animals, then animals were the relatives of man, and in degrees bearers of that inwardness of which man, the most advanced of their kin, is conscious in himself.” (from Cunningham 2010: 65)

In other words, the truth of our continuity should not tempt us toward the genetic fallacy; for we should be cognizant of what evolution has actually produced: a rational

²⁵ Both Deneen and Berry give the example of industrial farming as an example of the ways in which a failure to understand the notion of substantial form has given way to an environmental crisis. In fact, Berry (2002) has specifically taken on popular philosophical naturalists, including Richard Lewontin, over this issue. Lewontin (2001) insists that those critical of industrial farming can only justify their older system of ‘natural’ farming (small plots, animal fertilizer, organic seeds, crop rotation) through an appeal to nature that is ‘religious’ and ‘romantic’. Lewontin concludes: “...industrial capitalism...has become so much the basis of European and American life that any truly popular new romantic movement against it would be inconceivable.” (from Berry 2002) Yet Berry reminds us that it is not ‘spooky’ to insist that nature shows us what ought to be done in regards to crop rotation and fertilization. “The problem for Lewontin and others like him,” writes Berry, “is that the faith in industrial agriculture as an eternal pillar of human society is getting harder to maintain, not because of the attacks of its opponents but because of the increasingly manifest failures of industrial agriculture itself: massive soil erosion, soil degradation, pollution by toxic chemicals, pollution by animal factory wastes, depletion of aquifers, runaway subsidies, the spread of pests and diseases by the long-distance transportation of food, mad cow disease, indifferent cruelty to animals, the many human sufferings associated with agricultural depression, exploitation of “cheap” labor, the abuse of migrant workers.” (2002)

animal. Just because we come from the primordial swamp, this does not mean that we are reducible to it. We are as irreducibly distinct from the non-living building blocks of this swamp as is the first organism that arose from it. Nor should we be equivocated with our nearest of mammalian kin. We are as ontologically distinct from a flower as we are from a monkey. As Tallis (2011), Midgley (1996), Cunningham (2010), and Conway-Morris (2012) insist, to equivocate between the substantial form of the human and that of, say, a monkey or a dolphin, is actually to make an *anti-evolutionary* insistence. That we are rational animals--this is what evolution has shown, and this is what evolution has produced. There is no reason to downgrade rationality to instrumentality (whereby animal pleasures are all we can hope to achieve), the same way that we need not downgrade consciousness to something other than the strange and wonderful thing that it is merely because it cannot be properly accounted for by weak emergence. Evolution has given us both consciousness and rationality. If these features are not accountable through weak emergence, and if these features were not part of the hidden powers of the building blocks in the primordial swamp, then nothing could now be conscious or rational. But we *are* both conscious and rational. Therefore, the initial building blocks must give evidence of an Aristotelian conception of efficient causation. While these features are problematic on a mechanistic reading of evolution and a Cartesian reading of efficient causation, there is no sense in re-describing these features to be other than they are in order to make them better fit with the mechanistic reading of evolution. Instead, we should simply assume that the Cartesian interpretation of efficient causation is mistaken, and the mechanistic reading of matter is false. We have good reason to say that the evolutionary process relies upon an Aristotelian philosophy of nature.

Moreover, we might see immediately the problematic nature of the mechanistic reading of matter, if we notice that the differences between man and his nearest of mammalian kin are simply more than could be accounted for given the differences in the physical structures of these two organisms. For the profound intellectual differences between the human and the monkey (as argued by, e.g., Chomsky and Pinker 2008) do not seem to correlate in profound differences in brain structure or DNA make-up between these two species.²⁶ The differences between these two species cannot be entirely accounted for by the combining, circulating, and aggregation of the biological stuff of the human animal as compared to the combining, circulating, and aggregation of the biological stuff of the chimpanzee. Not only will Laplace's Demon be unable to account for consciousness, but it will not be able to account for the intellectual differences between a monkey and a human. For this reason among others, we have good reason for accepting an Aristotelian reading of efficient causation over a Cartesian one.

Another important way in which Aristotle's notion of efficient causation helps demarcate this view from contemporary naturalism is that it draws a wedge in the metaphor, advanced by Daniel Dennett, that speaks of the difference between skyhooks and cranes. Briefly, Daniel Dennett argues that the 'Darwinian' naturalist is committed to a form of building and evolution that advances by 'cranes', instead of skyhooks. As Dennett writes, "“Let us understand that a skyhook is a 'mind-first' force or power or process, an exception to the principle that all design and apparent design, is ultimately the result of mindless, motiveless mechanistic. A crane, in contrast, is a sub-process or special feature of a design process that can be demonstrated to permit the local speeding

²⁶ It is noteworthy, furthermore, that the human brain size is *smaller* than our Neanderthal kin. (Conway Morris 2012: 211)

up of the basic, slow process of natural selection, and that can be demonstrated to be itself the predictable (or retrospectively explicable) product of the basic process. Some cranes are obvious and uncontroversial; others are still being argued about, very fruitfully.” (1996: 76) Richard Dawkins echoes the crane theme, writing, “The most ingenious and powerful crane so far discovered is Darwinian evolution by natural selection. Darwin and his successors have shown how living creatures, with their spectacular statistical improbability and appearance of design, have evolved by slow, gradual degrees from simple beginnings. We can now safely say that the illusion of design in living creatures is just that—an illusion.” (from Talbott 2011) And Owen Flanagan describes the skyhook idea succinctly: “If you really accept the Darwinian picture, there are no skyhooks, only cranes—cranes all the way down. A crane—a machine that is already there upward and onward, sometimes making something swatch and new. Skyhooks if there are any, hang up there, on their own as it were, drawing into being that which did not exist before the skyhook drew whatever it is into being. God is a skyhook; natural selection is a crane.” (2007: 45) And again: “Intentionality doesn’t come from on high; it percolates up from below, from the initially mindless and pointless algorithmic processes that gradually acquire meaning and intelligence as they develop.” (2007: 80)

Yet these thinkers seem to be making some metaphysical mistakes, as far as the Aristotelian is concerned. Firstly, they seem to be conflating design with irreducible *form*. As mentioned in Chapter One, an irreducible form is not, strictly speaking, the same as a *designed* thing. There is nothing about a form that need be ‘complex’. What makes a form a form is that it has an irreducible nature and irreducible striving on the

level of the thing. Form, as the Aristotelian argues, cannot arise from the combining and circulating of its various building blocks. It must be the product of efficient causation. What is interesting about a bacterial flagellum, as far as the Aristotelian is concerned, is not its complexity. Perhaps its complexity is ‘irreducible’, perhaps it is merely the result of trial and error—and therefore the combining and circulating of its parts. Instead, what makes a bacterial flagellum interesting is its formal and final cause—its irreducible *nature*. But in this way, a bacterial flagellum is no more interesting, ontologically, than an amoeba.

Secondly—and this will be made more explicit in the next chapter, though it was articulated briefly in Chapter Three—these thinkers seem to be conflating teleology with intentionality. A form’s immanent goal and striving is not necessarily represented to itself as such. Yet perhaps this is incidental. For whether we are talking about a substance that has the ability to represent its goals to itself (like a yak) or a substance whose goals and strivings are not accompanied by such representations, we are nevertheless dealing with an irreducible whole. The difference between an irreducible, *teleological* substance and an entity that is not so irreducible is the difference between a polygon and a circle.

For these reasons, an Aristotelian philosophy of nature might undercut the difference between a crane and a skyhook. For on one hand, the Aristotelian wants to agree with Dennett, et al, that nothing in nature is ‘sky-hooked in’. At the same time, the Aristotelian will reject the insistence by these thinkers that everything in nature is the product of what is here described as “mindless and pointless” building blocks and an equally pointless evolutionary ‘process’. For reasons discussed in this chapter and all throughout this dissertation up to this point, the Aristotelian simply rejects the idea that

mind and meaning could ‘emerge’ from a mindless and meaningless starting place; but because we have every reason to think it is there, for reasons discussed here, we have every reason to see as problematic this reductionist reading of the evolutionary process.

One might initially imagine that the naturalist accepts cranes but the theist or the Platonist (of whatever stripe) accepts skyhooks. After all, to speak of the priority of the intelligible over the sensible, as was argued in Chapter Four, is to imply a metaphysics of sky-hooks, for the very language of ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ seems to extend the spatial metaphor on display. And that might be a perfectly acceptable way to see the difference between the two theories. But let us look at the crane metaphor more closely. Wendell Berry has reminded us when a metaphor is construed as an equation, it is out of control, but when it is construed as identity, it is preposterous. The crane metaphor at the very least might be misleading. For if the Aristotelian is correct to be motivated by The Parmenidean Constraint, the naturalist’s own crane would actually be responsible for ‘drawing into existence’ *ex nihilo*, the higher level features of reality. So the only way that we can make sense of the crane metaphor is if we say that the crane is another word for Aristotelian efficient causation. We should simply notice that the Aristotelian is the true inheritor of the crane/skyhook metaphor, if this metaphor is helpful at all. For if we adopt an Aristotelian conception of efficient causation, we can show how, in the hands of Aristotle, the evolutionary process is indeed an example of a crane-laden ontology. So Dennett, et al, are right to talk of cranes, but they might not realize what they are admitting to by insisting on this metaphor.

So we should note the irony of Flanagan’s position. Flanagan is saying something entirely consistent with the Aristotelian. Thus to insist upon the continuity of the human

species with other organic entities is a fact incidental to the Aristotelian, precisely because the Aristotelian says the same thing. The only difference between Flanagan and the Aristotelian is that it is only the Aristotelian's conception of nature, as containing formal and final cause and a richer conception of efficient causation, that can make sense of *evolution* itself. Scott Turner puts the point well: "On principle, modern Darwinism rules out any role for intentionality in our thinking about evolution. Evolution is immediate, contingent, and does not look forward. It is driven the Darwin machine, and solely by the Darwin machine. Yet, we know that intentional living systems have evolved on Earth, because we are examples of them. We are capable of looking forward, assessing the future, and intentionally seeking future goals. How, then, can an unintentional process, which natural selection is supposed to be, produce intentional beings like ourselves? Was it just a lucky break, or is it a reflection of an unappreciated intentionality in the process of evolution?" (2009: 26) Yet it is beside the point to ask whether it was 'lucky': it is more important to ask if it was *possible*. Clearly, it was, since evolution produced *us*.

Given what has been argued so far, it seems as if the naturalist has three choices: first, he could insist upon an a-teleological and mechanistic conception of the material world, and a world that is, at bottom, mindless and meaningless; then, in order to keep things consistent, he will also deny that we humans give evidence of goal-seeking, rationality, or consciousness. But this sort of eliminativism seems highly suspect. Secondly, he could argue that the human being is the lone exception—that he alone is the sort of 'intentional' agent that Turner speaks of. But this seems suspiciously dualistic, in the vein of the dualisms spoken of in previous sections. Thirdly, he could accept the

continuity of *teleology*, and pump mind and meaning *downward* into nature. But in which case, his scientific naturalism seems to slouch towards the very Aristotelian picture of reality he wants to originally deny.

Yet the naturalist *should* choose option three: for it is only if the Aristotelian story of nature is right that evolution is possible at all. Therefore, it is not a ‘concession’ at all for the Aristotelian to admit to the truth of the Darwinian story of biological continuity. Quite the contrary. In fact, many philosophers seem to agree with Etienne Gilson (2009), who argued in *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again*, that it is only *if* we accept an Aristotelian metaphysics of nature that the evolutionary process is possible at all. (e.g., Lennox 1993, Midgley 2002, 1996, & 2010, Turner 2009, Oderberg 2006, Cunningham 2010, Fodor 2010, Conway-Morris 2012, Tallis 2011, and Nagel 2012) As biologist Mario Bunge rightly writes, “Evolutionary biology, born in 1859, killed physicalism.” (2010: 114) The ‘argument from evolution’ against Aristotelian substantial form is actually just the argument from physicalism-cum-mechano-atomism, hidden under biological dressing.

It is therefore probably false to think that evolution *per se* is an independent critique of substantial form in its own right. Quite the contrary. Those who want to argue against substantial form using Darwin, first need to problematically reinterpret the actual evolutionary process, and reduce it to the language of mechano-atomism. This has been attempted, of course. (e.g., Dawkins 2006, Dennett 1996, & A. Rosenberg 2011). But the Aristotelian, for reasons spoken of here, does not see these attempts as successful.

5.7 Aristotelian and Evolution, Part Two: Aristotle's Anti-Hobbesianism

The theory of evolution might put another sort of pressure on the Aristotelian, however. The Aristotelian insists that the fulfillment of our rational nature is a life of virtue. Yet if this is true, and if human nature truly is continuous with other species, then this natural 'goal' is dubious. Unfortunately, nature might show us that the real goal of homo sapiens—or as John Gray in *Straw Dogs* (2007) calls him, the 'homo sapien' (from Tallis 2010: 5)—is of a sort that no moral realist would recognize as 'moral' at all. We 'naturally', it is argued, are of a constitution that is akin to Hobbes' 'state of nature', at best. Nature, this argument goes, gives us a human animal that seeks its own survival by any means necessary. Those traits we most admire in the virtuous person—humility, friendship, altruism, mercy, cooperation, charity, and the like—are qualities that are quite different from those found in our true and *real* 'natures'. When we read of horrible crimes—rapes, murders, looting—we are looking at examples of what our true natures are really like.

Against these insistences, the Aristotelian sees every reason to see virtue as the true fulfillment of our *real* nature, and true substantial form. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss biologist's findings in any detail, it should be noted that most biologists endorse the idea that in nature, selfishness is derivative, not basic. "The selfish gene? An exploded concept that was almost past its sell-by date as soon as it was popularized," writes Simon Conway-Morris. (2012: 6)

But rather than focus on biological evidence, something this author is not equipped to do, it can instead merely be noted that there are two *metaphysical* reasons for eschewing primal selfishness. First, as Philippa Foot (2003) and especially Alasdair MacIntyre (2001) clearly iterate, the fruits of virtue and its necessity for a flourishing life

are clearly evident in our lived life, and not surprisingly, given the essential continuity of species, this same cooperation is seen in other species. Cooperation and companionship are vital components of the flourishing life of a dolphin; we humans would be a morphological anomaly if our own true natures manifested a *bellum omnium contra omnes*. We have better evidence across the biological world, argues Conor Cunningham, that cooperation is primary and selfishness is derivative. Once again, it is important to note Hans Jonas' insistence that not only do we have no reason to see selfishness as 'primary' in humans, but no reason to see it as primary *anywhere* in nature. (Jonas 2011) That is, our lives become solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short, once we *opt out* of the state of nature for reasons that are *unnatural*. And this is as true of a yak as it is for a human being.²⁷

But we have reason to doubt the Hobbesian construal of nature for another reason. If the virtues as we commonly understand them to be are derivative of a more 'basic' nature that is anything but virtuous, we end up relying on a dualistic construal of the human person to make sense of our very *ability* to act in a way that is commonly called moral. In other words, the same dualism that seems to infect contemporary moral theories might also infect ultra-Darwinist readings of the human person. This is why Richard Dawkins, for example, insists in his book *The Selfish Gene* that since it is the goal of the human being to live lives that are not, as it were, solitary, poor, nasty, and brutish, that we need to, in Dawkins words, "rise above our natures" and "escape our genes." (2008: xx) But we cannot rise above our natures—not unless we read nature dualistically. We

²⁷ It should be pointed out that as much as this dissertation is, generally speaking, against the philosophy of Hume, Hume himself rejected the Hobbesian 'state of nature' argument wholeheartedly, endorsing a view of man that is far closer to Aristotle's own—namely, that man naturally sees living in society as desirable. (Simpson 2011: 91ff) Hume's differences with Aristotle are not here, at any rate.

are, by nature, a biologically-based animal. To ‘rise above’ our biology is to insist, perhaps unknowingly, on a dualistic relationship between our morality and our biology. But our morality is *rooted* in our biology, so there is no reason to rise above it. As Foot words it, “We are no more free to make up the rules for morality than we are to make up the rules for nutrition, for denying this is asserting that human morality is somehow alienated from how we live, from human nature or from the human condition. We may not take the biology out of the human condition, and we may therefore not take the biology out of morality, either.” (Foot 2003: 18) But more to the point, neither *could we* rise above our own biology, even if we wanted to. For the only way to ‘rise above’ our own biology is through a dubious Cartesian or Platonic metaphysics.

Many philosophers, including Conor Cunningham, Mary Midgley, David Oderberg, and especially Raymond Tallis, have seen in these Hobbesian arguments another undocumented strain of dualism. It is difficult to see, argues Tallis, how the need to ‘rise above’ what our natures *truly are*, in order to be moral, can be other than recalling the expression, ‘mind-over-matter’ in its most literal meaning possible. In particular, argues Cunningham and Tallis, the emphasis in these polemical tracts by Gray and Dawkins (among others) on the need to be moral *despite* what we ‘naturally’ are, and despite our ‘real’ goals, is reminiscent of the sort of body-hating dualism offered by Plato in the *Phaedo*. Cunningham actually calls the move a version of Gnosticism. (2010: 249ff)

Of course, the ultra-Darwinist could respond that, precisely because he assumes a proto-Hobbesian conception of nature, a proto-Hobbesian political theory (whereby we construct a ‘veil of ignorance’ to counter our self-interested goals) could alleviate the ills

created by our natural behavior and goals. But this just moves the metaphysical problems to the contractarian; it is, to recall Feser's imagery, but another version of "sweeping under the rug of the mind" (Feser 2012b) what should rightly be done away with entirely. For as mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, the constructivist project seems to rely on their own dualism as well. Indeed, many moral philosophers (e.g., S. Smith 2010, and Kozinski 2010) have seen Rawls as a 'softer' version of Hobbes. In fact, as Kozinski argues, the dualism in Rawls' arguments are quite explicit: to be properly rational according to the dictates of modern democratic reason, we must rise or simply ignore altogether the philosophy of being. In Chapter Six, we will again discuss the metaphysical problems with the modern assumption of the 'disinterested' view of reason.

Ironically and unfortunately, the argument concerning the differences in what our 'true' nature is as opposed to the nature desired by the value realist, is seen even among those committed to virtue theory. John McDowell (1995) for example, famously disagrees with Foot's suggestion that the virtuous life is a fulfillment of our true nature, as *prima facie* made evident to us. McDowell insists, by contrast, that the virtuous life is actually the fulfillment of a 'second' nature. The virtues, argues McDowell, are practiced for their own sake ('for the sake of the noble') and not because the virtuous life is *recognized by us* 'naturally'. In McDowell's words, "what it is for a human life to go well" is not necessarily what is 'natural' to us. In fact, argues McDowell, a human life might go well completely in isolation from the virtues. McDowell argues that, while a wolf's 'nature' is such that it cooperates with a pack, we can also imagine a "rational wolf" that largely keeps to himself, and occasionally steals food from the rest of the pack before retreating to live by himself. Likewise, a human being is 'naturally' in a position

of this lone wolf. We could just as easily ‘step back’ from the life of virtue and, upon being told that we are no longer living ‘naturally’, simply respond, ‘so what?’ McDowell argues that it is only by transcending our ‘mere’ natures and fulfilling a second nature that we realize, now from the ‘inside’ of a virtuous life, that the virtuous life is fulfilling. McDowell writes: “Reason does not just open our eyes to our nature, as members of the animal species we belong to; it also enables and even obliges us to step back from it, in a way that puts its bearing on our practical problems into question.” (1995: 154) As such, argues McDowell, “the concept of nature figures here, without incoherence, in two quite different ways: as ‘mere’ nature, and as something whose realization involves transcending that,” and that our second nature “is to some extent autonomous with respect to nature on the natural-scientific conception.” (1995: 154)

But as Christopher Toner argues, McDowell’s insistence on ‘transcending’ our ‘mere’ natures and making an ‘autonomous’ break with it in order to fulfill our ‘second’ nature, shows his theory to be not so much an Aristotelian ‘naturalism’, but more of a ‘culturalism.’ Indeed, McDowell himself says that “any actual second nature is a cultural product” and one should have a “lively sense of alternative possibilities for human life, lived out in cultures other than one’s own.” (2008: 176) McDowell, argues Toner, does not clear himself of this charge merely by insisting that the move from ‘mere’ to second nature is ‘Neurathian’. As Toner argues, if the virtuous life is so foreign to our original nature that its fulfillment means removing every ‘plank’ from the source, then we are relying on a version of rationality that is less Aristotelian and more Cartesian spirit. As Toner words it, “McDowell is surely correct to stress the importance of second nature (or natures), but it (or they) cannot sustain the whole weight of moral reasoning alone. Virtue

ethics must either find a firmer footing in a common human nature or submit to the subordination of virtue to the more deontological elements of political liberalism—that is, give up the hope of *naturalism* supporting a self-standing virtue ethics.” (2008: 179) In other words, if we need a whole sale Neurathian evolution to arrive at the virtuous life, then we cannot really say that are arrival point is teleological. It makes no sense to say that our telos is something entirely different from what nature shows us it is. McDowell is correct to say, along with Simpson (1992), that nature does not reveal to us the virtues. Indeed, as will be argued in the next chapter, we can only recognize the virtues inside the ‘virtuous circle’, as iterated by J. Budziszewski (2001). But McDowell’s construal of ‘second nature’ seems to leave behind *nature* entirely. This can be seen if we consider, as Toner argues, how McDowell’s own ‘encultured’ second nature—or really ‘natures’-- now has no ability to appeal to teleological notions of our form. That is to say, McDowell’s ‘second nature’ leaves us with a thoroughly modern political theory, as none of the resulting ‘second natures’ are able to appeal to a common substantial form to adjudicate commons norms, but are instead left with a moral system that looks ironically Rawlsian. This will be explained in more detail in the following chapter.

McDowell’s dualism is less stark, since instead of using the explicitly dualistic language of ‘rising above’ our natures and ‘escaping’ our genes, McDowell instead insists on a Neurathian approach: we can end up with an entirely different nature than what we started with, but we can only do so piecemeal. But even here, we see that McDowell’s insistence on ‘transcendence’ is misplaced. For no Neurathian procedure can produce a talking chimp. No amount of training ‘stages’ can get a baboon to play the violin. However piecemeal the change, the end result must still be within the natural

limits and capabilities of the organism. Thus, what McDowell sees as a ‘second’ nature is really just what Aristotle would call a *potentiality*. Thus, either McDowell is *actually* agreeing with Foot’s insistence that our actual natures align with the virtuous life—in which case, he should cease describing our arrival of second nature through the language of ‘transcendence’ and ‘autonomy’, or he should cease referring to ‘second nature’ as a ‘nature’ at all. It is, as Toner argues, merely a ‘culturalism’. But as it will be argued in Chapter Six, the Aristotelian has reasons for rejecting culturalism.

5.8 Aristotelianism and Evolution, Part 3: Kripke, Efficient Causation, Convergence

The Aristotelian might here deal with one more relevant charge against Aristotelian value realism that stems from a commitment to evolution. This is an argument made most eloquently by Sharon Street. This argument states that moral realism is disproven by evolution, since moral facts, if derivative of natural facts, would be entirely *contingent* facts. This is because the natural facts that give rise to moral facts are a product of what the evolutionary process just ‘happened’ to bring about. Thus, ‘moral facts’ seem to be in no sense unchangeable, but rather as changeable as the evolutionary story. This argument is assuming the ‘tape of life’ conception of the evolutionary process. Stephen Jay Gould (1989) has famously argued that the particular species that are around today are here entirely a result of random chance, and that, if we played back the tape of the evolutionary story, we would most certainly get an entirely different set of species. Sharon Street has argued that this fact about the evolutionary story serves as a defeater for moral realism, since this shows that the particular set of powers, strivings and purposes that might determine our goodness and therefore our moral reality would be

entirely arbitrary to this ‘possible world’. Street writes, “If we had possessed a completely different set of evaluative attitudes, the evaluative facts would have been identical with the very different natural facts M. Such a view does not count as genuinely realist in my taxonomy, for such a view makes it dependent on our evaluative attitudes which natural facts evaluative facts are identical with. On such a view, there is an important sense in which we need only alter our evaluative attitudes in order to change the evaluative facts, for by altering our evaluative attitudes we change which natural facts the evaluative facts are identical with.” (2006: 129) As E.O. Wilson famously put it, if things had turned out differently, we might have found it good to “dwell in darkness, eat each other’s feces, and cannibalize the dead. We would extol such acts as beautiful and moral. [In such an alternate world, we would] find it morally disgusting to live in the open air, dispose of body waste and bury the dead.” (from Copan 2011) If we had evolved differently *physically*, we would end up thinking that different things were *good*. Darwinian readings of nature, argue Street and Wilson, make it an entirely contingent fact that our evaluative attitudes are what they are: wind back the tape, and the story of human emergence would play out a different way.

As it will be argued in Chapter Six when discussing the connection between rationality and the emotions, the Aristotelian in one sense is happy to *agree* with Street in her insistence that our ‘evaluative attitudes’ are contingent on a certain *emotional* structure, and is also insistent, as is Street, that our emotions are a product of hormones, chemicals, and various brain stuff. To this extent, there is nothing in Street’s arguments that should falsify the Aristotelian way of looking at reality. For as mentioned throughout this dissertation, and as it will be explained in more detail in Chapter Six, the Aristotelian

posits a *reductive* view of human value. The human good follows from the human form. Human goodness is a product of the irreducible human essence and nature. To this extent, the human good turns out to be whatever the human *form* turns out to be.

But in another sense, the Aristotelian, like any realist about value, should not be happy with Street's arguments. For the Aristotelian wants to insist that human value is a product of human *rationality*, and it seems impossible for rationality to be anything whatsoever. But if this is true, and if human rationality is as much a product of nature's building blocks as anything else in nature, then we would either have to posit a special 'skyhook' for human rationality, or we would have to say that rationality could be anything at all. But since the latter option is (intuitively) impossible, the Aristotelian seems stuck with a 'skyhook' after all.

In one sense, to posit the 'specialness' of human rationality is something that, traditionally, the Aristotelian has insisted upon. The Aristotelian argues that the intellect is, unlike the other parts the human soul, immaterial. The argument for this is well known and has many forms. I'll briefly give an Aristotelian argument advanced by James Ross (1992): insofar as we think about, say, triangularity, we are thinking about *perfect* triangularity (which is different than saying we 'represent' perfect triangularity to our self). Insofar as we do not approximate perfect triangularity but really think about it (and it seems that doing geometry would be impossible if our thoughts about triangularity were only approximate) we are thinking about something immaterial. This means that the thought itself is entirely immaterial, and not reliant on any brain stuff.

Whether one accepts this argument is incidental to our purposes presently, however. This is because the Aristotelian insists that, as much as the rational powers are

in and of themselves immaterial, the sort of rationality involved in correct moral decision making is one that most certainly makes use of the *emotions*. This aspect of moral rationality will be articulated in more detail in the next chapter, but for the moment, it should be noted that an Aristotelian rejects a ‘disinterested’ conception of moral rationality, and instead insists that the emotions are rational (whereby repulsion and disgust, for example, are at times the right *rational* responses), and that we act *irrationally* if we insist on ‘rising above’ our emotions or if we have been born with damaged emotional centers in the brain (like psychopaths) or if we have been *conditioned*, through training and narcotics, to be emotionless towards certain vices (like kidnapped child soldiers in Sierra Leone).

But clearly, the emotions, regardless of whether the above argument concerning the immateriality of rationality is correct, have physical correlates in the brain. So if Street is right and what we call a ‘normally functioning brain’ is entirely the product of evolutionary accident, whereby if we ran back the tape of life and played it forward again, we’d end up with an entirely different set of brain stuff, and therefore an entirely different set of emotional responses to, say, extreme violence, then it does in fact seem as if what it means to be ‘morally rational’ is entirely contingent on how things just ‘happened’ to turn out.

The Aristotelian responds by insisting that the intellect subvenes on the emotions and determines them, since the human animal is the rational animal, and the form, as argued in Chapter Four, is hierarchically and ontologically prior to matter. In other words, the emotions are what they are because rationality is indeed fixed and determinate: since rationality is most certainly one thing and not *anything*, so are the

emotions normative in a particular way. This shows that the brain could simply *not* have evolved in any old way, but had to evolve in the particular way that it did. The Gouldian insistence on an *arbitrary* evolutionary process, and one that could have turned out differently, is false. But the dubious nature of the Gouldian ‘tape of life’ can be shown merely by meditating again on the Aristotelian notion of efficient causation. The Aristotelian insists that the building blocks of life have the powers to bring about the particular forms that they do. This is a way of speaking more metaphysically accurately about what some biologists refer to as the ‘deep structure’ of biology. (cf. Conway Morris 2012, G. Rosenberg 2004)

To understand the notion of deep structure, we might call to mind the ‘essentialist’ arguments of Saul Kripke. It was argued previously that Kripke’s notion of an essence is different than the Aristotelian version. Often, especially since Kripkean-style essentialism has become more popular, we have come to say that if a thing has an essence, then there is a property that this thing has in all possible worlds (for all x , if x is A , then x is F). That is, we are of the opinion that finding an essence is a simple matter of what sort of statement we can make with a universal quantifier. But the Aristotelian does not construe essence this way. An Aristotelian Categorical conceives of a real nature differently than the Kripkean essentialist. Yes, it is right to say that a dog has four legs. But certainly, we do not have to say that, for all x , if x is a dog, then x has four legs. Neither is the Aristotelian’s claim about doggy nature merely taken from statistical norms. Yet we still want to say that having four legs is part of the nature of a dog.

But in another sense, the Aristotelian is happy to agree with the Kripkean essentialist—as long as the Kripkean expands his notion of identity to include the notion

of *realization*. Take the oft-cited example of water and H₂O, as discussed in this dissertation in Chapter Three and Four. Kripke and Putnam argue that in every possible world, water *is* H₂O. The Aristotelian is happy to agree, as long as we replace the notion of identity with the notion of *realization*. As David Oderberg (2008) reminds us, it is only in philosophical literature that one reads of water being ‘identical’ to H₂O. In a chemistry book, one would instead read about how hydrogen and water molecules *realize* cold and wet stuff. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the verdict is still out as to whether water strongly or weakly emerges from hydrogen and water molecules. Certainly, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to weight in on that issue. Regardless of how that issue is settled, however, the Aristotelian can most certainly point to the ways in which the bottom building blocks of life *realize* irreducible things—like yaks and flowers. The point is that the building blocks of life, because of the *particular* efficient causal powers that they have, give rise to certain irreducible forms and not others. Given that the stuff in the primordial swamp is what it is, it must necessarily give rise to certain things and not other things. The evolutionary story can only be told one way.

This is to suggest that we speak of nature’s *deep structure*. The Kripkean connection, moreover, can be clearly gleaned from the ways in which biologists who endorse convergence talk about the relationship between life forms and their building blocks. To get a flavor of this, consider this argument from biologist and convergence proponent and George McGhee. This quote is a bit lengthy: “If I were to insist to a chemist that if he or she were to rerun the process of the evolution of the universe—go all the way back to the big bang and start all over again—that the elemental composition of the universe would be entirely different, that it is highly unlikely that neon or argon

would be present in that new universe, I am certain I would be promptly escorted out of his or her laboratory as a person with obviously no knowledge of science...Is the evolution of life so different? Is evolution such a chance phenomenon, such a random series of unconstrained events, that, if we reran the process of biological evolution, the organisms present in that new universe would be entirely different?...Contrary to the dictum that ‘biological evolution has no predictable destination,’ I predict with absolute confidence that if any large, fast-swimming organisms exist in the oceans of the moon Europa—far away in orbit around Jupiter, swimming under the perpetual ice that covers their world—then they will have streamlined, fusiform bodies; that is, they will look very similar to a porpoise, an ichthyosaur, a swordfish, or a shark.” (from Conway Morris 2012: 32)²⁸

This is all to say that the primordial swamp necessarily produces certain things and not others. But this is probably what we should expect if we have reason to think that formal and final cause run ‘all the way down,’ and if we further insist that efficient causation is Aristotelian and not Cartesian. The story of nature is not one of bits randomly banging against each other, but instead the story of the *realization* of the *particular* efficient causal powers of nature’s building blocks. So if we reinterpret Kripkean necessity by way of *realization*, which is much more scientifically accurate than ‘identity’ anyway, and we then understand realization by way of the Aristotelian notion efficient causation (something that this dissertation has tried to do), then we have good reason for thinking that the evolutionary process is not ‘random’ but limited in how it can unfold. The Aristotelian has good reason to think that the particular human being

²⁸ While the notion of convergence and ‘deep structure’ to the evolutionary process has gained fame with Conway Morris, et al, it is an idea with rich pedigree.

that arrived on the scene evolved the way that he did because of the efficient causal powers of the elemental building blocks. Mutation, while random in the sense of unpredictability, cannot be *anything at all*, since efficient causation cannot be anything at all. Efficient causality reduces potentiality to actuality. To speak in the spirit of Bishop Butler, every potency is what it is and not another potency. This is not to imply a ‘principle of plenitude’ (whereby every potency is actualized necessarily), but merely to speak of the real *limitations* of the ‘unfolding’ (‘evolvere’) of the evolutionary story.²⁹ Therefore we have good reason to believe that while rationality itself is immaterial and therefore the same ‘across possible worlds’, that the question of ‘possibly differently physical human forms’ is rather unlikely anyway. While we can speak of chance occurrences, we might not be able to speak of wholesale *random* occurrences or emergences. The only way that the world could have evolved differently than it did was if the fundamental building blocks of life had different efficient causal powers than they in fact do.

This is also—we might quickly note—why David Chalmers’ zombies are impossible. For the same reason that hydrogen and oxygen molecules necessarily realize water, the various neurons in our brain (in part) necessarily realize a *conscious* brain. There is no sense to be made of a ‘possible world’ with the same brain as this world but no *conscious agents*. Chalmers’ thought experiment only gets off the ground if we assume a very Cartesian conception of efficient cause.

So if we broaden our understanding of Kripke’s essentialist arguments to align more properly with what chemistry actually teaches (whereby we replace defunct notions

²⁹ Moreover, as biologist Norman Cook points out, “the idea of randomness lacks all but the most trivial descriptive meaning, referring only to *our knowledge* of the mutation event.” (as quoted by Stephen Talbott 2011)

of ‘identity’ with more scientifically accurate notions of *realization* and *therefore* with an Aristotelian notion of efficient causation), we realize that there is a ‘convergence’ between Kripke and Aristotle. And this convergence shows us that the only way that things could have turned out differently than it did is if there was an entirely different periodic table to begin with.

But the Aristotelian has no real reason to engage with an argument that simply states, ‘what if everything was different than it was?’ The Aristotelian value realist, therefore, has good reasons for thinking that Street and Wilson’s arguments can be defeated.

5.9 Conclusion

That’s the argument for Aristotelian naturalism, in a nutshell. It is important then to now return to the penultimate purpose of this dissertation, and suggest why an Aristotelian philosophy of nature is the most promising route for *metaethicists*, and why it should be properly be called a moral naturalism. In the next chapter, we will discuss in more detail the contours of Aristotelian value theory.

Chapter Six

Aristotelianism and Natural Human Goodness

6.1 Introduction

The previous pages have attempted to provide justification for an Aristotelian philosophy of nature. An Aristotelian realist defense of value and human goodness cannot make any headway unless we provide reasons for why this pre-modern philosophy of nature, upon which this ethical theory is justified, can itself be justified. Thus, the modest goal of these past pages was to suggest that an Aristotelian conception of nature--the very conception that gives legitimacy to his rival moral theory--is not immediately falsified by the assumptions of the contemporary naturalist. Indeed, we might in fact have good reasons for rejecting those versions of nature that make it difficult to speak of substantial forms, and we might therefore have reasons for additionally rejecting any ethical theory that itself denies or even simply does not build his moral theory around the teleological rendering of the human being. Moreover, it was also suggested that there are some ways that the Aristotelian position might prove beneficial, especially given how Aristotelian realism can see humanity as continuous with a nature saturated with immanent value.

In this, the last and longest chapter of this dissertation, the ways in which an Aristotelian theory of human value might have advantages over rival ethical theories will be more fully explored. Yet while this chapter is certainly longer than the others before it, it is nevertheless not an attempt to deal thoroughly with every view popular today in metaethics, let alone normative theory. Rather, it will focus on some rival views that the

Aristotelian value realist needs to pay especially close attention to, given the Aristotelian's peculiar place and status in relation to other contemporary moral theories, both in the metaethical and normative domains. In the realm of metaethics, it will be shown why an Aristotelian ethical theory is after all the most faithful to the contours of the nature of reality and human nature, and why it therefore is to be preferred over (for example) expressivism, moral 'naturalism', and moral 'non' naturalism. Yet as a 'normative' theory, precisely because it follows nature so closely and rival normative theorists of the modern era therefore do not, the Aristotelian position will look especially peculiar, by comparison. The peculiarity of the Aristotelian position can be clarified in part by mentioning here that the Aristotelian theory is not really a *moral theory* at all, at least when compared to rival normative theories, like Kantianism or utilitarianism. For while it is a form of *moral realism*, and while it insists on the *objective* nature of right and wrong action and that 'moral facts' are part of the furniture of the world, the Aristotelian nevertheless does not, for example, offer us a formula or a set of criteria by which to act justly or well or correctly, nor does he offer us a sure-fire trick to 'find' or 'track' these moral facts. As we'll see, the Aristotelian insistence on prudence, which is kind of 'moral sight', is categorically different than the formulaic approach of other moral theorists. In this way, a straightforward comparison between Aristotelianism, Kantianism and utilitarianism is difficult, as it will be impossible to compare and contrast rival moral formulas since the Aristotelian has none of his own. It is a real case of 'apples and oranges'. Nevertheless, there still are ways that we can consider the differences between these theories, and we can still motivate a demarcation that gives us reason to not only accept Aristotelianism, but also see rival normative theories as potentially problematic.

This chapter will show that the Aristotelian realist is different from both the ‘non-naturalist’ moral realist, *and* the ‘naturalist’ moral realist. The Aristotelian moreover, while denying the ability of the realist to easily ‘read off’ a list of do’s and don’ts from nature, and while also denying that the contours of human nature do not lend well to general formulas that would easily ‘solve’ moral dilemmas, he nevertheless denies wholesale moral ‘particularism’ and any sort of moral relativism. The following pages will explain the ways in which the Aristotelian, given his rival conception of nature, carves out its own space in the contemporary moral landscape.

6.2 Aristotelianism vs. Non-Naturalism, Part 1

It was suggested that an Aristotelian philosophy of nature leads to a theory that is properly called realist and ‘naturalist’ about human value and goodness. These labels are especially confusing however, given how naturalism and realism are understood today, and also given that a most of this dissertation’s pages have been spent diffusing the metaphysical assumptions of contemporary ‘naturalism’. Given the tension between Aristotelian philosophy of nature and contemporary naturalism, one might reasonably draw the conclusion that the Aristotelian alternative in the realm of metaethics is actually a form of ‘non’ naturalism. But it is not any less confusing to attach the ‘non’ naturalist label to the Aristotelian position, especially since non-naturalists accept a Cartesian conception of matter and its corresponding Humean distinction between facts and values. Indeed, the ‘non’ naturalist begins with the assumption that matter cannot house value, and that the Aristotelian insistence on formal and final cause is dubious. This explains why the contemporary non-naturalist, like Russ Shafer-Landau (2003) draws a distinction

between the ‘supervening’ moral facts and the ‘natural’ facts subvening underneath. The non-naturalist would have moral facts ontologically or strongly ‘emerge’ from natural facts, and then have them sit in a ‘supervening’ relationship with these ‘natural’ facts. The language of ‘supervenience’ (i.e., no moral difference without a natural difference) might be innocuous enough, but as the term is used by the non-naturalist (i.e., to show the moral nevertheless *emerges* from the natural), we can see how the non-naturalist not only assumes an anti-Aristotelian, mechanical conception of natural ‘facts’, but also—from the perspective of the Aristotelian—an is-from-naught emergence that is metaphysically impossible.

By contrast, the Aristotelian, as mentioned in Chapter One, and again last chapter, will construe the relationship between goodness and ‘natural’ facts *reductively*: facts about the nature of the good of a substance are merely facts about the nature and real ends of a substance. There is no such thing as a substance that is void of value. Goodness is, as the medievals called it, a ‘transcendental’ on being. Insofar as everything *is*, it is also (among other things) *good*. As Stratford Caldecott words it, “Everything, in other words, is true, good, and beautiful in some degree or in some respect. All that exists—because it gives itself, because it means something—is a kind of ‘light.’ It reveals its own nature and at the same time an aspect of that which gives rise to it.” (2009: 32)

Since the non-naturalist rejects this Aristotelian-cum-medieval ‘transcendental’ reading of nature, and instead sees nature as dead, brute, and mechanical, the non-naturalist is forced to draw dubious distinctions between the ‘natural’ and the ‘moral’ realm, and tie these two realms together (thus saving his property dualism from ‘substance’ dualism) through the language of supervenience. Of course, the non-naturalist

considers moral facts to be supervening ‘properties’ (which is why one often reads of ‘moral properties’ in metaethical literature) of natural facts. In this way, the non-naturalist in moral theory is analogous to property-dualists in Chalmers in philosophy of mind, in that both assume that the emergent properties, while ‘non-natural’ or immaterial (respectively) are epiphenomenal. The epiphenomenal nature of the emerging properties is supposed to save both of these respective set of thinkers from a position that would place them far outside the ‘naturalist’ frame work. This is why these two respective property-dualisms are considered naturalistically respectable. But it matters little to the Aristotelian whether the moral facts are labeled derivative, efficacy-free ‘properties’ or thought of as independent platonic entities: either way, they are derivative of a nature that is seen as dead, brute, and mechanical, and therefore difficult to account for on the contemporary naturalist’s understanding of nature.

At the very least, we should see that the Aristotelian conception of natural goodness does not need to resort to the confusing language of supervenience. This chapter will discuss an influential version of non-naturalist moral realism in sections 6., to further iterate the differences between Aristotelianism and non-naturalism. It will also discuss the difference between Aristotelian and contemporary moral *naturalism*. Finally, it will discuss the ways in which Aristotelian ‘moral theory’ (to the extent that it is a moral theory) differs from most modern theories, and the ways that it can meet the challenge of moral relativism.

6.3 Aristotelianism and Metaethics: Realism and the Parallel Metaethical Tracks

‘Moral realism’, sometimes in the vein of non-naturalism, and sometimes in the vein of contemporary naturalism (usually called, confusingly, ‘moral naturalism’), is a respected and debated position in moral theory³⁰, but it seems as if the ways in which moral theorists discuss the potential reality of the moral sphere today runs down parallel tracks that never touch each other. One the far side is the ‘Aristotelian naturalist’ (or really ‘neo’ Aristotelian) track in its disparate guises (e.g., Hursthouse 1999, Foot 2003, Bloomfield 2004, Thompson 1995, Chappell 2007, and Oderberg 2000). The main middle track is the one that incorporates ‘moral naturalism’ (meaning *contemporary* naturalism) (e.g., Brink 1989, Sturgeon 1988, Railton 1996, Jackson 2007, Flanagan 2007 and Harris 2011), moral ‘non’ naturalism (e.g., Shafer-Landau 2003, Enoch 2011, Wiggins 2007, and McDowell 1995), and expressivism (including quasi-realism) (e.g., Blackburn 1998 and Gibbard 1992); running alongside these tracks is one more—the one that includes the constructivist and ‘ideal observer’ moral theories (e.g., Rawls 1980³¹, Korsgaard 1996, and Scanlon 1996). True, the constructivist track does at times intersect with the middle track; thus, the track that is most often left to itself is the Aristotelian track. One can easily see the extent to which these tracks are separate when examining introductory metaethics textbooks. For example, as mentioned in the previous chapter, two recent

³⁰ A recent poll conducted by PhilPapers showed that a majority of the 1800-plus philosophy faculty that responded to the survey considered themselves moral realists of one sort or another.

³¹ Though, as it will be pointed out later, Rawls does not consider his theory a moral theory, but a political theory, and since he assumes the legitimacy of modern democratic liberalism to begin with, one cannot rightly call his theory an ‘ideal observer’ theory. Of course, as Steven Smith (2010), Thaddeus Kozinski (2010), Michael Sandel (1984 and 2009), and many others have pointed out, Rawls considers outside of what could be called ‘reasonable’ any moral theory that espouses a philosophy of nature (and a different resulting political theory) that is different than his own.

surveys of contemporary metaethics, one by Alexander Miller and the other by Russ Shafer-Landau, fail to mention the Aristotelian option altogether. One could easily get the impression, from reading certain textbooks, that the debate over whether moral facts are part of the furniture of the world, was merely one between contemporary moral naturalists (so-called), moral ‘non’-naturalists, quasi-realists, and constructivists.

While the exclusion of (neo-) Aristotelian (and sometimes constructivist) alternatives are unfortunate, it is nevertheless understandable, given the conceptual differences underlying these three tracks, and their profoundly different metaphysical starting places. It is now important to clarify some of the differences between the tracks, and also find some ways to get the Aristotelian track to intersect with both the main track and the constructivist track. Yet before a longer discussion of contemporary moral naturalism and moral non-naturalism can take place, it is first necessary to discuss the Aristotelian alternative in more detail.

6.4 Natural Goodness and Natural Oughts

Aristotelian value realism and the Aristotelian notion of natural human goodness, follow from an examination of the formal and final cause of the human person. Insofar as the human person is an irreducible form, it has an irreducible essence and aim. From these facts about substantial form, we can speak of a natural ought: the human person ought to be the thing that it is, just as all substances ought to be the things that they are. On the level of chemistry and physics, this natural ought is incidental, since the natural motions and aims of entities on these levels follow more or less automatically (though certainly, scientists rely on the natural regularities and the efficient causal powers of the biological

parts (and on a smaller level) chemicals, compounds, and elements they research, in order to undertake scientific inquiry in the first place). But on the level of organic matter, this natural ought becomes more interesting. For on the biological level, a thing can deviate from its true form, and therefore a thing ought to be a way that it might presently not be. A daffodil, for example, can wilt if it does not get enough water, or if surrounding flora deprives it of oxygen and light. When a daffodil wilts (but is still alive), it has not changed into something else. It is still the same flower. But it has ceased living up to its true and real nature and goal to which it strives. It has ceased, that is, to *thrive*. When we say that a wilting plant ought to be given water and that such a plant ‘wants’ water, we are speaking of a natural ought, and implying the reality of irreducible formal and final cause and natural striving towards a *telos*.

It gets even more interesting when we speak of the natural oughts of a yak. For a yak not only responds to light and water and strives for them, but the yak, as opposed to a daffodil, can taste, see, hear, smell, and touch the world. A yak consciously represents the world to itself: there is something that it is like to be a yak. There are ways in which a yak thrives as a yak, and lives fully as a yak, and these ways must include the use of its perceptual facilities. Insofar as a yak becomes sick and is in pain, or goes blind, a yak deviates from its true nature.

It gets even more interesting for a human being. For not only does a human being experience the world (perhaps much like a yak), it also has an intellect and a free will. And a human being’s flourishing must take into account these features of *its* form.³²

³² Even Karl Marx (Tucker 1978) alluded to Aristotelian formal and final cause, though certainly without alluding to Aristotle or even having him in mind, when he (Marx) articulated the ways in which factory work *alienated* man from himself and his work. While not mentioning Aristotle by name, there is clear Aristotelian influence apparent in

To clarify, immanent oughts are *analogously* inherent to all natural things. Goodness is not univocal: it is not one, simple thing. A thing's goodness is relative to its particular form. This is to say that particular things, relative to the substance in question, are needed for a thing to flourish. In fact, the very terms 'health' and 'sickness' are indicative of an Aristotelian philosophy of nature, and the analogy between health and goodness is as old as the dialogues of Plato. Of course, to mention health is only to begin to unravel what it means to thrive as a human person. For one can be perfectly healthy, in that one does not need medical attention, and one can be perfectly *happy*, in the sense that one 'feels good', but, unlike a yak, still not thrive as a human form, precisely because we are, unlike a yak, a particular sort of rational being. In fact, the allusion to health might be merely trivially important. For it might do little good to say that certain things are bad for us and certain things are good for us in the same way that certain things are healthy for us and certain things are unhealthy for us, since a quick glance at the history of civilization has shown us that while a limited number of things have been deemed healthy, an endless list of things have been called good.

these early works (Marx wrote his own dissertation on ancient metaphysics), especially when, in his 1844 Philosophical Manuscripts, Marx speaks of man being "alienated from his species-being," due to the fact that the *activity* of factory work was anthropologically unnatural. (1978: 25) In fact, it is quite difficult to make sense of the Marxian notion of alienation *without* assuming something like an Aristotelian notion of substantial form. Indeed, alienation makes clear and unambiguous sense when one accepts an Aristotelian ontology. Certainly, Marx made explicit his commitment to an historical materialism that deemed arguments from 'nature' as inadequate (or more correctly as mere antiquated ideology); yet when one reads the Economic Manuscripts of 1844 with an Aristotelian philosophy of nature in mind, Marx's arguments about the problem of alienation seem especially cogent. Since the time of Marx, political philosophers have specifically referenced Aristotelian themes to guide their own notion of alienated labor. For example, the political philosopher Matthew Crawford (2010) has written of the alienating aspect of some factory work, as well as modern office work, in a specifically Aristotelian vein.

6.5 Happiness Is Parasitic On Virtue, Not the Other Way Around

So the nature of human goodness is found through human flourishing. And in turn the nature of human flourishing is found through virtuous activity. But we cannot begin with a conception of flourishing, and thereby find the good, and thereby find virtue. To proceed in this direction would make Aristotelian ethical theory no different than utilitarianism (we will speak more of the problem of utilitarianism, that is, the problem of starting with a conception of happiness so as to figure out what actions align with its maximization, in section 6.15). We must instead work backwards. We must consider the nature of virtue, and in turn find true human goodness, and in turn find what it means to truly flourish.

In other words, we must remember that the goal of flourishing or thriving is defined *through* the virtues. It is well-known that the Aristotelian notion of ‘eudaimonia’ is not the same as our modern notion of ‘happiness’, since one can be happy in that one can ‘feel good’ yet not reach eudaimonia. But what is not often stressed, but what is equally important, is that the virtues are not defined through a pre-conceived notion of eudaimonia, even remembering that it isn’t the same as happiness: one cannot merely conclude that x set of parameters makes us thrive and then ‘fit’ a conception of human excellence into these pre-established parameters. Yet it is not precisely right to say that we can easily begin backwards: for we cannot begin with any ‘self-evident’ conception of what *virtue is* either.

This makes Aristotelian ethics much different than other moral theory. For the Aristotelian does not seem to have any axiomatic starting point by which to

sylogistically proceed. The Aristotelian cannot begin with happiness, like the utilitarian, so as to find out what is the ‘right’ thing to do; but neither can he begin with (or at least logically deduce) pure duty or ‘the right thing to do’, as does the Kantian does, and simply not concern himself with the utilitarian’s own starting point (nor make it his end point). No, the Aristotelian wishes both to find out what it truly means to be happy, but also what it means to do the ‘right’ thing; yet interestingly, and perhaps inconceivably, the Aristotelian argues that we do not have self-evident knowledge of *either* happiness *or* virtue, nor can we get any formula for telling us the right thing to do. This seems like quite the conundrum for the Aristotelian, and at the very least, it shows how different his theory is than modern normative theories.

As Peter Simpson words it, “Eudaimonia is defined as activity of soul along with virtue, while the virtues are defined as various habits of choice, lying in a mean relative to us, and determined by reason. What falls into the definition of a thing is prior to that thing, and has to be understood before that thing can be understood. So the notion of virtue must be prior to the notion of eudaimonia and must be understood before eudaimonia can be understood.” (1992: 507) For to be virtuous is to remember that happiness (in the sense of ‘feeling good’ or ‘contentment’) *and even health--and even one’s own life--must be sacrificed in order to be properly excellent, and to avoid what is wicked and shameful, and knowing what is virtuous (and as a result, what is wicked and shameful) is simply not a matter of finding ‘formulas’ in nature, or ‘reading off’ ‘moral facts’ in nature. Being able to properly read and ‘see’ the good requires cultivating the virtue of prudence. Only those who have cultivated this virtue are able to see the good. That is, we can note what is virtuous by considering what the prudent man sees, and we*

can only properly see the good if we are prudent ourselves. This is what John Budziszewski (2011) calls the ‘virtuous circle,’ and we will speak more of this peculiar Aristotelian epistemological conundrum in the pages to follow. For now, we should simply note that the human good is found in the exercise of virtue, and eudaimonia is *defined through this*, not before the fact.

We might also note here and now that Aristotelian moral theory can be analogously clarified through the notion of health in one important way. And it’s this: just like everyone ought to be healthy but not everyone is born with the same level of health or responds equally to medicine and therapy, in the same way human beings have been given different natural ‘moral’ abilities, and varying capacities to overcome natural moral deficiencies. We are the rational animal, but this does not mean that we are all equally rational or able to access rationality *per se*, equally. In the same way, we are an athletic animal, but we are all not equally good runners and jumpers. In the moral realm, we have been naturally gifted differently. Some are more naturally stubborn or tempted by food or drink or sex; others are more naturally empathetic and temperate; still others are more naturally diffident and humble; others more naturally able to avoid false modesty, etc. Moreover, we do not all have the same abilities to *learn* the virtues and escape our natural vices. Moreover, habituation and instruction are not equally given, and moreover they do not, even if given equally to everyone, do not lead to equal results across the board.

As true flourishing is tied to goodness, and as true goodness is tied to virtue, some might reasonably conclude from these facts about our inegalitarian nature that the Aristotelian is offering an elitist theory, in that he seems to be arguing that some people

will be better able to be virtuous and therefore happier than others, both because they are more naturally virtuous, and also because they have easier or more convenient means to be properly instructed and habituated in virtue. This is perfectly correct, and at least in two important senses, the Aristotelian is fine in having its view thought of as elitist. First, Aristotelian ethics *is* elitist at least insofar as he sees the Kantian as mistaken in thinking, as Thomas Nagel words it in his pivotal article “Moral Luck,” “that we cannot be morally assessed for things that are outside of our control.” (1991: 24) Nature has unfairly unequally doled out natural skills and abilities unequally, and as rationality is not just how our nature is defined, but indeed *part* of our nature, this means that not everyone has equal amount of ‘rational skills’. Rationality is not found elsewhere than our natures, and in this way, we might notice a natural inequality. Yet perhaps this shows the ways in which Kantianism relies on a conspicuous and never-articulated mind/body dualism. For if morality is based on something other than what nature gives us, we are forced to consider a dubious ontology of the human person. Kant’s insistence on the ‘purity’ of practical reason, free of ‘inclination’ and the like, sounds conspicuously like Richard Dawkins’ proto-Gnostic cry, mentioned a chapter earlier, that we must ‘rise above’ our biological natures in order to find out and live in a way that is truly moral. Indeed, Kant begins his famous *Religion Within the Bounds of Pure Reason Alone* by reminding his readers that our ‘natural inclinations’ might in fact be evil, and that it is only through a seemingly detached ‘pure will’ and the pure rationality on which this will operates, that we can ever hope to do follow the dictates of duty, as purely constructed from the parameters of the Categorical Imperative. As Kant argues, nature gives us no real guide in this regard: “We shall say, therefore, of the character (good or evil) distinguishing man

from other possible rational beings, that it is innate in him. Yet in doing so we shall ever take the position that nature is not to bear the blame (if it is evil) or take the credit (if it is good), but that man himself is its author.” (Kant 1973/1996: online) And by ‘man’ Kant means to designate our pure will, free of the inclinations (whether good or evil) innate in our biology. The Kantian seems to argue that the source of our moral duty must stem from a source entirely above, or at least entirely avoiding, our biology. Thus, it seems as if we achieve ‘moral equality’ and avoid ‘elitism’ only if we make a dubious metaphysical move—namely, we consider mind as separated from our biologically-based emotions, whereby we free ourselves of the possibility of moral luck. After all: we seem to get moral equality if we are all able to, with equal ability, ‘rise above’ our very unequal biologies, so as to access a ‘pure reason’ that is ostensibly the same for everyone. Yet not only does this seem metaphysically dubious, but it seems to ignore the importance of the emotions. As will be argued in later sections of this chapter, not only does the Aristotelian have no need to avoid the emotional aspect of our mental life (unequally bequeathed by nature), but he in fact relies on it to properly form the virtue of prudence.

Yet we can think of Aristotelian moral theory as helpfully elitist in another way. This is because the Aristotelian—precisely because he stresses habituation, discipline, and formation by the already-virtuous—downplays the notion of autonomy and the ability of the ‘rational agent’ to ‘reason for himself’. This is a consequence of a theory that rejects the idea that we can all think equally well, but also that rejects the use ready-made formulas to construct moral law. Indeed, precisely because such formulas are not available, because nature does not dole out virtue equally, and because discipline, habituation, and formation by others is a necessary part of acquiring virtue (and

especially the virtue of prudence, whereby one can see the good), the Aristotelian considers the elitism of his theory to be one of its virtues. In short, Aristotelian moral theory downplays autonomy and freedom to its benefit. Stanley Hauerwas, in describing the false security and ease of modern moral theory, and its dangerous reliance on autonomy, writes: “I can think of no more conformist message in liberal societies than the idea that students should learn to think for themselves. What must be said is that most students in our society do not have minds well enough trained to think. A central pedagogical task is to tell students that their problem is that they do not have minds worth making up. That is why training is so important, because training involves the formation of the self through submission to authority that will provide people with the virtues necessary to make reasoned judgment.” (1991: 883) For as Aristotle himself famously says in his ethics: it makes no small difference how we are formed and trained, rather it makes all the difference in the world. We might say then that Aristotelian moral theory is ‘altruistically elitist’, in that it sees the importance of moral formation, and also in that it recognizes the importance of training by those who are already virtuous. Indeed, as Aristotle himself writes in his *Politics*, the virtuous city is not the one that lets every citizen ‘think for himself’ or make up his own mind on all things, but instead the one that allows people to fulfill their innate capacities for virtue—whatever these happen to be and at whatever level of virtue they are able to naturally attain.³³ One might yet respond that insofar as some might not, even with all of the training and discipline in the world, be able to perfect their rational capacities, and that therefore that the Aristotelian is promoting a theory that seems to say that some people are going to be happier than others, and that there’s nothing we can do about that. In a sense, this is correct. As

³³ Thanks to Peter Simpson for reminding me of this insight from the *Politics*.

rationality is not doled out equally, and as even a utopian society might not yet be able to form everyone to be perfectly virtuous (and therefore prudent), it is certainly true that this is an ‘elitist’ theory, and perhaps therefore unfair. But it is no more unfair than nature. Nature contains norms, but it does not give everyone equal ability to follow them.

Yet this last thought should not be taken as too large of a concession. For we must realize that the prudence and perfection of our rational powers that comes through training is different than the sort of ‘bookish’ intelligence that one can get by attending a good school. The colloquial distinction between EQ and IQ is not lost on the Aristotelian, and is in fact important to understanding his theory. To be wise is not necessarily to be *smart*, in the sense of being able to get a good score on the LSAT. Indeed, the age-old epistemological distinction between knowing-how and knowing-that is relevant, if it is properly unpacked. Just as a pianist might play brilliantly but not have the ability to teach others, one might be prudent and be able to *see* the good, and therefore know ‘that’ a certain action is just, but not necessarily be able to *articulate* this knowledge (this aspect of the Aristotelian’s theory will be more fully explained in the following sections on relativism and moral emotions). Moral wisdom is reliant on moral training, and not necessarily the sort of education that one (theoretically) gets at an expensive university.³⁴ Indeed, the notion of ‘emotional intelligence’ is precisely to the point, as will be explained in Section 6.9 and 6.10. One can be materially rich and have a brilliant

³⁴ We might here note, however, that the notion of ‘moral formation’ used to be a major component of the liberal arts education, and perhaps still is. Certainly, this is a well-known thesis of John Henry Newman in his *Idea of a University* (1996), but as Alasdair MacIntyre (2009) also reminds us, students in the middle ages and Renaissance periods thought of the university as a place where young men were trained not just in the liberal (as opposed to the servile) arts, but also in the art of virtue, specifically because they were in the tutelage of *virtuous men* (*vis*, the faculty) who they were to not just learn from, but emulate.

education but still be morally impoverished. For the moment, we might say that while an Aristotelian moral theory is elitist, the sort of elitism he is endorsing is not of the usual sort; and considering the metaphysical moves needed to avoid it, unavoidable.

6.6 Morality as an Aristotelian Necessity

It is only the virtuous person whose desires are properly rational and therefore natural, and therefore in line with his true form. Moral oughts are those natural oughts related to natural desire (as opposed to, e.g., the natural oughts regulating the digestive system). Moral ‘facts’ aren’t anything more or other than the oughts of *human* nature, given the *sort* of natural entity that the human being is--specifically, a being essentially involving rationality. As Christopher Toner importantly adds, “Morality itself is an Aristotelian necessity for us.” (Toner 2008: 176) Which is to say that in order to truly flourish, we must abide by, recognize the moral thing as moral, and *act* morally. To be ‘moral’ in the Aristotelian sense is not to follow a set of principles that have been logically concluded from axioms (and therefore understood by any ‘impartial’ spectator), but to lead a life of virtue, whereby you properly recognize the human good. To be *virtuous* or excellent is the goal, and excellence requires prudence, or the ability to *see* the good, not merely ‘deduce’ it. This is an important point that will be alluded to again in the section on relativism. As Sokolowski (2004) argues, the indulgent, the ignorant, and the “morally obtuse” do not properly recognize the good as such, even though human nature is fixed in its essence and ends. This nature, while apparent to our experience, does not allow an indulgent person otherwise led by what David B. Hart (2010) famously called (in criticism) “the disinterested light of reason” from properly ‘reading off’ a list of

prescriptions and proscriptions merely by meditating on this human form. Only the virtuous man can. It is ‘inside’ information.

This shows us a major difference between Aristotelian and modern moral theories. And in an important sense, it shows us why Aristotelian ethics is not really a moral theory at all—at least considering how moral theory is usually presented in ethics classes. For example, the Kantian theory and the utilitarian theory both allow the selfish, the indulgent, and the ignorant to follow through the logical steps of the theory, and to replace the variables with the circumstances, in order to find the right thing to do in any situation. Hence, the virtuous circle.

As Christopher Ferrara words it, “In the Greek view of man...the rational soul is ordered by nature to the practice of the virtues of which it alone is capable—above all prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice, and the last being the sum of all virtues in social relations. Man’s happiness—man being The only creature even capable of rationally seeking and knowingly experiencing happiness—does not consist in mere pleasure or material gain for its own sake...It consists, rather, of an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue.” (2012: 17) So as it turns out, living according to the *form* of the human being is in key ways vastly different than living according to the form of even the highest animal, and for this additional reason, the analogy of human goodness with human health is only so helpful.

This is not to entirely discount the analogy of health. It is important, perhaps in the sense that it shows us that the good of the human form is *fixed*, however broad; that is, just as health cannot be any old thing, that therefore the good human being (and therefore the virtuous human being) cannot be any old thing, or any old action. As

Mortimer Adler once put it, just as human beings all have the same number of chromosomes, bones, or teeth, they should all have the same ‘natural’ set of desires, even if they are not all exercised or perfected equally. (2012: 26)

But this is probably as far as goodness’ analogy to health can go if it is to be of any help or provide any clarity, given that there doesn’t seem to be some *self-evident* way of demarcating ‘natural’ from ‘unnatural’ desires (though the notion of a ‘self-evident’ truth will be explained more in the following sections); and at any rate, certainly the history of the human species has shown us a wide variety of desires that have been *deemed* ‘natural’. As Robert Sokolowski words it, “we may differ about the *what* of happiness, but not about the *that*, nor do we differ on the fact that we want and need to be happy. The reason we can argue about these differences is that they all pertain to one and the same quest and target. The just man and the hedonist might act very differently, but in some sense they are aiming at the same thing. We are all concerned not just about living but about living well.” (Sokolowski 2004: 508)

So, the Aristotelian wants to insist that the human person who is not virtuous is a person who is not living according to his *rational* nature, and therefore is not really happy, even if he might ‘feel’ happy. We will speak more of the difference between eudaimonia and feeling happy in later sections, when describing the ‘realist’ theory of Railton.

Mention of a ‘virtuous circle’ is important; for one might conclude that an Aristotelian ethics is circular, because in an Aristotelian system, the virtuous man defines virtue by way of what the virtuous person does. (cf. Chappell 2007: ch. 2) But it’s not quite this vicious in reality. Budziszewski explains the nature of this circle by arguing

that while there is a single human nature and therefore an objective moral reality, we cannot say that this body of moral facts is available to be *clearly* understood by a ‘neutral’ observer in the same way that a body of simple mathematical truths might be available to everyone ‘equally’. Getting access to the real nature of the good requires us to be virtuous ourselves and to have the sort of ‘inside’ or ‘background’ knowledge set (gained by, in part, by habituation) that only the virtuous person has. Budziszewski writes, “Is there a *common* ground? Yes, because there is a single human nature. But is the common ground a *neutral* ground? No, because not all views of God, not all views of the structure of reality, not all views of human nature itself are equally adequate, and some make it harder to *see* the common ground...the more adequately one has been *shaped and formed* by...disciplines that conform to the natural law, the more clearly one can discern the underlying moral reality on which these disciplines are based.” (2011: xiii) These words are probably cold comfort to the modern moral theorist, however.

An Aristotelian moral theory relies on the ability of the virtuous person to see the good based on an extensive background knowledge that might not even be able to be articulated by the virtuous person himself. The virtuous person *sees* what is good. But this is *not* to imply that an Aristotelian ethic is radically ‘particularist’ (cf. McNaughton 1988); after all: the contours of the fixed form of human nature will certainly require exception-less proscriptions (e.g., the prudent man could never ‘see’ circumstances, however peculiar, that would morally justify committing adultery or intentionally killing a baby, precisely because the contours of the human substantial form disallow this).

In this way, Aristotelian metaethics is much more like medieval ‘natural law’ theory, in that it will conclude that certain things are virtues and other things vices

necessarily and without exception---that *certain* actions are, by their very nature, always vices. Nor, more importantly, is the insistence on the ‘virtuous circle’ to imply that two people with radically different values and conceptions of wrong and right simply cannot have a debate. Rather, as Budziszewski reminds us, their debate will be impossible unless they first unpack and debate their competing conceptions of nature. In this way, Aristotelian value naturalism is a much ‘thicker’ moral theory, and involves much more legwork. The Aristotelian accepts the idea that *theoretically* two people with radically different conceptions of right and wrong could debate fruitfully, with the possibility of one of them converting the other one. In *principle*, this is possible. Yet it is much more difficult and involved, and requires a look at the world that is far more messy than the sort of ‘pure’ and disinterested approach assumed by many philosophers of the enlightenment. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section on moral relativism. For the moment, we should clarify the nature of Aristotelian value realism by noting that a human being acting fully in accordance with his nature is a *good* human being, and to be *virtuous* is part of what it means to live in accordance with one’s human nature. The Aristotelian insists that to live in full accord with one’s virtuous nature, one therefore lives communally, and in a family. As Patrick Deneen words it, “To act in accordance with our bounded freedom is to act in accordance with the *virtues*. It is to act in a way that is rightly oriented toward the fulfillment of our nature, within the context of a natural order. Virtues combine our pre-conscious dispositions and habituations to do what is right—such as generosity, friendliness, cleanliness, and right speech—with an intellectual ability to reason, reflect upon develop, and train those habituations...” (2011: online) Man, as Aristotle rightly argues, is a ‘political’ animal. But since the polis is an

outgrowth of the family, the family is the primary natural unit of man. As Alasdair MacIntyre (2001) has argued, it is part of our nature to need friends and to be a friend, to marry and have and raise children, to live in community, and to form social bonds³⁵. As Christopher Toner words it, “membership in networks of giving and receiving is essential to human flourishing, and the exercise of the virtues is essential to the maintenance of such networks, and therefore to flourishing. And essential not just as ‘instrumental to’ but as constitutive means of flourishing—virtues are expressed in practical reasoning, and sustained and effective practical reasoning takes place only within networks of giving and receiving.” (Toner 2008: 239)

These *basic* aspects of the flourishing human person make us different than other animals, even as we also rely on our mere animality to flourish—for we are animals, merely of a peculiar sort. But we are not other than animal. Just like a lion must raise her cubs to flourish--and if a lion does not, it is a defective lion—we need to raise our own children and teach them how to be virtuous, in order to thrive and live according to our

³⁵ As will be more fully explained in Section 6.10, man’s nature is fixed, but that does not mean that man’s nature is *narrow*. Thus, one should not make the mistake of concluding that there is no human nature and therefore no ‘real’ way that one should live and not live, simply because experience shows us seemingly endless ways to live effectively and well. We can truly speak of real ends and a fixed nature, even if this admits of a broad range of options. One looks the world over and sees many cuisines; but we should not conclude from this that *anything at all* can be eaten. As the many brilliant and beautiful ways to express manners should not lead us to conclude that all behavior is virtuous and good. There are many ways to live that are properly in line with our natural form. Moreover, we must think of the powers of man as each having their own telos, in addition to man as a whole having a telos (namely, the flourishing life). Thus, a man has certain powers that he must use properly. It is natural to eat, but it is unnatural (and a vice) to eat too much. In the same way, our sexual powers must be used in accordance with their proper end. But this is different than saying that celibacy is a vice. It is unnatural to use sex wrongly, but not to not use it at all. Consider a possible example of a ‘misused’ sexual act, in the stories of children of sperm banks who, when they went to investigate, found out that they had over 200 siblings. We might say that these children’s sperm donor ‘father’ misused sex. But a celibate person, like Kant, is not misusing anything.

own natures. Otherwise, we are defective people. That is to say, like the defective lion, a deadbeat dad, even if this dad is healthy and happy, is actually a defective human being, and not living as a human being ought (even if his children are indifferent to their dad's absence, and even if the children 'feel happy' without their dad around). For we clarify the notion of 'immorality' by attending to the ways that a human being is naturally *defective*. As Philippa Foot reminds us, while it is true that we are animals, "[w]e need things no animals do, because we have capacities for goods beyond their reach. Because of our needs we do have certain characteristic ways of going on, many of which involve cooperation and depend upon such virtues as loyalty, fairness, kindness, and trustworthiness." (2003: 95)

We should see Aristotelian value realism is theory about what we should *be*. It is not a theory that gives us moral formulas or principles, precisely because it emphasizes the importance of culture and wisdom as part of our human being, as opposed to pure, a priori formulas. This isn't to say that we cannot easily deduce *some* moral principles and even some non-negotiable 'rules' or laws from a cursory analysis of the human form. But we must recognize that a theory of natural goodness is different than, say, the sort of formulaic ethical theories made famous during the Enlightenment period, like the deontological theory of Kant or the utilitarian theory of Bentham and Mill.

6.7 The Anti-Realist Response

A naturalist who denies the reality of the natural ought could respond a couple of ways to this analysis. First, he could say that there are no such things as irreducible forms, and therefore no such things as natural oughts. This dissertation, however, has given reason

for thinking that there are indeed irreducible forms. Certainly, there must be formal and final causes *at some level*, and we have good reason, as it has been argued, to see many *layers* of such forms.

Secondly, the naturalist could respond by arguing that, while the world does indeed suggest irreducible layers, and therefore irreducible forms, that this gives us no reason to posit natural oughts. We have no reason to say, one could argue, that even though the levels of reality are irreducible, and that biological entities are irreducible wholes, that therefore a flower, for example ‘ought’ to have light and water. In one sense, this argument is incoherent, or at least unimpressive. It is incoherent because there seems no way to make sense of it. Moreover, one cannot say that other natural things have natural oughts but not the human natural thing. We’ll see this more explicitly when we look at Simon Blackburn’s ‘non-entailment thesis’ a few pages down. For while one might deny a *specific ought* that an Aristotelian moral realist deduces from the human form (e.g., one might deny, with great difficulty, that the contours of the human form give us no reason to think that being a deadbeat dad is naturally bad), one cannot say that there are *no* natural oughts of the human person. This fact will become important in the next few sections, when discussing relativism. For relativism can at best be an epistemological claim; it cannot be an ontological claim--for this would make the human person biologically *sui generis*, and imply a special, a-teleological creation, which would make it total discontinuous with other species. Insofar as we speak of the reality of irreducible wholes on the biological level, we are therefore speaking of entities that, due to disease or injury, are defective relative to their natural form.

The Aristotelian simply does not see any reason for declaring our common sense perception of the world an illusion, and no reason to accept a metaphysical premise (specifically, that substances do not exist and we do not quite see what we think are see) that is at radical odds with what we *observe* in the natural world, and also with how we *talk* about the natural world. As argued in Chapters Three and Four, we clearly and manifestly observe purpose. Our natural being-in-the-world experiences a reality as it is—as purposeful and saturated with meaning, striving, and value. We see a world of natural things in natural motion, and things unfolding according to their respective natural *telos*. It is only by stepping out of the lived world that it becomes conceivable to give ontological status to a mere a-teleological ‘snap-shot’ of this same reality. Only when we remove ourselves from the lived world can we begin to take seriously the idea that the world is not inherently and immanently purposeful. This is particularly ironic, since most all naturalist philosophies, even those versions that are ‘liberally’ naturalist, assume that a purely *a priori* approach to philosophy is scientifically irresponsible. Yet it is only from the *a priori* ‘arm chair’ that we could ever deny natural purpose to nature. That is to say, contemporary naturalism seems reliant on an *a priori* move, with profound consequences.

Unfortunately, some philosophers are uncomfortable with what seems to metaphysically follow once we take seriously common sense observation, so much so that they are willing to make this *a priori* move and say that our common sense observation is in some sense an illusion. (Rosenberg 2011) Leon Kass (2002) describes this as the modern problem of ‘concretizing the abstract.’ We abstract away something from the lived world in motion, and then declare this mere conceptual abstraction the

reality. At the very least, as Kit Fine (2012) argues, many philosophers today seem uncomfortable with the idea that our common sense being-in-the world could ever provide us with a way of carving reality at the joints.

This general failure to take seriously the lived world of formal and final cause is particularly ironic for another reason. Not only does ‘concretizing the abstract’ seem to be a dubious *a priori* ‘first philosophy’, and not only does it fail to account for what is actually observed, but it seems to posit conclusions that are at radical odds with the vocabulary used to describe the world. Indeed, such purpose-driven language is most clearly seen in precisely the place you’d expect to find it if an Aristotelian philosophy of nature held its weight: biology textbooks. James Barham describes this tension thusly: “Although biologists may *say* that it is only a matter of convenience, the fact is that biological treatises and textbooks are saturated with teleological, normative, and even intentional terminology of every sort, and it would in fact be impossible to discuss the phenomena of life at all without recourse to such descriptors,” (2004: 36) and in another place, he writes, “Open any cell biology textbook to any page, and what will you find? Talk of regulation, control, signals, receptors, messengers, codes, transcription, translation, editing, proofreading, and many other, similar terms...these concepts are no less normative than those of everyday speech.” (2007: 212) This dissonance between theory and description is usually handled by the offering of promissory notes for a future time when descriptions through teleological language will be ‘cashed out’. But there doesn’t seem to be any reason to analyze nature in a way that eschews common sense observation and appearance, especially since to describe entities through the language of agency is actually to wield Ockham’s razor, if we consider the sort of baroque

explanations that would be required (but as yet not given) to describe teleological entities through the language of mechanism. And even if this teleology-free language comes, we seem forever stuck with our common sense. In general, we should notice the ways in which philosophies that ‘concretize the abstract’ end up with byzantine explanations our thought and talk, and this is especially true in the realm of moral theory.³⁶

But in another sense, the naturalist is entirely right to see a problem with the ‘natural ought’. They are right in the sense that a meditation on the human substantial form does not reveal a full-fledged moral theory with precise laws and stipulations, nor does an analysis of human form supply us with precise ‘rules’ or ‘principles’ of conduct. In the next sections, this aspect of Aristotelian moral theory will be discussed in more detail. For it is now time to discuss the differences between Aristotelian value realism and moral relativism.

6.8 Sorts of Relativism

This chapter [chapter 6] has tried to stress that an Aristotelian insistence on the reality of natural substance entails a real and objective human good, along with realism about human value. Precisely because the form of the human person is fixed and finite, human

³⁶ A good example of this is the complicated response that Blackburn must give to the rather straightforward and simple objection to non-cognitivism known as the ‘Frege-Geach problem’. In fact, in an introductory metaethics textbook (Miller 2003) meant to cover a wide gamut of contemporary metaethical literature, an analysis of Blackburn’s reply to Geach’s very simple argument takes a considerable chunk of words. None of this, of course, shows that Blackburn’s very lengthy and baroque response to Geach (which this author does not fully understand) is *wrong*. But it does give reason to doubt that anti-realists wield Ockham’s razor. Indeed, one looks at the impressive array of literature in the philosophy of mind and morals, and the myriad attempts to defend physicalist and anti-realist theses, and while one sees sophistication and brilliance, one does not see Ockham’s Razor. Modifying Aristotle’s dictum, one might argue that a small mistake at the beginning results in unnecessarily complicated explanations down the line.

goodness is fixed and finite. This is not to say that human norms are ‘rigid’; after all, we are in some sense the ‘universal’ animal. (Simpson 2011) Whereas other animals seem physically and behaviorally fitted or ‘dressed’ to a particular environment and way of life, the human being is like a naked doll, able to be dressed in a variety of norms, customs, traditions, behaviors, and outlooks. We have sex in all seasons, eat all kinds of food, make wildly diverse music and art, and have amazingly variegated ways to show respect, shame, and reverence. Because of our rationality, we are able to don all sorts of interesting characteristics. This ability to be differently ‘dressed’ has resulted in a wide and fascinating variety of government, religion, food, art, music, and the like. Since man is the only animal who displays such wildly disparate features, and man is the only rational animal, it is reasonable to conclude that precisely *because* we are rational, we are therefore this diverse in our customs and traditions.

Certainly, there is a real sense in which the phrase ‘celebrate diversity’ is a wise moral norm; after all, we would rightly call someone prudish and insensitive (or perhaps merely boring) who was completely uninterested in travel, or who had no curiosity or interest in any food, custom, religion, music, or dress of another culture or ethnic group, other than his own. Yet the call to celebrate diversity has limits: certainly, we do not want to ‘celebrate’ female circumcision, blood sport, human sacrifice, or the rape of children. Yet, in various cultures, these practices are (or were) condoned and internally ‘celebrated’. The Aristotelian argues that while it is true that we are a ‘naked’ or universal species, we are nevertheless not *formless*. The clothes worn, to continue the metaphor, must take a particular shape and form, however diverse, if they are all to properly ‘fit’ our rational nature. When the Supreme Court, in its famous decision in

Planned Parenthood v. Casey, argued that man has “a right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life,” they were surely taking the idea of celebrating diversity too far. There is no contradiction in saying that our human form is both broad and fixed. While we have a *broad* and *diverse* set of norms and practices, the fact that we have a *fixed* formal and final cause makes it the case that certain practices simply fall outside what can rightly be considered the fulfillment of our rationality.

For this reason, moral relativism is *metaphysically* impossible. For relativism could only be true if either there was no such thing as a human form or if human *nature* varied along with time and place. The latter suggestion is absurd (and potentially quite racist), and the former suggestion has been shown in these pages to be, if not false, at least greatly problematic. Human goodness cannot be relative to a time or a culture or an ethnic group, precisely because all such groups share the same human nature. It would seem as if an Aristotelian, after showing reasons why his philosophy of nature is cogent (and this dissertation has hopefully done this), could quite easily show the problematic nature of moral relativism.

Yet, *prima facie*, given these facts about the human’s substantial form, the Aristotelian argument against moral relativism might only be effective against those *metaphysical* versions of the doctrine—that is, those versions that assume contemporary naturalism and endorse the idea that we are indeed formless.³⁷ Moral relativism is in this

³⁷ One might also here mention the more or less ‘defunct’ Sartrean idea that moral realism is false not because we are reducible to atoms, but because the contours of human nature are entirely constructed by us, and that ‘existence precedes essence’. Such an idea is certainly in one sense incoherent (how could we construct what biology has already given us?) but in another sense, it seems to flow logically from the Cartesian insistence that the mind of man is ontologically distinct from his biology, and that the contours of

sense merely a qualification on anti-realism, in that it acknowledges the force of custom and tradition on the shaping of one's moral life, or the ways in which groups of people reach, in Harman's words, "tacit understandings of their relations with one another," regardless of there being no such thing, *really*, as the human good, because there is no such thing, *really*, as formal and final cause. (cf. Harman 1975) One might call this version 'Protagorean' relativism, in that it assumes that we do not discover goodness, but that man himself is the sole creator or 'measure' of what is good. Such a thesis assumes that goodness is not real to begin with, and it denies an Aristotelian reading of formal and final cause. Certainly, if the Aristotelian can show that there are natural oughts related to human desire, this would dampen the hopes of this sort of moral relativist since it would undercut his *anti-realist* foundations.

Yet there is another form of moral relativism that the Aristotelian cannot so easily dismiss. As Christopher Gowans (2004) correctly points out, most versions of moral relativism remain agnostic on the *ontological* grounding of moral facts, and eschew consideration over whether such facts exist independent of our attitudes; instead, most relativists focus on the impossibility of *reconciling* various moral belief sets, given that various moral belief sets are the results of disparate and irreconcilable views of the world. Unlike truths about other domains of knowledge (e.g., geometry and mechanical engineering), there seems to be little 'progress' in the realm of *moral* knowledge, and moral debates don't necessarily result in any change in moral views. In other words, there might well be a relativist who concedes that there is in fact an objective moral reality independent of our attitudes and "theory-laden perceptions;" it's just that there is no way

'mind', being free from biology, can be internally shaped however one pleases. One could then say that Sartrean existentialism (being a sort of Gnosticism) is the ultimate culmination of the new views of matter given to us by Descartes and Galileo.

that we could ever *agree* as to what this moral reality ever was, because we cannot ever get past our own theory-laden attitudes. We might not be even *close* to what the ‘real’ moral reality demands of us, this sort of relativist would say, given the impossibility of ever escaping our own perspective, a perspective that blinds us from looking at reality as it really is. Relativism in this sense might not even be a laudable or desired metaethical doctrine by those who espouse it, but rather the theory that we are ‘stuck’ with, given the widespread and entrenched disagreement over what precisely is to be called good.

Prima facie, it seems as if Aristotelian value realism has no real answer to this. For while the Aristotelian assumes that certain things and not others are naturally good, she thinks that it is nevertheless the case, as mentioned in the previous section, that all kinds of things are and were called good, from child pornography to gladiatorial fights to human sacrifice. It is certainly *possible* to call all of the things on this list good, and sadly, at various points in history (including the present time), all of these things *were and are* called good by many people. But a closer look at this version of relativism, along with a closer look at the contours of Aristotelian naturalism, show that the Aristotelian realist can meet this epistemological challenge.

6.9 A Realist Relativism?

Interestingly, the form of ‘epistemologically motivated’ relativism just discussed is tacitly assumed even by theorists who espouse moral *realism*. Or, at least there seems to be versions of realism that are *consistent* with relativism—namely, those realist theories that argue for the possibility of complete ignorance of the entirety of the moral realm. And there are such theories. For example, both the ‘neo-Aristotelian’ Paul Bloomfield

(2004) and the 'non'-naturalist Russ Shafer-Landau (2004) argue that ontological moral realism is consistent with total *skepticism* about the precise nature of the moral realm. In fact, both Shafer-Landau and Bloomfield argue that it is a *virtue* of their respective version of moral realism that it allows for complete skepticism about the precise nature of any one moral prescription or proscription. As Shafer-Landau argues specifically, the possibility of (near) total ignorance of the moral sphere makes his moral realist theory less 'dogmatic' than relativism. He argues that a relativist could quite easily 'master' the contents of the relativist moral realm quite easily merely by having his 'finger on the pulse' of his society. And this mastering leads too easily to dogmatism and close-mindedness. The realist, by contrast, has an "awareness of the complexity of the moral world, and a corresponding recognition of the limits of one's knowledge." (2004: 29) Shafer-Landau concludes that, "If ethics is neither a comforting fiction nor a human construct, then answers to moral questions will be harder to discern. The harder it is to be sure that you've got the right answer, the less room there is for self-confidence... Thus we do best to remain open to the possibility of correction. There are limits to such a thing... But there's no better check against hubris and arrogance than the recognition that we are not the authors of the moral law." (2004: 29) However, other than assuming in passing that members of the Klu Klux Klan and the suicide bombers of 9/11 committed immoral acts, (2004: 29, 35) he does not give any details as to what would mark these 'limits'. Presumably, we could be skeptics about most every 'moral fact' while remaining committed to the thesis that moral facts are part of the furniture of the world, and it could be the case that while morality is real the 'difficulty' in finding it will result in a never-ending search.

Bloomfield goes even farther, arguing that while there is indeed a moral reality (he argues in an Aristotelian vein, no less, by stressing the analogy of the objectivity of health with human goodness), that the only knock-down argument for the reality of the moral sphere would have to take place from a mythical ‘third person’ point of view. Given, however, that we are ‘stuck’ in a first-person, subjective point of view, and are therefore clouded from true, objective moral judgment from behind our perspectival “moral phenomenology”, we can never say “with any certainty” that our moral view of the world is the correct one. (2001: 5) He insists on moral realism, but nevertheless insists that from *our first-person perspective*, we might merely ‘just know’ that a certain event--say, Harman’s example of the burning of the cat--which will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections--is morally wrong *solely* because our moral phenomenology presents it to us as self-evidently wrong: it just *appears* to us as wrong. Yet someone else might ‘see’ the world differently. Bloomfield also importantly argues that there *is nothing irrational about someone simply failing to see anything wrong* with setting cats on fire for fun. They are not *wrong* for not ‘seeing’ the moral wrongness in this action, even if (presumably) burning cats is in fact wrong. Presumably, this is because the person who cannot see it cannot control what he sees and doesn’t see. Bloomfield argues that regardless of the ultimate truth of the wrongness of burning cats for fun, *there is nothing irrational* about someone failing to *see* anything wrong with it. Bloomfield does not think that one’s moral perception can even be measured as rational or irrational.

This is an interesting argument, in that it seems to be a particularly stark version of externalism. Externalism is usually defined as the idea that one could fully recognize the moral facts of a situation, but regardless of this total recognition, still fail to act

morally. This doctrine is usually contrasted with internalism, or the idea that there is in some sense a necessary connection between the recognition of a moral fact and a motivation to act morally.³⁸ Bloomfield seems to side-step this particular issue of moral psychology by arguing that one could *fail to entirely recognize* the reality of the moral sphere altogether. One could, as he argues, think that it is *good* to make children suffer (p. 4), and simply *fail to see* how someone could think differently. He concludes that since a total failure of *recognition* is possible, it is therefore *impossible* to be certain of any of our moral beliefs. Like Shafer-Landau, Bloomfield sees the possibility of total ignorance as a *virtue*. Apparently, it is a good thing that we are trapped by our own perspectives, perspectives that apparently might entirely fail to reach the world ‘in itself’, since a recognition of our phenomenological cage limits the “hubris” that apparently follows from our failure to recognize it. Interestingly, both Bloomfield and Shafer-Landau argue that this ignorance staves of the sort of ‘hubris’ that they both associate with *Christian fundamentalists and Islamic terrorists*. (Shafer-Landau, 2004: 1-2; Bloomfield 2001: 6-8)

Ironically, as mentioned, both Shafer-Landau and Bloomfield both see their realism as an *alternative* to relativism, and they both see relativism as ‘dogmatic’. Several things could be said about the strangeness of this position (including the basic fact that it is hard to see the point of advocating realism if total ignorance of any and all moral facts is our fate). But instead of going through these reasons, it is instead instructive to look at the arguments of Shafer-Landau and Bloomfield in order to see

³⁸ This dissertation will not discuss this issue in any detail, but merely note that insofar as incontinence is possible, it seems rather clear that we can recognize the good, and *care about* doing the good, but still fail to do the good. A detailed defense of this aspect of Aristotelian moral psychology, however, is outside of the bounds of this dissertation.

what might be wrong with the sort of ‘epistemological’ relativism that Gowans mentions rightly as being the most powerful form of relativism. Of course, it should be mentioned how strange it is that neither realist author mentioned here realizes that their view logically *leads* to an epistemologically motivated moral relativism. For it surely does. For it seems clear: if there is no way to resolve moral disputes between individuals and groups because of different, yet equally *rational* moral visions, then we are stuck with precisely the sort of *epistemologically* motivated moral relativism spoken of by Gowans. It’s just that now, we’d have competing relativist societies made up, ironically, of realists.

So even though Shafer-Landau and Bloomfield do not see how their views lead to relativism, we can understand the limitations of the epistemological form of relativism by looking more closely at the reasons that Shafer-Landau and Bloomfield—but especially Bloomfield—insist on the possibility of total moral ignorance. For certainly, the strongest form of relativist is the one who is also a realist. So—assuming (rightly) that the pressing issue motivating moral relativism is not *anti-realism* about ‘moral facts’ but instead the irreconcilability and incommensurable of various moral visions of the world, what can be said in response?

6.10 Arguments Against Epistemologically Motivated Relativism

First, the Aristotelian simply rejects the thesis stated explicitly by Bloomfield, and certainly *assumed* by many other moral relativists, that one’s moral phenomenology eschews the category of rationality. To say that no moral vision is any more rational as any other is to assume a quite *anti-Aristotelian* (and very *Cartesian*) conception of perception. We can quickly see the problems with Bloomfield’s view if we consider other

areas of our phenomenal life. Consider the example famously used by Thomas Aquinas. He mentions (Sum ST 1a.85.2) how, when someone has a cold, sweet food like honey tastes bitter. While it is true that they cannot help but think that their food tastes bitter, this doesn't mean that the food really is bitter. Instead, it means that their taste buds are temporarily damaged. So in one sense, they are not 'wrong' to taste bitterness. But this is only in the trivial sense that it tastes bitter *to them*. It would be absurd to conclude from this, argues Aquinas, that there is no *natural* or *real* way that the food tastes, and no natural or real way that one's taste buds should respond. So in a more important sense, the person with a cold clearly *is* wrong to taste honey as bitter. Analogously, it is only trivially true that someone might fail to see the wrongness of harming children. It would be absurd to conclude that the moral vision of the person who condones such harm and the person who finds such harm as monstrous are *equally rational*. To say that we have a rational nature is to say that we are *naturally* geared to find the truth and to *see* the truth about reality. Insofar as we fail to do this, our moral vision is irrational to that extent. As Edward Feser puts it, "In short, reason is built to pursue what it takes to be good; what is in fact good is the realization of the ends set for us by nature; and thus a rational person apprised of the facts will seek to realize those ends. In this sense to be moral is simply to act rationally and to be immoral is to be irrational. The obligatory force of morality thus follows from the natural end or final cause of reason, just as the content of morality follows from the natural ends or final causes of our various capacities more generally. Morality, for the classical philosophical tradition, is thus doubly dependent on an essentialist and teleological conception of nature." (Feser 2013) Bloomfield, in

suggesting that moral phenomenology is a-rational, is quite anti-Aristotelian to that extent.

The analogy used by Aquinas is fruitful for considering the problems of Bloomfield's argument, for it allows us to look at the issue of 'moral phenomenology' more closely. In this way, the analogy between the taste of honey and the perception of a tortured cat fails. Given that the Aristotelian's 'moral facts' reduce to facts about the formal and final cause of the human being (and in this case, cats), it is difficult to consider how two people could *see* two different sets of moral facts, considering that they are both looking at the same event, involving the same natural substances. The only way that two people could have different moral phenomenologies *in this sense* is if one person was *hallucinating* their reality. Yet even those who endorse a stark phenomenal/noumenal distinction (like, say, Schopenhauer) assume that everyone's phenomenal realm is *phenomenally* the same to the extent that the same substances appear to them in roughly the same way. Indeed, Kant himself included *substance* in his list of transcendental categories used by the mind to order experience. In the basic sense of what is physically observed, both the person who sees a moral wrong and the person who fails to see a moral wrong are looking at the same kids, the same cat, and they both hear the same cries of alarm and see the same cries of distress (though this will be qualified below). Therefore, they are looking at the same set of 'moral facts', in the same way that the healthy person and the person with the cold taste *sweet* honey.

In this basic sense, it is impossible for two moral phenomenologies to differ, for everyone has equal access to the 'things in themselves'. Either every one is stuck behind the Veil of Maya, or no one is. The difference between a Kantian and an Aristotelian is

that the Aristotelian sees no reason to think that our experience of the world is not *direct*. We do not ‘project’ substances onto the world.³⁹ They are really there, ‘out there’. As mentioned earlier, the Aristotelian assumes common sense realism. This is as much a correction to those who would, like Kant or Schopenhauer, suggest that we are forever prevented from access to ‘the things in themselves’ given how the categories of our mind shape reality, as it is to ‘strict’ naturalists-cum-eliminativists, who would declare, much like E.O. Wilson declared about morality, that the macro-level world an ‘illusion’ “fobbed on us by our genes.”

Once again, this shows a difference between Aristotelian and Cartesian conceptions of matter. If one accepts a Cartesian conception of the material world, then in order to align this world with what shows up in one’s experience, one either has to construct an elaborate system of transcendental categoricals and declare in a prolegomena the ‘end’ of metaphysics, and further declare a ‘Copernican Revolution’ in philosophy, *or* one has to, much more simply, declare our experience to be so much illusion ‘fobbed on us by our genes’. Whether the ‘things in themselves’ are the micro-building blocks of reality, as they are for Rosenberg, et al, or something much more mysterious, as they are for Schopenhauer: either way, it is only if we reject an Aristotelian common sense realism that we are forced to contemplate a radical disconnect between reality as it is in itself and reality as it is represented to us. So in this sense, insofar as an Aristotelian philosophy of nature is true, Bloomfield’s points about moral phenomenology fall short.

Yet in another important sense, Aquinas’ analogy with honey is entirely appropriate. For in a key way, it *is* entirely possible to have divergence and differing

³⁹ And furthermore, the Aristotelian thinks, unlike most enlightenment philosophers, that we can make moral conclusions based on an analysis of these substances. This difference will be discussed more in the next section.

moral visions on an Aristotelian story, in the same way that the sick person does not taste the sweet honey as sweet. This is because the Aristotelian places importance on the virtue of prudence. And prudence is referred to by Aristotle himself as a sort of ‘eye’, reminiscent of Plato’s own talk of a kind of ‘vision’ that the philosopher has of the good. (Simpson 1992) As mentioned earlier, the Aristotelian denies that one can look at nature and easily ‘read off, say, the Mosaic Decalogue. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, this ‘moral vision’ is not the ability to plug in the various factors of a particular moral vision into a pre-defined moral formula or ‘match up’ what is seen with a set of principles. Rather, it is the ability to assess the morality of any given situation given the contours of *that* situation. In this sense, it seems possible for two people to have differing moral visions. While they both see the same substantial forms, only the person with a modicum of prudence will be able to see the moral wrong of burning the cat. Of course, prudence can be gained by degrees, and it is simply difficult to imagine being so *bereft* of prudence that one would fail to recognize the moral horror of what is being observed. But this is incidental. For as mentioned earlier, the Aristotelian would not be tempted to endorse relativism upon learning that there did in fact exist an entire race of people who, due to strange pedagogical practices, social conditioning, and cultural mores, failed to ‘see’ anything wrong with torturing cats, and found it strange that another culture found it appalling. This fact would not lead to epistemologically motivated moral relativism or to Bloomfield’s idea that there were two equally rational moral visions; instead, the Aristotelian naturalist would sadly recognize that an entire culture (though this needs to be qualified below) was bereft of moral wisdom, and to that degree thought and acted *irrationally*. If everyone on some far off Pacific island enjoyed burning cats alive, the

Aristotelian would simply say that everyone on this island had a faulty moral system (to that extent) and were irrational to that degree.

6.11 The Impossibility of Total Incommensurability

These comments aside, while the Aristotelian certainly wants to give due importance to moral phenomenology, it is also true that the extent to which being able to ‘see’ the good is parasitic on a formal moral argument with a conclusion logically following from accepted premises—whether or not the virtuous person who sees the good can *make* this argument. So let’s turn to the notion of formal argument now. For, regardless of the problems of competing moral visions, the Aristotelian rejects the idea that two moral traditions could be completely incommensurable and that there is no possibility for debate.

But before arguing this further point about the impossibility of total incommensurability in any detail, it is important to first note that the notion that there are various fixed ‘moral traditions’ is somewhat misleading. Talk of ‘moral traditions’ can give one the impression that there are societies—whether of a distant past or a distant shore—with a single, unified way of looking at the world, and that this ‘tradition’ is incommensurable to one’s own (personal) view. But such talk of traditions might merely be an example of the ‘out-group homogeneity’ fallacy. This fallacy can be articulated by the famous quip, “The homogeneity as seen from the outside is (inversely) proportional to the heterogeneity as seen from the inside.” So, for example, an epistemologically motivated relativist who was an atheist might speak of the incommensurable religious worldview of the Catholic. But the Catholic is going to wonder what worldview the

atheist has in mind. There are conservative, moderate, and liberal Catholics. Among conservative Catholics, there are neo-conservative and traditionalist Catholics. Among the traditionalists, there are (among other distinctions) ‘remnant’ traditionalists, recognized schismatics, unrecognized schismatics, neo-traditionalists, and sedevacantists. Among, say, the sedevacantists, there are conclavists and independents. And among the independents, there are as many distinct views as there are people declaring themselves sedevacantist. A Catholic who speaks of the ‘atheist worldview’ is likewise going to run into as many atheist worldviews as there are atheists. The same might be said for Republicans and Democrats. Rarely will you find a Republican or a Democrat who accepts their respective ‘party line’ without any qualifications. To use one more example: the same should be said of an historical era. Certainly, there were as many theological and philosophical disputes among individual medieval scholastics as there are today among philosophers in any one academic department. So to talk generally about (for example) the incommensurability of the ‘medieval worldview’ with the ‘modern worldview’ is again to falsely conflate the ideas of the various individuals of these two ‘traditions’.

This is not to say that folks inside what we label either as a tradition or merely as a ‘group’ (atheists and Catholics, Democrats and Republicans, medievals and moderns) do not have anything in common internally. Certainly they do. But talk of ‘competing’ or ‘incommensurable’ traditions usually falsely assumes a homogeneous conception of the tradition that is said to be incommensurable with one’s own. It seems much easier to place all of one’s ideological opponents under a single umbrella, and then to think of oneself as ideologically independent. This is all to say that relativism might in fact

collapse into subjectivism. In other words, epistemologically motivated relativism turns out to not be a thesis about group-to-group incommensurability, but about person-to-person incommensurability. (Shafer-Landau 2004: 20ff)

Yet it seems much more difficult to speak credibly of two *individual* people holding to completely incommensurable worldviews. After all, debates happen all of the time between individual atheists and individual Catholics, or individual Republicans and individual Democrats. And such debates can be fruitful and productive precisely because the worldviews of the opposing players are *not* incommensurable. Indeed, it is possible to read and understand individual medieval scholastic philosophers and assess what they have right and what they do not have right, for the same reason. Yet, as mentioned previously, sometimes a debate is only possible between two individuals holding to wildly different conceptions of the good, etc., if these two individuals first uncover their assumed and unarticulated (and perhaps even unknown) metaphysical starting points. In the case of a medieval scholastic like Aquinas, properly understanding his arguments concerning natural law will require studying up on various ‘background knowledge’ that he assumed and we today do not—namely, various pieces of Hellenistic and Patristic metaphysics (including Aristotelian philosophy of nature) and Christian doctrine—but these pieces of background information can be read and assessed on their own terms as well (or perhaps, in light of background knowledge that these further thinkers were privy to). And with these pieces of background information known, we can credibly assess the merits of his arguments concerning, say, the immorality of divorce or fornication. Indeed, philosophy professors routinely assign the writings of thinkers from what should presumably be, from the epistemologically-motivated relativist’s perspective, an

incommensurable moral tradition. Plato and Aristotle spring to mind. Yet professors reasonably expect students to be able to assess what these thinkers got right and what they got wrong, and professors seem quite able to unpack many of the background assumptions of these two philosophers. We can assume, that is, that we are all part of a Great Conversation.

Certainly, given the possibility of divergent and assumed background knowledge, this conversation will at times proceed slowly; it is at times a laborious process to wade through and unpack the background metaphysical starting points that lead to opposing ‘worldviews’, and it is also a project that the average man on the street is not equipped to undertake. Indeed, as Noam Chomsky often argues (cf. Achbar and Wintonick 1992) *true* debates regarding radically divergent moral and political views are rarely had, because they require so much unpacking.⁴⁰ It is for this reason that moral debates often become shrill, or why the person holding to the unorthodox opinion is not given space to make his argument properly.⁴¹

Moreover, we should not think that those who are inside of what Budziszewski calls the virtuous circle are one and all philosophers. Most people who believe that burning cats for fun is wicked might nevertheless lose an argument with a philosopher

⁴⁰ Chomsky has also said that this is the reason that political theorists who hold to wildly dissident views on, e.g., American commerce or American empire, usually decline interview invitations from major media outlets or invitations to be a ‘talking head’ on a cable news show, since such interviews would require the dissident theorist to make their unorthodox points in an absurdly compact amount of time. But this is impossible, given that the unorthodox or dissident view is contingent on the dismantling of so many unsaid assumptions and so much presumed background information.

⁴¹ This was quite evident during the Occupy Wall Street protests, when news reporters would interview protestors. News organizations were quite easily able to paint these protestors as uninformed because even the informed protestors were not easily able to defend the immorality of, say, usury, in the 10-second ‘sound-bite’ that they were given. Sometimes the answer of ‘it’s complicated’ is perfectly correct.

from this far off Pacific Island. The devil, as Shakespeare reminds us, is the prince of lawyers. And certainly a non-philosopher from here and a non-philosopher from the far off Pacific island might be only able to stare at each other in wonder. But none of this should imply the epistemologically motivated form of moral relativism.

David B. Hart (2013) is right in writing, “allegedly, the testimony of nature should inform any rightly attentive intellect that abortion is murder, that lying is wrong, that marriage should be monogamous, that we should value charity above personal profit, and that it is wicked (as well as extremely discourteous) to eat members of that tribe that lives over in the next valley. Nature, however, tells us nothing of the sort, at least not in the form of clear commands; neither does it supply us with hypotaxes of moral obligation. In neither an absolute nor a dependent sense—neither as categorical nor as hypothetical imperatives, to use the Kantian terms—can our common knowledge of our nature or of the nature of the universe at large instruct us clearly in the content of true morality.” (2013) If two people both assume a rarified Cartesian reading of nature (as argued in Chapter Five), then moral relativism is entirely possible, and arguments ‘from nature’ will do little to convince. We might say that they do not have properly ‘attentive’ intellects. But this only shows that arguments between two wildly disparate moral viewpoints need *lots of work*.

This is all to say that what appears to be two incommensurable ‘groups’ is really a disagreement between two individuals. But when two people disagree, they argue and debate. They assess whether their own or their opponent’s moral arguments follow logically from premises, or if their various moral beliefs are consistent, or the extent to which a given premise that motivates a moral argument is true. So, if one were to engage

in a debate concerning the morality of burning cats alive for pleasure with a citizen of this far off Pacific island, *presumably* it would be possible to show this islander that their moral beliefs were incorrect, either because they were inconsistent (do they burn *all* non-human sentient beings alive for fun, or just cats?) or based on faulty premises (cats do not feel pain) or irrational prejudice (that's just what we've always done), or some other reason (e.g., our personal pleasure is more important than the suffering of these innocent animals).⁴² This is all possible *in principle*. But because such a debate might be a quite

⁴² These arguments might seem to have something in common with the Domain Theory in moral psychology, (cf. Smetana 1996, A. Metzger and Smetana 2009) but the two theories are not entirely the same. The Domain Theory states that morality is universal, and that all cultures agree on what is moral as opposed to what is merely conventional (that they fall into *recognizably* different 'domains'). Everyone, according to a main variant of this theory, thinks that inflicting emotional and physical harm (for its own sake) is bad and that fairness is good, and everyone is able to recognize the difference between the moral and the conventional—even from a very young age. What separates individuals and cultures therefore, is merely differences in what is assumed to bring about fairness and lessen harm, and how cultures and individuals rank convention and harm in certain situations. This is better seen if we switch from a favorite in the metaethical literature (burning cats) to a real example—say, human sacrifice. A domain theorist would say that this activity was practiced because it was a ritual that *saved lives*. They did not view it as a leisure activity or as a mere convention. A domain theorist would argue that it is practically impossible, due to our universal commitment to fairness and our universal recognition of what animals are, for a culture to inflict *harm to animals solely for fun*. The Aristotelian might agree to the extent that, as argued previously, it would be nearly impossible, save for severe damage to the emotional centers of the brain (this will be discussed in the next section), or severe misunderstanding as to the benefits of such an activity, for someone to be so bereft of prudence that they wouldn't 'see' what was wrong with burning cats for pure vanity: so, while history shows instances that *are* quite similar to Harman's example of the firey cat—from bear baiting to the 'cat burning' festivals of early modern Europe—these examples do not in themselves show that the Domain Theory is false. (Conversation with A. Metzger) However, the Aristotelian disagrees with the Domain Theorist in a number of ways. First, the Aristotelian would probably want to broaden the scope of what could be considered 'impossible to not know'; and this is not because the Aristotelian advocates a theory about 'harm' and fairness, but because even a modicum of prudence would make it impossible to 'not know' certain things. As such, what makes the defender of human sacrifice wrong is not merely their faulty assumption about appeasing the gods, but their equally faulty assumption about the less-than-worthy humanity of the prisoners and children used in these sacrifices. As J. Budziszewski argues, people might 'universally' believe that taking human life is wrong, but convince

laborious process, and because it might involve articulating unsaid metaphysical starting places, moral relativism sometimes *seems* like the best way to go. It has also been stressed that total and complete *knowledge* of the human good is available only inside the ‘virtuous’ circle. The good is not perspicuous, and not available to a ‘disinterested’ knower.

We might say, then, that one of the reasons that an epistemologically motivated relativism is so common today is that it is tacitly supported by an unsaid assumption of so much modern philosophy: that moral theory must be a product of a delimited space of reasoning. As Peter Simpson notes, during the enlightenment, “The increased confidence in man’s power to make or exploit things came in at the same time with an increased despair of man’s power to know...As Locke later put it, the human mind is too limited to be ‘let loose’ into the ‘vast ocean of being,’ and if it is, it will end up only with absurdity

themselves that only their tribe is really human. People might ‘universally’ know that sleeping with one’s neighbor’s wife is wrong, but then convince themselves that they can make their neighbor’s wife their own. And so on. One is here reminded of Chesterton, who opined that “men do not differ much about what things they will evils, but they differ enormously about what evils they will call excusable.” It is difficult, of course, to distinguish where there is true ignorance, and where there is mere rationalization. Either way, the Aristotelian, will disagree with the Domain Theorist in another way. This is because the Aristotelian holds to a ‘thicker’ conception of moral reasoning and the nature of virtue, and is not afraid to delve into the ocean of being or conclude that actions could be wicked or shameful that do not physically hurt anybody. The Aristotelian would therefore see as shameful actions that the domain theorist would not see as falling into the ‘domain’ of morality (for example, if a man whittled away his life playing video games and looking at pornography while living in his parent’s basement, or if a man failed to choose death over grave wickedness or disgrace). This will be discussed in more detail in the following sections. Lastly, the Aristotelian might want to question the ways in which it truly is a ‘universal’ in humans that we recognize the wrong of harming innocent people. One might argue that it is the truly innocent in our society that are afforded the *least* protection. Perhaps, though, this is merely another way of iterating the point made above concerning the ability to rationalize. After all, many who would endorse the morally licit nature of killing innocent persons do so by arguing that it is not in fact the killing of a *person*. Again, it is difficult here to distinguish true ignorance from mere rationalization. This dissertation hopes to side-step this issue, however, in the arguments that follow.

and endless disputing. It becomes a task, the first task, of philosophy to trace the boundaries, to undertake (as Kant later put it) a ‘critique’ of the understanding.” (2011: 109-110b) Yet perhaps what is needed to solve moral disputes and to find the nature of human goodness is in fact to regain our confidence and delve into this vast ocean.

We might qualify the notion of the ‘virtuous circle’ by saying that those in the virtuous circle hold to background information about the nature of the human person. They hold, perhaps unawares, to a rich (and correct) metaphysical view of the world. One can *join* the virtuous circle, but only when one understands all of this background information. But if one is not habituated or conditioned to understand the world properly, it is difficult, as Aristotle points out in his *Ethics*, to come around to the truth later. But it is not *in principle* impossible. In this sense, Aristotelian naturalism is ‘foundationalist’. But this is not to say that the ‘self-evident’ facts about human nature present themselves as such. As Thomas Aquinas argues, metaphysical facts are self-evident ‘in themselves’ but not necessarily to us. We might then say that self-evident principles do not present themselves as such to those outside of the virtuous circle. So someone working within a Kantian rational framework could not easily *find* these ‘self-evident’ principles.

6.12 Moral Relativism and Emotion

The epistemologically motivated relativist seems to be assuming that if epistemological relativism were false, then there simply wouldn’t be any moral disagreement. But people can continue to disagree on moral matters for all sorts of reasons, none of which have to do with incommensurability. People can fail to understand an opponent’s assumptions, or fail to understand how an opponent’s argument is both valid and sound. Most often, a

person's failure to convert to a new moral position has little to do with the extent to which a person fails to *understand* their opponent's moral position. It has more to do with his inability to properly 'see' the good, despite understanding the argument for the good. A clean sweep in a moral debate will do little to convince one's moral opponent to change moral opinions, let alone change his life. Moral conversion is not possible in the same way that conversion to, say, a new scientific theory on the extinction of the dinosaurs, is possible. But this inability to easily convert in moral debates is, as mentioned above, not a proof of moral relativism. Rather it is evidence of the Aristotelian insistence that proper moral training and habituation is necessary. It is further evidence of what Budziszewski calls the 'virtuous circle.'

True *understanding* of the good is, unfortunately for the Kantian or utilitarian, 'inside information', information only properly conditioned or habituated to. And to habituate someone (or oneself) to a proper view of the good is to condition one's emotions and way of looking at the world. David B. Hart words the problem that the Kantian has thusly: "Modern persons of a secularist bent, who believe that the roots of their solicitude for human equality reach down no deeper in the soil of history than the so-called Age of Enlightenment, often tend to imagine that their values are nothing more than the rational impulses of any sane conscience unencumbered by prejudice. But this is nonsense. There is no such thing as 'enlightened' morality, if by that one means an ethic written on the fabric of our nature which anyone can discover simply by the light of disinterested reason." (2010: 39) This point might seem to be an argument *for* relativism. But Hart does not deny Aristotelian formal and final cause, and he does not deny the reality of the good. Rather, his point is that the real human good cannot be easily

understood from outside the virtuous circle. An entirely ‘disinterested reason’ is a reason, argues Hart, that is also purified from important truths regarding the philosophy of nature.

The point about ‘seeing’ the good can be further qualified when we consider the ways in which *emotions* play in our moral life, and how they shape what and how we see the world. This chapter started with an overview of the Aristotelian defense of a rather ‘pre-modern’ philosophy of nature. This Aristotelian philosophy of nature denies the mechanical reading of material stuff and the mind/body dualism that seems to logically result from such a mechanical reading. (Feser 2012b, S. Smith 2010, A.D. Smith 2012) The Aristotelian instead insists that the human form is essentially embodied. But the physical embodiment of the human form does not prevent us from talking about the normative dimension of the physical. Like any other material thing in the universe, the human material thing has ways it ought to be and ought not to be. Many of the building blocks of human form has a *telos*. For the same reason that the Aristotelian rejects Cartesian readings of matter, it rejects the idea that the emotions cannot be *normative*.

We should expect then that not only is there a particular way in which we can be rational, but also a particular and right way to *feel about the world*, and these feelings about the world are in fact a component of our rationality. This aspect of an Aristotelian philosophy of nature, more than anything, shows why Bloomfield is incorrect in seeing any moral vision to be as rational as any other. It was emphasized earlier that substantial forms make up a ‘layered’ reality. Thus, while the human form is irreducible, it is nevertheless embodied, and the physical body of the human is composed of individual forms with their own individual *telos*. The heart, for example, has an immanent teleology

and purpose, as does the liver. Of course, their particular natures are in the service of (or have as their *telos*) the health of the *whole* human being. But the ‘irreducible’ nature of this whole should not overshadow the ways in which the parts have their own immanent ends. So just as hearts and livers have their own immanent aims and ends, and just as there is a good and a bad way for a heart or a liver to function, so are our hormones and neurons immanently teleological, and so are the various chemicals in our brain that realize emotional states. These chemicals *naturally* ought to be a certain way and not another way, and it is only if they are working as they *naturally* should that the health of the whole is maintained. But since hormones regulate emotions, and since emotions are part of what it means to be rational, therefore the natural functions of emotions are in the service of the *rational* nature of the human being. Emotions are therefore normative, and are in fact a part of what it means to *be* rational.

Certainly, the end goal of the rational animal is to find truth, but precisely because human rationality cannot properly be called so without proper (natural) emotional responses, this is yet another sense in which Hart is right to say that no quest for truth can be accomplished in a disinterested and dispassionate way. And this means, quite surprisingly from the perspective of the Cartesian, that the hormones and brain chemicals that realize human emotion have as part of their *telos* *the discovery of truth*. So to return to the problem of moral phenomenology, precisely because there is, contrary to Bloomfield’s insistence, we can speak credibly of both a rational and an irrational moral phenomenology, but we can now further conclude that part of what it means to properly ‘see’ the immorality of burning cats for fun is to be *repulsed* by it, and to fail to be repulsed by it is to have, to that degree, an irrational moral phenomenology.

Leon Kass (1997) has argued that there is ‘wisdom’ in emotions like disgust and repugnance. He argues that many times these reactions are *natural*, which is to say *normative*-- in that one *ought* to feel a certain way regarding a certain moral circumstance. Natural emotions can help guide us to correct moral decisions. Indeed, sometimes it is necessary to rely on moral emotions in cases where an appeal to nature involves too much background unpacking. The man on the street inside the virtuous circle, as argued, does not need to be a philosopher in order to be virtuous. So he does not need to check all of his moral views against a worked-out metaphysical argument. Instead, as virtuous and rational, he can merely check his own emotions. Or, as Kass words it: “Revulsion is not an argument; and some of yesterday’s repugnances are today calmly accepted — though, one must add, not always for the better. In crucial cases, however, repugnance is the emotional expression of deep wisdom, beyond reason’s power fully to articulate it. Can anyone really give an argument fully adequate to the horror which is father-daughter incest (even with consent), or having sex with animals, or mutilating a corpse, or eating human flesh, or even just (just!) raping or murdering another human being? Would anybody’s failure to give full rational justification for his or her revulsion at these practices make that revulsion ethically suspect? Not at all. On the contrary, we are suspicious of those who think that they can rationalize away our horror, say, by trying to explain the enormity of incest with arguments only about the genetic risks of inbreeding.” (Kass 1997)

Yet, for the same reason that these emotions guide one to the truth and help one to truly understand the nature of the good, we can not expect someone to fully understand the good if they do not have the right *emotional* conditioning. For just as Chinese foot

binding can *unnaturally* contort the size and shape of a girl's feet, so can bad moral conditioning and bad habituation *unnaturally* contort the emotions. A rather chilling example of this is the sort of conditioning that warlords in Sierra Leone use on kidnapped children, in order to rid the children of their natural empathy and disgust of innocent suffering and brutal violence. (cf. Roy-Macauley 2009) Moreover, just as someone might be unlucky enough to be *born* with a club foot or unnaturally small fingers, so might someone be unlucky enough to be born with unnatural emotions or even be born completely *emotionless*, whereby they feel no emotion or distress or guilt or shame over, for example, images of extreme violence—or the torturing of cats. In fact, studies show that the sort of 'amoralism' displayed by psychopathic killers is directly attributable to the fact that they do not have the same *emotional* responses when they hear words pertaining to violence, and have blunted or damaged sense of empathy and abilities to *sense distress in others*. (Prinz 2005) Presumably, upon locating the correlating emotional centers in the brain, we should be able to see a difference in brain activity between a healthy adult and a psychopathic killer when it came to hearing about and perceiving violence and distress. We see here another interesting qualification on Aquinas' analogy with taste buds: it seems as if damage to the emotional centers of the brain can damage what is in fact *perceived*. This example from 'abnormal' (unnatural) psychology, presumably reinforced by neuroscience, gives us good evidence of an Aristotelian philosophy of nature: the material bits in nature, including brain stuff, chemicals, and hormones, are not purposeless and mechanical, but goal directed and purposeful. In so far as they are damaged, our rationality will be damaged.

Both Kass and Hart are giving us good reason to see the problematic nature of a purely ‘disinterested’ moral theory, and every reason to think that the prudent person’s ‘sight’ or intuition of the good is not just a product of background knowledge, but proper emotional conditioning. If emotions are rational, as Kass argues, then they can be rightly used as a moral guide, especially when a verbal articulation of the moral vision is difficult to give. A good example of the failure to see the ‘wisdom of repugnance’ is seen in the arguments that Mary Anne Warren (1996) gives for the morality of abortion. Warren argues that since the fetus is not a person (defined as an entity that is, to steal the language of Ned Block, both state and creature conscious) but merely ‘biologically human’ (a formless pack of complicated cells not yet ‘held together’ or made to be a person by high level mental states (see Chapter 3), that the fetus has no rights in the moral community. It is therefore perfectly morally licit to kill a fetus, even in its very late stages of development. Warren mentions that such a killing will most probably repulse us, and that such abortions might be ‘morally impractical’ for the simple reason that it usually accompanied by this severe, even sickening (in that it makes one physically ill) emotional response.⁴³ But she goes on to argue that “mere emotional responses cannot take the place of moral reasoning in determining what ought to be permitted.” (1996: 438) We see in Warren a tacit rejection of Kass’ point that the emotions are to be listened to (at least in regards to the issue of abortion). Yes, late-stage abortion might sicken us, argues Warren, but this is no evidence that it is *morally* monstrous *per se*.⁴⁴ While

⁴³ One thinks, for example, of the rather similar emotional response (to wit: horror and revulsion) held across the moral and political spectrum (conservative, liberal) to the practices that went on in the abortuary of Dr. Kermit Gosnell in Philadelphia.

⁴⁴ We might here notice that it is easier to rationalize the ignoring of one’s emotions when we can safely distance ourselves from actions that might *trigger* our emotional responses. If a documentary on the brutality of animal factories was shown on a large

Warren might be willing to give more deference to her emotions in other situations, she seems quite willing to ignore them in the case of such abortions.

Certainly, regardless of the truth of Kass' point, the Aristotelian naturalist could in fact unpack the background knowledge necessary to defeat Warren on purely 'philosophical' grounds. In this way, the arguments against late-term abortion are more readily apparent than arguments against incest. In-depth moral arguments are rare when the moral issue is assumed to be answered a particular way by most people. Thus, the reason that the philosophical literature does not show an abundance work on the immorality of incest is not proof that there are no in-depth moral arguments to be made. It is rather that such arguments were never needed to be made, since it is rare to find someone who endorses the practice to begin with. For the same reason, there is not an extensive literature on the wrongness of torturing cats for fun, or flying airplanes into buildings. Though one can expect the arguments against incest to become longer and more sophisticated in the years to come, as more and more people come to see incest as morally licit. However, abortion has been condoned for thousands of years, and arguments *against* it have also been around for a long time. For this reason, and not for

screen television right outside of a McDonald's restaurant, this would most probably deter people from entering the restaurant and ordering a Big Mac. But, of course, most everyone *knows* that the meat from McDonald's comes from cows that were raised in absolutely brutal conditions. It is quite easy, it seems, to ignore what *reason alone* tells us, if we can safely ignore or leave sleeping the *emotional* aspect of our rationality. Indeed, McDonald's seems to be aware of this fact, which is why they have, in tandem with Tyson foods, successfully lobbied to make it illegal to fly over animal factories or take pictures of them. To use another example, if the documentary *Manufactured Landscapes* played on loop in front of WalMart, it would certainly deter patrons from entering, even though most every patron *knows full well* that the merchandize inside the store comes from exploited labor. R. R. Reno (2012) reminds us, meditating on a famous passage from Dostoyevsky, that a society where 'everything is permitted' is not necessarily a society of chaos and disorder. It is instead a society where wickedness thrives behind closed doors or safely behind factory (or abortion clinic) walls.

reasons of incommensurability, is it easier to argue against a promoter of late-term abortion than a promoter of incest.

So, quite briefly, the Aristotelian might want to question Warren's criteria for what constitutes a person, and there are many who do just this. For example, given what was argued in Chapter Three, we might argue that a person should not be defined through particular *properties* of a form—like consciousness—but through the very irreducible *form* of the thing itself. It is not, contrary to the arguments of Trenton Merricks, *consciousness* that holds a thing together. Instead, a thing's *form*, which is different than a thing's *material make up at any one point in time*, marks a thing as an irreducible thing. A fetus in the embryonic stage, let alone freshly born baby, is irreducibly a person; in fact, the embryonic stage of anything—whether an acorn or a human—is a great example of the immanent teleology of the natural forms of living things. As far as the Aristotelian naturalist is concerned, Warren is relying on a faulty Cartesian (or really *Gnostic*) conception of the human person, both to argue for the licit nature of abortion, and to justify ignoring our emotions.

Yet this is not a dissertation on the thorny issue of abortion, let alone late-term abortion. I merely give this (very brief) argument to indicate how an Aristotelian naturalist would *begin* to argue against Warren, and show that it is indeed possible. I'll refer to this argument again below. But the point here is that even though such arguments are possible to be made, and regardless of the success of this rebuttal to Warren's own position, Kass has given us a reason to doubt the legitimacy of Warren's conclusion. Kass' own reason can be gleamed, ironically, from Warren's own admission that killing an infant would most certainly *disgust* someone with suitably rational moral visions of

the world, whether they knew anything about Aristotelian philosophy of nature or not. Warren, unlike Kass and the Aristotelian naturalist more generally, fails to see the rationality of the emotions.

This failure is, as mentioned, consistent to her more sustained argument for human personhood. Precisely because she marks off the human person through solely *mental* characteristics, she simply *cannot* then say that brain chemicals that produce certain emotions should have anything to do with a good moral argument. For if she were to say that physical stuff (in this case, brain stuff) was normative, she would be forced to reassess her arguments for the (non) personhood of the fetus. Warren thinks that moral arguments about abortion should be made ‘pure’ and ‘disinterested’, and our considerations of the licit nature of late-term abortion should be free of any emotional addition. The Aristotelian, for reasons just given, disagrees. The Aristotelian sees no reason that we must, like a 2nd century Gnostic, ‘rise above’ our biologically-laden emotional responses, precisely because to stay embodied and to ‘listen to’ our bodily responses is to be fully rational.

The cases of the kidnapped African children and the psychopathic killer are important in showing not just the role of the emotions, but the *normativity and rationality* of the emotions, along with the end-directed states of the brain-stuff that realize these phenomenal states. For both the child soldier and the psychopathic killer *do* in fact recognize that killing innocent people is wrong. It’s just that they feel no guilt or shame. *They don’t care*. This makes them irrational, but not for reasons usually assumed.

Thus, a person can be irrational not only because of a lack of philosophical understanding or ignorance of a proper and correct philosophy of nature. One can also be

irrational because an important part of rationality—emotion—has been damaged, reconditioned, or outright *ignored*. G.K. Chesterton has it right: the madman is not the person who has lost his reason; rather, the madman is the person who has lost everything *but* his reason. Yet, quite ironically, these emotionless killers are giving us an extreme (and morbid) example of the most *common* response to Aristotelian-style ‘naturalist’ arguments. David B. Hart (2013) argues that the reason that moral arguments that proceed from an analysis of the teleological nature of the embodied human person usually fail, is not because of a flaw in the form of the Aristotelian argument given, nor is it because the Aristotelian has assumed a faulty premise. Instead, most people who reject such arguments simply *don’t care* what nature’s norms happen to be.⁴⁵ Yet if the arguments above are convincing, then the only thing to conclude of such a person is that they are, contrary to Bloomfield’s insistence, victim to an irrational moral vision.

⁴⁵ Jesse Prinz (2005) seems to be making a similar point about the necessity of ‘emotional knowledge’ in his thought-experiment involving ‘Moral Mary’. In this thought-experiment, a woman has been born emotionally blunted, such that she has no natural feelings of guilt or shame or indignation. She has also has not been ever given a moral education, but is otherwise normally intelligent. Wanting to see what this morality thing is all about, she goes about learning the various moral theories, and upon mastering them, can then see quite well how a various decision might, say, ‘maximize happiness’, or how a various decision might be able to be universalized without contradiction, etc. (We might also helpfully assume that Moral Mary studies Aristotle’s ethics, and then goes about ‘swimming in the ocean of being’, and does all of the necessary and laborious leg work needed to uncover the true nature of the good.) Prinz asks: while Mary might see how a theory can be applied (or, alternatively, what the virtuous man would say in a given situation), will she be able to see the moral weight of these conclusions? Prinz argues that quite obviously, she will not. Like Mary the color scientist, it seems as if Moral Mary would indeed ‘learn something knew’ about the moral gravity of a given situation *only if* she returned to a natural *emotional* equilibrium. It seems as if both Hart and Kass would agree here that Moral Mary would obviously be unable to recognize the moral weight of the theories’ conclusions. But Hart and Kass would further suggest, perhaps contrary to Prinz, that the *reason* for this obviousness is because the *emotional component of their rational nature* has been damaged. But this, of course, will not be the end of the story.

6.13 Moral Naturalism and Harman's Firey Cat (*Redivivus*)

A good way to see some of the differences between Aristotelian value realism and contemporary moral realisms (of both the 'naturalist' and 'non' naturalist varieties) is to see how each of these theories responds to a famous contemporary argument for *anti-realism*. In the course of describing this anti-realist argument, some of the differences between moral naturalism, moral 'non' naturalism, and *Aristotelian* naturalism will be explained.

Gilbert Harman, as mentioned in section 6.6, is a relativist. But a closer look at his reasons for rejecting moral realism are important to consider. He famously offers an argument, mentioned in passing in the previous sections, that challenges the idea that there is any moral reality external to our minds. (1988) He argues that we have no reason to think that moral realism is true, because we do not have to resort to 'moral facts' to give an exhaustive explanation of what we 'morally' observe. He argues that there seems to be a difference in this regard between scientific and 'moral' observation. Harman draws a comparison between a scientist who concludes that there is a proton in a cloud chamber with a witness to a morally depraved act--a bunch of kids setting fire to a cat. Harman says that, at first glance, we might put the observational conclusions of the scientist and the witness of the fiery cat in the same category. Both people draw conclusions about what is the case—namely, the existence of a proton and the existence of a moral fact, respectively--based on what they observed. Moreover, it seems as if both people could only observe that which they say they see if they come into their observations with set of theories. But Harman says that there is a difference between the proton observer and the witness to a depraved act. To make sense of the scientist's

observation, we have to conclude not only that there were theories he was using going into the experiment, but that, in addition to these theories, there *really was a proton there*. But when it comes to the case of the kids and cat, we don't have to suppose that there is a 'moral fact' of the matter, really out there being observed, over and above the theories that the witness of that terrible situation brings to the observation. The psychology and the emotions of the witness, combined with these background theories, entirely cash out the response, and explain what is observed. But it doesn't in the case of the scientist and the proton. The point of the comparison is this: it seems as if the property 'moral wrongness' would simply be unnecessary in our explanations. If such a fact were there, it would only be there epiphenomenally. It's not 'doing anything', nor is it affecting what we observe. Thus, we have good reason to think that the property 'moral wrongness' simply isn't there, since it would be odd of nature to offer up a completely useless, *sui generis* property.

Quite obviously, Harman is drawing upon some distinctions eloquently iterated by David Hume. It was Hume who argued that nothing in our observations shows us a 'moral ought'; in order to get such oughts, we must 'turn to our own breast.' In fact, Hume goes so far as to famously declare that nowhere in the 'observation' of a 'willful murder' will we *see* any breaking of any norm. We will only see "...certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object [itself]," and that, "...when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it." (Treatise on Human Nature, III:1:1) Hume argues (and perhaps is

the first to argue) that reason cannot *know* the nature of natural goodness, because substances with formal and final cause are different than the inert ‘facts’ that show up in the mind. Harman seems to argue in the Humean vein by arguing that a moral realm is *redundant* to the ‘facts’. Moral judgment, then, must be a product of sentiments or other purely subjectively rendered ruminations concerning what is seen. There is nothing ‘out there’, argues Harman, that could be called a ‘moral fact’.

Harman originally offered this argument in 1977, when moral realism was not near as an entrenched and popular position in metaethics as it is today. But subsequent to Harman’s argument, moral naturalism gained strength. Even more recently, moral *non-naturalism* has arisen to prominence, not least of which because of the work of Russ Shafer-Landau. So in the following sections, a brief overview of some of the responses to Harman will be given, both by ‘non’ naturalists and by contemporary moral ‘naturalists’. These overviews are not meant to be exhaustive analyses of the non-naturalist and naturalist literature; rather, they merely provide enough details of the theories so as to show where an Aristotelian analysis of value differs, and where it is the same.

6.14 The Contemporary Moral Naturalist Response

Contemporary moral naturalists believe that moral facts are part of the furniture of the world, and that these facts can be properly identified (either ‘reductively’ or ‘non-reductively’) with natural facts. As such, moral naturalists believe that morality is an ‘empirical science’ of a sort, in that moral facts play an explanatory role in our explanations.

Moral naturalism has many varieties, but what holds all such views together is the idea that moral facts are attitude independent and external to the mind of those seeking them, and that we can use *scientific inquiry* to find these moral facts and to subsequently improve our lives. Certainly, in saying as much, moral naturalists are defining ‘scientific inquiry’ broadly. Obviously, if science were defined narrowly--that is, as merely the facts derived from physics or chemistry--it would be difficult to derive moral facts from ‘science’. Thus, for the moral naturalist, science is defined as any inquiry that uses empirical data in its method of inquiry. So we can expect the findings of, say, psychology to help us in this regard. Of course, even if the moral naturalist gathers this new empirical data, we still do not have a *theory* of human goodness, or any ‘moral rules’. Thus, most moral naturalists also argue that the very process by which human beings discover what is moral is a natural process. David Brink (1989), for example, has argued that scientific inquiry is any inquiry that makes use of the reflective equilibrium, whereby what is deemed moral is what is found to be so by everyone upon suitable analysis. Brink calls the result of this analysis a ‘natural property’, in that we can empirically track it, and in that it is not the result of a priori intuition, but instead the result of a revisable and ‘holistically’ rendered conclusion.

Taking this idea to a new level, moral naturalists like Sam Harris (2011) and Owen Flanagan (2007) have argued that finding moral facts will involve research in psychology and neuroscience to discover what in fact brings about true happiness for the human (and non-human) species. Flanagan calls this project ‘eudaimonics’, invoking the Aristotelian idea that morality aligns with human flourishing. For Flanagan, this means using an “empirical-normative inquiry into the nature, causes, and conditions of human flourishing.” (2007: 1) All moral naturalist theories hold moral inquiry to be a *science*, one tracking *empirically given information*, and therefore tracking information that figures causally in our explanations. As such, moral ‘facts’ can be true or false just as any scientific fact can be true or false.

Certainly, in saying as much, the moral naturalist (of whatever sort) is relying on *identity* relationships (broadly defined) between moral facts and empirical facts. That is, moral facts do not show up ‘all on their own’ in our observation. This would imply a sort of dualism that all moral naturalists seek to avoid. Yet it is not a problem for the moral naturalist that we must identify moral facts with natural (empirically findable) facts, for the same reason that the fact that consciousness doesn’t ‘show up’ in a brain scan doesn’t force us to adopt either eliminativism or dualism. Just as the physicalist will make *some sort* of identity relationship between the physical and the mental, the moral naturalist will likewise make an identity relationship. David Brink (1989), for example, has advocated for a ‘non-reductive’ identity relationship. He says that this notion of non-reduction saves the sense in which the moral fact and the natural fact can be conceptually different while still being the same entity. He draws a comparison between water and H₂O. Certainly, it seems to be a scientific fact that water ‘is’ H₂O. But this is not the same as saying that

water and H₂O are conceptually the same thing, or that the latter reduces to the former.⁴⁶ Likewise, moral facts can identify with a cluster of natural facts, without *reducing to*, which is to say, being ‘swallowed up’ by, these facts.

Brink initially raised this argument as a way of responding to the famed ‘naturalistic fallacy’ of Moore. Moore argued that making identifications between goodness and natural (or supernatural) properties cannot be done, because it seems to always be an open question as to whether the identity relationship suggested by the moral naturalist really holds. If one were to identify goodness with pleasure, we seem to be able to reasonably ask, ‘but is goodness really pleasure?’ Brink argues that the ‘Open Question’ argument is not insurmountable for the moral naturalist, because if Moore’s Open Question proved insurmountable, then any two properties that are known to be identical—say, H₂O and water—could now generate an open question regarding their identity. After all, in the case of water and H₂O, it *was* an open question for quite a while as to whether they were in fact identical.⁴⁷ Brink also argues that even those who are aware of certain synonymies and identity relationships before-hand do not, subsequently, have the second thing identical or synonymous to the first thing ‘before the mind’ when the first of the two things is ‘before the mind’. Brink therefore argues that the lack of conceptual identity between moral and natural facts does not signal any lack of *metaphysical* identity. This is all to say that the reference of moral terms ‘ain’t in the head’. And this makes sense: after all, argues the moral naturalist, we came to *discover*

⁴⁶ As mentioned in the last chapter, in no chemistry textbook will you read the sentence, “Water is H₂O.” You might, however, read about how water is ‘realized’ by H₂O. Whether ‘realization’ is the same as ‘non-reductive identity’ is one of the issues that drives a wedge between moral naturalists and moral non-naturalists, as we’ll see.

⁴⁷ And, as mentioned in the last chapter, they are not. But since this is not how it is usually presented in the philosophical literature, this fact about water will be side-stepped for the time-being.

that slavery was wrong—by identifying certain natural facts as cruel. The natural facts constituting slavery were always metaphysically identical: it's just that it wasn't until the 19th century that we made this connection 'before our minds'.⁴⁸ With these arguments in tow, the moral naturalist argues that the moral realist has a way of addressing the anti-realist arguments of Harman, and also showing why Moore's open question argument should not force the realist to adopt non-naturalism.

The moral naturalist might say then, in response to Harman, that certain moral facts identify (in some such way) with a cluster of observable facts involving the rowdy boys and the poor cat (one supposes that this cluster will include facts about the off-kilter neural make-up of the boys (on the assumption that boys would only find pleasure inflicting cruelty on an innocent animal if they were psychologically or neurologically disordered), combined with the obvious suffering of the cat), combined with 'natural facts' concerning theories related to what we ought to do in response to 'needless'

⁴⁸ It should be noted that arguments against slavery stretch back to Aristotle's own day. In addition, slavery was *defended* as just (by Aristotle himself no less) and not simply assumed (thanks to Prof. Simpson for pointing this out). The insistence on 'moral discovery' by both modern day moral naturalists and non-naturalists (Shafer-Landau 2004 also argues extensively for 'a priori' moral discovery) is quite often suspect, when one considers more closely the examples of moral discovery given by these philosophers. It seems quite easy to think of discoveries in the empirical sciences, but rather difficult to think of *any* real discoveries in the moral realm. Certainly, however, we can nevertheless acknowledge that Christendom gave rise to a moral system that was in some senses 'unprecedented'—at least in the sense that it gave rise to widespread practices (the hospital, alms for the poor) and proscriptions (against late-term abortion) where they were not *widespread* previously. As Hart words it, "[w]hile it is correct to deplore Christians whose behavior betrayed the morality of the faith they professed, it is also worth noting that one cannot do the same where the pagans devoted to the temple cults are concerned, since their religions had practically no morality to betray." (2010: 45) Yet this fact should not necessarily help the modern, secular moral theorist, as the sort of 'background knowledge' assumed by the early and medieval Christians might force us, as John Milbank (2006) and Christopher Ferrara (2012) have argued, to concede that our current proscriptions against abortion and perceived duties towards the poor and sick have no real justification, and hold fast only from what Elizabeth Anscombe in another context called 'mesmeric force'.

suffering and cognitive disorder (as concluded through, say, Brink's 'holistic' analysis) that we 'bring in' to our observation. We can say, then, that we do indeed 'observe' moral wrongness identifying with the empirical 'facts' of the situation, making it the case that a moral fact, in this case, a moral wrong—deliberate cruelty--does indeed play a causal role in our explanations of what happened.

6.15 Aristotelianism and Non-Naturalism, Part 2

Russ Shafer-Landau (2005) has recently offered a non-naturalist critique of moral naturalism. Yet we should first see that Shafer-Landau sees much in the naturalist project that is admirable. Like moral naturalists, Shafer-Landau thinks that moral facts are external to human attitudes, and that they are part of the furniture of the world. As such, moral facts are *discovered* in the world. Part of the allure of moral naturalism is that it easily explains the idea that moral knowledge comes piecemeal, and that moral progress is possible⁴⁹. We should expect moral knowledge to advance piecemeal precisely because scientific knowledge advances piecemeal, and moral facts while not properly identifiable with scientific facts, are *derived* from them.

So while Shafer-Landau also wants to allow for moral progress, he does not think that this is done by *identifying* moral facts with natural facts. He thinks that this identification cannot be made, even if we loosen our criteria for identification by relying on the concept of 'non-reductive' identity. Therefore, Shafer-Landau does not think that moral inquiry should properly be called a 'science'. Shafer-Landau simply does not think that moral facts are discoverable in the same way that scientific facts are discoverable—

⁴⁹ Though, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Shafer-Landau also suggests that moral knowledge might be forever in the future.

through ‘empirical’ inquiry. Shafer-Landau himself explains the difference between moral naturalism and moral non-naturalism this way: if a fact is natural, then it is “amenable to scientific confirmation.” (2005: 55) For Shafer-Landau, a moral fact could only be properly declared a natural fact if we could somehow show that they were “a species of scientific facts, discernable in all the ordinary ways, as motivating and as normative (or not) as ordinary facts.” (2005: 55) Shafer-Landau gives the follow criteria for a scientific fact. To be amenable to scientific confirmation, a fact must be 1) causally efficacious, 2) “descriptive” instead of evaluative or “practical,” 3) “physical” instead of “metaphysical,” 4) amenable to prediction. Shafer-Landau declares the moral fact to have none of these characteristics. (2005: 59-60) As Shafer-Landau himself notes, “The language of ethics is not the language of physics, and the information conveyed in a moral rule is not identical to that incorporated in any law of physics.” (2005: 63)

So, moral inquiry is not a piece of science, argues Shafer-Landau. Rather, moral facts are found through *a priori* inquiry, as opposed to ‘empirical’ inquiry. At the same time, Shafer-Landau insists that moral facts are *realized* and ‘constituted’ by natural facts. In this way, moral facts are not properly ‘identical’ to natural facts, and so they do not play any explanatory role in a ‘scientific’ analysis of our observation. Shafer-Landau explicitly invokes similar moves in the philosophy of mind to defend his view, and refers to his own theory as a ‘partner in innocence.’ So, just as David Chalmers, for example, insists that consciousness is ‘realized’ by and ‘supervenes’ on the physical entity playing the functional role of a mind (whether it is a brain or a thermostat), Shafer-Landau argues that moral facts supervene on natural facts.⁵⁰ And crucially, just as Chalmers argues that

⁵⁰ David Chalmers is nowhere explicitly alluded to in Shafer-Landau’s 2003 book *Moral Realism*. The comparison is mine.

the supervening conscious states are *epiphenomenal* and therefore causally inefficacious, moral facts epiphenomenally supervene on natural facts, and therefore play no role in our causal stories.

Gregg Rosenberg describes the arrival of consciousness in nature as if God has given nature a Rolls Royce when it only needed a Volvo. Likewise, Shafer-Landau seems to be answering Harman's challenge by saying something similar: it is true that our *natural* explanations are not amended by the arrival of moral facts on the scene involving the cat and the boys. But God has given us a Rolls Royce: nature has given us a further moral fact, on top of the natural fact. As far as Shafer-Landau is concerned, the constitutional and supervenient relationship that moral facts have with natural facts not only works well in itself, but it is truly the *only* option left for the realist committed to naturalism, given that the identity theorist—that is, the moral naturalist—makes an *impossible* metaphysical argument by identifying the metaphysical with the physical, the evaluative/practical with the descriptive, and the a posteriori with the a priori. As Shafer-Landau words it, "If the moral is neither identical in kind to the natural, nor exhaustively constituted in particular cases by it, then there is no explanation (other than God's fiat) of why the moral should be as specially dependent on the natural as it is." (78) In other words, in lieu of 'moral occasionalism', we have good reason to be moral non-naturalists, if we wish to be realists about morality.

Thus, Shafer-Landau is going to answer Harman by saying that *of course* we do not invoke moral facts when giving an exhaustive 'natural' explanation involving the kids and the firey cat. But neither would we need to invoke consciousness when giving a total 'functional' explanation of human behavior on Chalmers' 'dualist' conception of mind.

The lack of causal efficacy is not necessarily a sign of a property's non-existence, it seems.

6.16 The Aristotelian Response to Moral Naturalism

First, the differences between Aristotelian value realism and contemporary moral naturalism will be discussed. Then non-naturalism will be discussed. As for contemporary moral naturalism, there is much to admire in the approach, but also much that is problematic.

As for what is in principle correct about the approach. First off, the Aristotelian should not see anything wrong, in principle, with those in this camp who want to make use of reflective equilibrium to help find moral principles. The problem isn't the approach, but the extent to which it is lived up to.

Some might argue that reflective equilibrium merely gives us a belief set that is 'democratic', and not necessarily a belief set that is *true*. That is, one might argue that it is doubtful whether a moral naturalist theory making use of reflective equilibrium qualifies as a *realism*. Certainly, science should be in the business of revising its claims based on the extent to which they cohere with other scientific claims. But it is far from clear, this argument continues, whether we can call the results of this process a 'natural' or a 'real' property of the world. After all, the idea underlying realism (in any domain) is that things are what they are, and this reality is not contingent on us finding it. But one could hold, it seems, to a web of beliefs that, after checking and revising, all support each other and all cohere together, and one could furthermore get a set of beliefs that 'everyone agrees to,'

yet fail to actually reach the truth of the matter. This seems especially true in the realm of ethics.

Yet this charge can be met. The trick is to make sure that this revising process leaves no belief un-revisable in principle, and that it results in a web of belief that is truly systematic. For as Thomas Aquinas argues (ST 1a.1.8), and as mentioned in the previous chapter, two people can legitimately have a debate insofar as they share at least one belief in common. If two people hold no beliefs in common, then debate is impossible. But this state of affairs—where two people hold no beliefs in common—is seemingly impossible. Indeed, this is the ‘ecumenical’ strategy I have tried to take in this dissertation. Contemporary naturalists regard consciousness, in the words of Nagel, as “the most conspicuous obstacle to a comprehensive naturalism.” (2012: 55) I merely tried to show that this phenomena did not just constitute the ‘hard problem’ but showed that the entire contemporary naturalist program is flawed. So while an Aristotelian philosophy of nature and a contemporary naturalist do not hold many beliefs in common, they share enough in common to make a debate between these two theories possible.

There can be no such thing, then, as two totally systematic, yet conflicting belief sets. This is one reason why we should not think that just because moral knowledge inside an Aristotelian theory of nature requires habituation, enculturation, and wisdom, that there is *no way* to offer arguments using facts about the human substantial form that are understandable by someone outside of that tradition. After all, if this wasn’t possible, then moral conversion would not be possible. As mentioned in previous sections, this is *difficult* at times, but not in principle impossible.

Thus, it seems possible to debate someone of differing beliefs so as to bring them to a new position, on the assumption that the old and new positions hold at least one belief in common. The holder of truth will have the truly systematic and inter-supporting web of belief, and he will therefore be able to show that his opponent has an inconsistent set of beliefs. Thus, the problem with reflective equilibrium is that it is not usually fully implemented. Indeed: John Rawls (1999) uses reflective equilibrium to help ground his theory of justice, but that he front-loads in a conceptions of what one should consider to be ‘reasonable’ in that theory. As a result, for Rawls, reflective equilibrium isn’t a matter of finding moral truth with a capital T. This is evidence, to recalled again the quote from Peter Simpson from earlier, that so much modern theory has simply ‘given up’ on being itself, and refuses to delve into the vast ocean of the nature of nature. Rawls admits that his theory is ‘political not metaphysical’ as he famously words it. (So for Rawls, instead of the reflective equilibrium being a process that potentially leads to revision of our beliefs about justice, it instead assumes that some sort of modern democratic theory is true. John Rawls’ reflective equilibrium gave him principles of justice that are therefore in line with the assumptions of a modern liberal democrat, precisely because his reflective equilibrium was rigged—knowingly and purposefully--from the start, to make sure that it would result that way.⁵¹

⁵¹ As Rorty (1990) says, Rawls is actually closer to the pragmatist Dewey than the deontologist and transcendental idealist Kant. Rawls’ retroactive justification for espousing his constructivist schematic is that he claims not just that there is no need to *speak* of moral facts independent of this very constructivist schematic, but that there simply ARE NO facts of this sort at all. “What justifies a conception of justice,” Rawls writes in his paper *Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory*, “is not its being true to an order antecedent and given to us,” but that “moral objectivity is to be understood in terms of a suitably constructed social point of view that all can accept. Apart from the procedure of constructing the principles of justice, there are no moral facts.” (Rawls, p. 248) Rawls even goes so far as to title a paper, *Justice as Fairness: Political, not*

One might even make the claim, reasonably, that much that is considered scientific orthodoxy today is given ‘support’ from a reflective equilibrium that treats certain beliefs as Archimedean points, so as to have all other beliefs suitably revise around *it*, in that all beliefs *other than it* are suitably revisable. The same problem might infect moral naturalist theories more generally. It might be the case that such theories will fail to truly lead where the arguments—along with a meditation on the human form—truly takes them. Instead, they resort to a false pleasure principle. Yet none of this should falsify the method itself. Reflective equilibrium, if used properly—that is, if no beliefs are off limits for possible revision—might well lead us to conclusions that are shocking. In point of fact, moral conversion is indeed possible, and it seems conversion happens because one responsibly uses reflective equilibrium so as to make sure his beliefs are truly systematic. Thus, the problem for the moral naturalist isn’t his use of the reflective equilibrium, but whether he uses it rightly.

The Aristotelian also agrees with the contemporary moral naturalist in saying that morality is, minimally, about human flourishing. Thus, the Aristotelian does not see anything wrong, in principle anyway, with using the results of psychology and neuroscience to ‘track’ the physiological components of human flourishing more precisely. After all, such tracking assumes formal and final cause. Insofar as the brain has

Metaphysical, wherein he writes that “philosophy as the search for truth about an independent metaphysical and moral order cannot...provide a workable and shared basis for a political conception of justice in a democratic society.” (1985: 230) It should be pointed out that in so far as Rawlsian reason is the going thing (in so far as Rawls himself says it represents ‘reasonability’ in a liberal democracy) the traditional *Catholic*, by endorsing a richer, Aristotelian philosophy of nature, is now forced to play on a field that makes ‘unreasonable’ the very power of the Catholic argument. While this might be a bold claim, I’d maintain—along with Steven Smith (2010) and Thaddeus Kozinski (2010)—that insofar as Rawlsian reason is discontinuous with nature, not only can the traditional Catholic never really truly make his case, but what is regarded as public reason now is sufficiently anti-Catholic.

formal and final cause, and insofar as the human mind has formal and final cause, we should expect these things to be a certain way and not another way if they are aligning with their form, and we should expect to *observe*, perhaps with neuro-scans, what deviation from the norm *looks* like. For example, a psychologist might say that a sociopath does not feel the same sense of guilt or remorse as a regular person does over doing or thinking about something violent, and a neuroscientist might also say that when someone feels guilty or remorseful, that certain areas of the brain are ‘activated’. It should follow that a sociopath’s neural scans do not show those same areas ‘activated’ when they perform or think about violent acts.

This is all fine and good. But the Aristotelian should quickly point out, first off, that all of this seems to assume an Aristotelian philosophy of nature. Thus, insofar as moral naturalism is a credible research project, it is so because it has smuggled in a metaphysics that *no naturalist should accept*. Namely, the moral naturalist seems to be assuming a *teleological* conception of an irreducible entity—a human knower.

Ironically, it is now the minority position among naturalist philosophers to deny the robust ontological significance of the various ‘levels’ of reality. That is, it now seems to be within the domain of respectable naturalistic inquiry to speak of the irreducible and immanently *teleological* aspect of the biological world. Ironically, many naturalist philosophers argue that when Aristotelian philosophers point out the reality of a teleologically-laden biological world, that they are behind the times, and are offering no reason to deny the naturalist picture. Mario De Caro, in his edited volume *Naturalism and Normativity*, wherein he defends a ‘liberal’ naturalist position, chides Charles Taylor’s criticism of naturalism (e.g., 1985). Taylor has argued that the reality of irreducible

teleology saturating the natural world puts pressure on contemporary ‘mechanistic’ assumptions of nature. Taylor, argues de Caro, has failed to notice that most naturalistic philosophers see nothing wrong with seeing nature as ‘layered’. (2010: 133) The contemporary naturalist, it seems simply doesn’t have to be a reductionist. A naturalist can keep to his ‘bottom-up’ schema and deny that everything must reduce to the bottom level. Thus, argues de Caro, Taylor is drawing a wedge where no naturalist—at least no ‘liberal’ naturalist—ever would.

Yet De Caro here simply fails to see how, if he really is endorsing the irreducibility of biology, he is reliant on an Aristotelian conception of efficient causation, and an Aristotelian conception of formal and final cause. This makes it simply impossible for him to endorse contemporary naturalism. As James Barham, Stephen Talbott (2010) and others have pointed out, most contemporary biologists and philosophers use teleological *language* as a heuristic; they don’t actually think that formal and final cause are actually ‘out there’ in the natures of things.⁵² If De Caro admits that these things *really are there*, then he ceases to be a naturalist in any relevant sense. De Caro simply does not realize what he is in fact admitting to by criticizing Taylor. Taylor insists that contemporary naturalists *cannot* endorse immanent teleology and a layered reality. Insofar as De Caro thinks they can, he seems to be unknowingly admitting to an Aristotelian worldview. Noam Chomsky famously said (in jest) to John Searle, in

⁵² As Talbott words it, “Most biologists...will happily own up to the fact that they think of the organism as engaged in strikingly meaningful activity....[they] will acknowledge that, at molecular and higher levels, they see almost nothing but an effective employment of a thousand interwoven means to achieve a thousand interwoven ends...The organism, as they will say, as it develops from embryo to adult...is the most concerted purposeful entity we could possibly imagine. It does not merely exist in accord with the laws of physics and chemistry; rather, it is telling the meaningful story of its own life. And then they will take it all back.” (2011)

criticism of contemporary naturalism, that as soon as we understand something, we call it physical. Perhaps De Caro is assuming that immanent teleology and the irreducible layers of reality—precisely because they are forced upon us--can fit into a naturalist framework. But for reasons argued in this dissertation, they cannot. Then again perhaps De Caro thinks that an ‘irreducible’ layer is simply one that admits of ‘top down’ causation. But John Searle admits as much about the ‘higher levels’ of reality, yet still insists that higher levels only ‘weakly’ emerge. Like most liberal naturalists critical both of ‘eliminativists’ and of, e.g., theists and Aristotelians who reject naturalism *tout court*, De Caro remains ambiguous in his commitments. It is simply impossible to tell given what De Caro writes.

For another recent example of this criticism comes from a recent review of Thomas Nagel’s book *Mind and Cosmos* by Brian Leiter and Michael Weisberg (2012). In the book, Nagel argues that the ‘neo-Darwinian materialist conception of the universe is most certainly wrong,’ partly because this conception *must* give the same sort of total reductionist story that has been alluded to throughout this dissertation. Yet this total reductionist story would have to deny the existence of a layered and teleologically-rich reality. To that extent, Nagel wants to argue for something quite similar to the view espoused in this dissertation⁵³. But in their review of the book, Leiter and Weisberg respond thusly: “We believe, along with most philosophers, that Nagel is right to reject theoretical reductionism, because the sciences have not progressed in a way consistent with it. We have not witnessed the reduction of psychology to biology, biology to chemistry, and chemistry to physics.” (Leiter and Weisberg 2012) But they then go on, like de Caro, to argue that Nagel does not, by pointing this out, do anything to challenge

⁵³ Though in fairness to many of the reviewers of Nagel’s book, Nagel is not entirely clear here. Nor, it should be noted, does this dissertation endorse Nagel’s panpsychism or his moral theory.

the bottom-up, naturalist picture of reality. Yet if the arguments in this dissertation have been persuasive, then we should instead argue that this gives us *every* reason to doubt the usual naturalist, bottom-up assumptions. As Edward Feser words it, “to affirm the reality of irreducible levels of the natural world above the level described by physics is essentially to affirm either property dualism or Aristotelianism” (2013c) Or, as Ala Noë worded it recently, “Very few thinkers today seek to reduce neuroscience to biology, biology to chemistry, and chemistry in its turn to physics. In practice, these are recognized to be autonomous domains. This is right, but it is a superficial and unsatisfying observation. For there is no stable or deeply understood account of how these autonomous domains fit together. The fact that we are getting along with business as if there were such an account is, well, a political or sociological fact about us that should do little to reassure. And anyway, as Nagel urges, the fact remains that where mind is concerned, not to mention society and economics, we lack sciences that are well-established, well-grounded and successful, loud pronouncements to the contrary notwithstanding. We haven't explained life and mind.” (Noë 2013) The Aristotelian simply insists that life and mind cannot *in principle* be ‘explained’ by way of weak emergence. An Aristotelian conception of matter, meaning an Aristotelian conception of efficient causation, is necessary to make talk of a layered reality legitimate. But once these Aristotelian aspects are accepted, contemporary naturalism can *no longer* be accepted.

To use another recent example, Jason Rosenhouse, writing on National Geographic’s Evolution Blog, criticizes Nagel in a way that again calls to mind Chomsky’s thought above: “At most,” writes Rosenhouse, “philosophy can explore the

consequences of certain assumptions about what matter can and cannot do. The trouble is that science is constantly changing our view of what matter is. The “material” out of which the world is made looks very different today than it did a century ago. It wasn’t that long ago that atoms were thought to be solid balls. Today they are vastly more complicated, to the point where even *physicists have trouble wrapping their heads around what they do*. Nowadays it is common to speak of the universe as having emerged from a quantum foam. Is quantum foam material? I don’t know.” (Rosenhouse 2013)

Rosenhouse seems to be admitting to an Aristotelian conception of efficient causation without knowing it, though talk of the atoms being merely ‘complicated’ might fool readers into thinking that the world could be built up by weak emergence notwithstanding. But words like ‘complicated’ might be inappropriate here, for this reason. Rosenhouse is, perhaps without knowing it (and perhaps not having the vocabulary to properly explain it), admitting to an Aristotelian conception of efficient causation.

The Aristotelian should be happy to see its own philosophy of nature become more mainstream, yet the contemporary naturalists who adopt such a philosophy should realize how much of a concession they are making.⁵⁴ Aristotelian nature is simply antithetical to the bottom-up picture of reality assumed by even the most liberal naturalist. As such, Thomas Nagel has good reason to argue what he does. This is all to say that while Aristotelian moral theory can rightly be called a *naturalist* theory, in that it does not rely on an immaterial substance like a Cartesian mind or a vitalist force, it

⁵⁴ Many philosophers sympathetic to Aristotelian philosophy of nature have suggested that we are currently seeing an ‘Aristotelian revolution’ in philosophical inquiry. One is here reminded of Nancy Cartwright’s contention that while modern science is seemingly built on the denial of Aristotelian philosophy of nature, that Aristotelian concepts end up finding a way back into the theories anyway.

assumes a nature that is antithetical to contemporary naturalism. The tension between Aristotelian and contemporary naturalism will be discussed later during an analysis of the differences between Aristotelian naturalism and contemporary moral naturalism and non-naturalism.

6.17 Contemporary Moral Naturalism Cannot Show Us How to be Excellent

So, insofar as the moral naturalist concedes the fact that he has smuggled in a philosophy of nature at odds with his own naturalist commitments, the Aristotelian is happy to align with contemporary moral naturalism *to this extent*. But in still another way, moral naturalism seems quite different than Aristotelian notions of natural goodness. One of the main problems with moral naturalist theories is that it seems as if such theories can only tell us that certain things give us instrumental goodness—namely, pleasure---and certain other things do not. But if this is to give us a *moral* naturalism, then it seems that moral naturalism is merely utilitarianism rebranded⁵⁵. But certainly, argues the Aristotelian, a true and more nuanced look at the form of the human person should lead us to believe that true human flourishing lies in aspects that transcend the mere getting of pleasure the avoidance of pain. That is to say, it doesn't seem as if an analysis of human nature as proposed by philosophers like Harris or Flanagan can give us anything other than a sophisticated utilitarianism. It cannot, in other words, show us how to be *virtuous*. Assuming that virtue is the way to human thriving, moral naturalism will fail to give us a proper set of 'moral facts'. What needs to shown is that this aspect of contemporary moral naturalism actually reveals that it is *not* relying on Aristotelian notions of form, but

⁵⁵ Though, usually it is not even rebranded. Peter Railton, David Brink, Sam Harris, and even Owen Flanagan all explicitly *call* their theories 'utilitarian'.

is instead relying on a *dualist* conception of human nature, whereby consciousness becomes the only ‘property’ of the human being that has any moral worth.

As argued in chapter three, the Aristotelian considers it crucial to clearly differentiate between intentional and teleological goal when iterating Aristotelian notions of value. *Our* natural flourishing, on the human level--that is to say, our natural human good and our real moral oughts--are products of our *teleology*. Our moral oughts are the product of our formal and final cause. While we are intentional beings that represent our aims to ourselves, we are first and foremost *teleological* beings. Our natural flourishing does not *necessarily* match up with any mentally represented intentional object or conscious reason, even though it should. In fact, in many cases, it does not line up. After all, a key component of Aristotle’s eudaimonistic notion of the human good is that the human being can falsely represent to himself a goal, or a conception of happiness, that is not his true, naturally flourishing state. Intentional objects and teleological goals do not necessarily align. We flourish when they do; but given that we are the sort of beings that we are—namely, beings with (imperfect and corrigible) intellect and will--we have the ability to deviate from our telos.

That we can deviate from our telos and not realize it—this is an important point, and one of the many ways that Aristotelian moral realism is different from contemporary moral naturalism. Consider the moral naturalist Peter Railton, for example (1996), who has put forth a utilitarian version of ‘reductive’ moral realism that, in some ways, looks on the surface like the teleological considerations of the Aristotelian. Railton says that we must draw a difference between an instrumentally rational agent A, and an instrumentally rational agent A+. A+ is an idealized version of A, in that he has full and complete

knowledge of what will *really* make A happy, such that, if A+ were to find himself in the circumstances of A, he would know exactly what in fact A should do; where as A, not knowing what A+ knows, would not know how to act in a way that is self-fulfilling. To illustrate this idea, Railton asks us to consider Tad and Lonnie, both of whom are suffering from the effects of dehydration. Their dehydration brings forth melancholy and lethargy in both, but only Lonnie has the wherewithal to drink some water. Tad, by contrast, thinks that a glass of milk will do him well. But drinking the milk only makes matters worse. If Tad knew what Lonnie knew, he'd be much better off. Railton argues correctly that Tad *actually wants* what Lonnie wants, but just doesn't know it. It is from this notion of '*actually wanting*' something that is all the while unknown to the agent that Railton posits the notion of the attitude-dependent 'objective' moral fact: moral facts concern the ways that we go about getting for ourselves and others these 'objective' facts about our own well being.

While many Aristotelians have rightly argued that fulfilling one's telos (so as to become virtuous) does not rightly align with the utilitarian's conceptions of maximal happiness for the most amount of people, (e.g., Hursthouse 1999, Foot 2003, and Annas 2011) what has not received enough attention is the fact that Railton's 'real' moral fact is, it seems, tied to one's merely *feeling* happy. For we have here in Railton's example a nice illustration of the ways in which what we think we want and what we really want can fail to align. The difference between the Aristotelian and Railton is that Railton does not further argue that what is actually good for A is not only different from what A thinks, but also potentially different than what will *end up* making A *happy*. Railton speaks only of 'instrumental' goods, and not of *teleological* goods. But an instrumental good can fail

to properly align with one's natural *telos*. Railton's example of 'instrumental' goods does not, therefore, cut deep enough. In his example of the milk, we know that it will not affect a dehydrated person positively near as well as a tall glass of water. Thus, Tad still feels lethargic and melancholy after drinking it. With this example, A, not knowing what A+ knows, immediately *feels* the adverse effects of his own ignorance. But the Aristotelian wants to go farther. Being a virtuous and fully rational agent means going beyond mere sensation and feeling.

For Consider Tad and Lonnie's cousin, Thad. Thad is a twenty-something man who spends his days in his father's basement, eating McDonald's, popping acid, playing video games, and looking at internet pornography. All the while, he *thinks* and *feels* as if he is leading a flourishing, happy life, and all the while he acts according to his own intentions. Thad thinks that his perceived ennui is *relieved* through his video games, narcotics, and pornography. He simply *feels* no ill effects of his own defective state. A medical report shows that he is, for all intents and purposes, perfectly healthy. Harris or Flanagan might do some neuro-scans as well, and we'd expect that certain 'pleasure areas' were suitably 'lit up'.⁵⁶ So: is Thad an example of A or A+? Common sense tells us that he is an example of A. For despite the euphoria Thad feels down in the basement, we can rather easily point out that he is mistaken concerning his own true flourishing, and therefore his own true *moral*, state. He is living shamefully, and his happiness cannot be called *real* happiness. Yet Railton's theory doesn't give us any reason for thinking that he isn't already an example of an A+. He isn't hurting anyone, and he is perfectly content. His video games, fast food, drugs, and pornography seem to be much like Lonnie's

⁵⁶ Though see Tallis 2011 on the problem of 'neuromania'. Tallis, both an atheist and a neuroscientist, argues that naturalists should temper their enthusiasm for neuroscience, as it does not show near as much as some philosophers and scientists think it does.

water: they are ‘non-moral’ goods for him. Consider what Harman’s observer would say if he turned from the cat-torching boys to observe Thad for a while, and suppose further that our observer was a moral naturalist. It is difficult to see how our moral naturalist, using the theories at his disposal, is going to see anything wrong with what Thad is doing. As Christopher Ferrara points out, to see Thad as doing nothing wrong is to “[insist] upon a previously unknown conception of social freedom: the mere absence of restraint on human action, save for that necessary to prevent violence and to protect the ownership, use and enjoyment of private property in the pursuit of whatever each individual deems to constitute happiness.” (4) The Aristotelian, by contrast, insists that a virtuous life require much more than this.

According to the Aristotelian, despite the failure of an instrumental decision making procedure to detect the moral failing, we can quite rightly say that Thad is indeed a moral failure. This is because Thad’s intended reasons are not in alignment with his *teleological* reasons, even though his intentions do not *harm anyone else*. As Railton words it, “Moral evaluation seems to be concerned most centrally with the assessment of conduct or character where the interest of more than one individual are at stake,” (from Miller 2003: 103) which is to say that, as long as *no individuals* other than oneself ‘are at stake’, we cannot apply moral judgment. Thad is merely satisfying very animalistic desires. His life is not virtues in any relevant sense, and he is therefore not living fully rationally, as far as the Aristotelian is concerned.

As such, moral realism for the contemporary moral naturalist just means acting in such a way that you maximize the non-moral (objective) goods of other people, where ‘non-moral’ goods are merely things that make a person feel a certain way. But according

to the Aristotelian moral realist, we can fail to live up to our natural telos even if we are the only agent affected. Yet Thad's 'non-moral' goods seem to be maximized, even though he's a long way from acting in a way that fully aligns with the nature of the human person, a nature that requires us to live virtuously and rationally and in community.

These brief Aristotelian points against Thad, continued below, are not meant to qualify as a sustained and knock-down argument for the objective wickedness of Thad's lifestyle. Such a sustained argument would transcend the very meager and modest bounds of this dissertation. Thad is broached merely to point out that the moral naturalist who does not also accept a distinction between teleological and intentional ends might be *forced* to see nothing wrong with Thad's lifestyle. Of course, a 'tough-minded' utilitarian might indeed be happy to admit that there is nothing wrong with Thad. This is not to say, moreover, that a debate between an Aristotelian and such a tough-minded utilitarian cannot be had. For, as mentioned in previous sections, since a debate between an Aristotelian and any moral rival is possible, therefore a debate with supporter of Thad's lifestyle is possible. But articulating this debate in these pages would require much unpacking of respective background assumptions, and it would make this dissertation much longer than it is.

The point being made here is much more modest: if we do not go beyond mere sensation and feeling, or even *health*, we risk collapsing teleology and intentionality, and make phenomenal consciousness the sole home of normativity, and this might force upon us some unwanted conclusions. Yet it seems as if many moral realists in the utilitarian tradition only want to derive value from consciousness. Sam Harris, another utilitarian

moral realist committed to finding moral facts from the ‘best of scientific inquiry,’ makes this clear, when he writes that, “consciousness is the only intelligible domain of value. What is the alternative? I invite you to try to think of a source of value that has absolutely nothing to do with the actual or potential experience of conscious beings.” (Harris 2010: 32) The problem here, according to the Aristotelian, is that if consciousness is the sole home of value, then it is difficult to decipher when what we consciously represent to ourselves as pleasurable really *ought* to be pleasurable.

Consider the moral relativist Tom Beauchamp, who has famously argued (1982) that, since morality is merely a product of preference, if everyone on earth happened to like certain actions we deem horrible (fondling children, where the children were too young to be ‘psychologically affected in any way’), he would concede that this would have to count as the good for humans. Unfortunately, it seems as if David Brink (1989) himself seems to describe his own use of reflective equilibrium as one that finds principles that everyone would ‘agree’ to, thus leaving him open to precisely the scenario that Beauchamp describes.

Beauchamp himself was not happy with this conclusion. So Beauchamp later revised his view: the good, he later said, is whatever satisfies well being when people are acting truly *rationally*. But this way of talking seems to hint at an Aristotelian, teleological view of human flourishing. J.P. Moreland speaks accurately to the problem here: “The only solution here is to say either that rational behavior is simply what is statistically regular among adults who grow up in a typical way in society or it is behavior that promotes the survival of the species...It is easy to conceive of possible worlds where most adults prefer to fondle children or where such behavior could have

survival value...Without a normative notion of proper functioning, the naturalist is stuck with problems like this.” (Moreland 1996) In other words, the mere maximization of non-moral goods does not give us morality. Ruth Ann Putnam words this problem well: “In planning and living our lives, we cannot ignore moral considerations on pain of finding that our intrinsic non-moral good is in conflict with what we ought to do, or what justice requires or simply with the non-moral good of our neighbor. Although our physical and psychological well-being matters to us, it is not the only thing that matters. Nor is it, for the most part, what we aim at, even when it is the result of our behaving rationally and successfully in pursuit of our aims.” (R. Putnam 2008: 26) In fact, as Christopher Lutz insists, the most important feature of teleological virtue theories is that it can show better than mere ‘instrumental’ theories of rationality why the moral person must be willing to *die* for virtue, and that no theory other than a teleological one can give us reasons why we must choose death over wickedness, dishonor, or disgrace. Again: the point in refereeing these differences between traditional virtue theory and utilitarian moral realism is not to *assume* the correctness of the Aristotelian but merely to point out that the contemporary moral naturalist seems committed to endorsing something much less demanding and heroic. Again, this might be incidental to the utilitarian, but that’s not the point.

Nor is it relevant, argues the Aristotelian, if your own actions maximize the happiness of *everyone*. After all, both Tad and Lonnie, along with the rest of the population on Earth, could go inside Robert Nozick’s Experience Machine and *feel* perfectly fine. The Aristotelian is committed to the odd sounding idea that people can think they are happy but not really be happy, even if their false feelings of happiness are not at the expense of another. While this idea sounds odd at first glance, as Rosalind

Hursthouse (1999) reminds us, some reflection on it can quickly show its truth. It is easy to think of people who *think* they are doing well, and think they are happy, when any reasonable measure of natural human purpose—a purpose that is observed—can show that they might not actually be doing well. Likewise, as Hursthouse goes on to argue that the parent who wants happiness for his child will nevertheless not want *any* happiness for his child, but only *actual* happiness. And as Hursthouse importantly goes on to say, it is usually by checking with the intuitions of *parents* that we can see the problem of utilitarianism. Parents want their children to be *happy*. And by happiness, they mean *flourishing*. Thus, it could be said that Thad's father is a *defective* and therefore *immoral* father if he thinks that his son's behavior is perfectly ok (or worse yet, if he is financially supporting his son, thus enabling his sloth) simply because his son feels happy and isn't hurting anyone else.

Consider the original example again. Tad was *still* lethargic after his milk, and Lonnie pepped up after drinking water. But Lonnie might still be a long way from his natural, teleologically rendered goal if he, while hydrated, is falsely under the impression that being friendless is the preferred and happier way of living, or looking at pornography is a perfectly healthy pastime. Thus, if Aristotle's conception of the natural human substance is right, we must not reduce this natural human good to what is *represented* as being good to him. As J. Budziszewski rightly points out, teleological conceptions of morality, "scandalize[e] us because our actual inclinations are at war with our natural inclinations, because our hearts are riddled with desires that oppose their deepest longings, because we demand to have happiness on terms that make happiness

impossible.” (2009: 5) If one does not realize that this ‘war’ is possible, we can fail to properly consider the true nature of the human being.

For this reason, it is far more important that we speak of the natural aims and goals of a natural substance through the language of teleology, and not *just* of intentionality. When dealing with a phenomenally conscious agent like a human or a dolphin, we must speak of *alignment* between the two, but we cannot make the mistake of relegating goodness to the latter. Goodness is a product of the former and not the latter, whether we are speaking of a flower, a heart, or a human person. All the same, we need not think that, just because we have taken out the necessity of representationalism from natural normativity, that we have therefore ‘downgraded’ a substance to something mechanical. A substance has natural aims and strivings regardless of whether or not a mind is doing the aiming and striving. We simply need not use mental representationalism as a starting point for theories of value.

6.18 Aristotelianism and Non-Naturalism, Part 3

Like the moral naturalist, the contemporary non-naturalist seems to assume an irreducibly layered conception of reality without accepting the Aristotelian notion of formal and final cause that seems to come along with this new ‘liberal’ naturalist understanding. This metaphysical dissonance leads to the necessity of positing a ‘supervenience’ theory. Shafer-Landau argues that just as the property dualist (like Chalmers) argues that consciousness is realized by the physical without being identical to it, Shafer-Landau argues that moral facts supervene on natural facts without being identical to them. And just as Chalmers’ supervening consciousness does not play a causal role, neither do

Shafer-Landau's moral facts play a causal role. Shafer-Landau insists that some facts in the world are just like this: they are real, and they are dependent on empirical facts, but they are not discoverable through empirical analysis. Moral facts, then, function much like consciousness. Both sets of facts are epiphenomenal, both sets of facts are sui generis, and both sets of facts are thoroughly real. In setting up his comparison thusly, Shafer-Landau declares that the non-naturalist is a 'partner in innocence.'

Yet given my analysis of irreducible form and the problem of ontological emergence on the naturalistic picture of reality, we should not see Shafer-Landau as a partner in innocence, but a partner in 'crime'. That is to say, when Shafer-Landau talks about 'supervening' moral properties, he is really, like David McNaughton from a chapter earlier, talking about properties that have *ontologically emerged*. As such, Strawson's argument against the emergence of the mental should hold equally for Shafer-Landau's analysis of the 'supervening' moral fact, *assuming that* Shafer-Landau, like all other naturalists, assumes a bottom-up picture of reality. Shafer-Landau is not using 'supervenience' in the rather benign sense that Hare and others used it—that is, to point out that goodness isn't a 'simple' property or a 'Platonic Form', but is instead necessarily tied to things that are good, and that it is impossible for two things to be exactly alike save for that one is good and one is not. In this way, the Aristotelian, who argues for universals instead of eternal forms, is happy to use the term 'supervenient'. And in this way, Shafer-Landau is an Aristotelian, in that he wants to deny the Moorean idea that the good is 'simple'. But Shafer-Landau also wants to motivate a way of looking at moral facts that is consistent with the *bottom-up picture of reality*, and the assumption that the bottom level of reality is without moral 'properties'. Thus, Shafer-Landau's use of

supervenience is *also* David McNaughton's quite explicit use of *emergence* by another word. Specifically, given Shafer-Landau's insistence that there can be no 'identity' between 'natural facts' and 'moral facts', we are thus, like the property dualist in the philosophy of mind, speaking of *ontological* emergence. Thus, it seems as if 'supervenience' is a loaded term.

6.19 The Non-Entailment Thesis

Yet even if we allow this supervenience story and the dubious naturalistic metaphysics that it implies, Shafer-Landau faces more problems. For another problem with Shafer-Landau's analysis of the 'moral fact' is that he seems to fall right into the hands of Simon Blackburn (1988), who argued that the problem of saying that moral facts non-reductively supervene on natural facts is that we have no way to understand how this relationship could be 'logical' and therefore 'necessary'. This argument by Simon Blackburn is sometimes called the 'Non-Entailment Thesis.' If moral facts supervene on natural facts, argues Blackburn, and this supervenient relationship leaves ontological space between the two sets of facts, then there doesn't seem to be any reason why a particular set of moral facts supervenes over another set of moral facts given any one set of natural facts. We might look at this argument as a version of Strawson's own 'principle of non-emergence' argument by another name. Indeed, precisely because Shafer-Landau garners support for his reading of moral facts through parallel non-reductive or 'property-dualist' theories of mind, he seems to walk right into Blackburn's criticism in the same way that a property dualist would walk into Strawson's criticism. The whole point of a property-dualist theory like Chalmers' is that consciousness,

precisely because it has no *logical* connection with the physical, could fail to arise in a counter-factual world. That counter-factual world could contain only zombies. Why cannot the same counter-factual situation hold for the non-naturalist moral realist? Since that counter-factual world would be the same otherwise, this shows that consciousness not only supervenes epiphenomenally, but that its very arrival on the scene is mysterious. Certainly, Blackburn is also using supervenience as emergence here as well.

Shafer-Landau answers Blackburn's challenge thusly: "The fact is that we can logically conceive of a world in which the base properties that actually underlie a particular moral ones fail to do so. But there is no mystery here, since people can conceive of many things that are not metaphysically possible." So the relationship between the subvening and supervening properties, while not logically necessary, are nevertheless, as Nick Zangwill words it, "brute," and in no need of explanation. (1997: 510)

In one sense, Shafer-Landau and Zangwill's answer is perfectly correct. Moreover, they might be conceding too much: one cannot even *conceive* of a world where the actions of the cat torturers were morally licit (and this might be all to the point). Yet the 'brute' answer is not satisfying, and no anti-realist should feel that this answer suffices to over turn their own anti-realist suspicions. So does this mean that we should be anti-realists? Not at all. The problem is the framework in which Shafer-Landau works, by which he has to give the 'brute' answer. Like the moral naturalist spoken of above, Shafer-Landau does not, when describing his non-naturalist program, speak of formal substances, but instead speak of 'natural facts' and 'properties'. He writes, for example, at the beginning of chapter four: "A good deal of opposition to moral realism

stems from a basic metaphysical puzzle. Put simply, it is hard to see what kind of thing a moral value could be, and this difficulty derives largely from the suspicion that values are something quite different from the commonplace, empirical facts that we encounter in our everyday experience. It is said that values have a pull on us that ordinary facts do not; that values are not discoverable as scientific facts are; that values provide justification for practices that plain facts are unable, by themselves, to supply. In short, it appears that moral values are something very different in kind from anything else that we are familiar with.” (2005: 55) Yet it is only if we assume what was referred to in chapter three as the ‘snapshot’ view of reality that we would ever speak of the world in this way. No, a ‘moral value’ is not an ‘empirical fact’, and it is furthermore false to say that ‘empirical facts’ are all that are ‘observed’. So it is only if we abstract away from the lived world that we would ever need to speak of a ‘subvening’ base that is void of morality and a ‘supervening’ base where ‘moral facts’ reside. For to speak of a formal substance is *necessarily* to speak of an entity with built-in ‘oughts’.

This can be clearly seen if we leave the world of ‘facts’ and ‘properties’ and enter the lived world of formal substances. For one thing, the world of substances is a world of *continuity*. We must rightly emphasize that a major component to Aristotle’s version of value realism, as opposed to both the theories of the moral naturalists and the moral ‘non’ naturalists like Shafer-Landau, is its construal of the human person as continuous with the natural order as a whole. For as Nagel reminds us, “The entire animal kingdom, the endless generations of insects and spiders in their enormous, extravagant populations, all pose this same question about the order of nature.” (2012: 55) As such, what is said about immanent normativity on the human level can be *analogously* said of *every* natural thing.

In fact, it is only *because* we can speak of the inherent oughts of *every* substance that we can speak of an inherent ought of *any* substance, and therefore of the human substance. Of course, when we consider a human form as opposed to a form of a flower or a worm or a dolphin, we are speaking of a particularly advanced sort of rational, intelligent, intentional agent. But the human form is not different in *kind* from these other entities, despite these robust mental features. We cannot say that, just because the human being displays a complex sort of rationality and intentionality, that he is therefore outside of the normative web of nature, for the same reason that we cannot say that normativity arises only on the human level. The human is a natural thing just like other natural things, and so his norms and goodness are analogously found in his very nature just like the norms and goodness of a mosquito are found in *its* nature.

To hold out the human person as the lone home of immanent normativity, as some philosophers, and even some biologists, are in the habit of doing,⁵⁷ is to risk positing a tacit dualism. But for the Aristotelian, moral realism follows from what can be said about organic nature as a whole. Of course, as David Oderberg (2008) argues, while immanent purpose and aim are ubiquitous to every substance in nature, organic or not, it is most apparent in organic forms, since organic substances exhibit teleological features that do not translate into mechanistic language, or explainable as anything other than teleological. As David Oderberg notes, an organic substance, as opposed to substances from physics and chemistry, “does things to itself and for itself, such as nutrition, growth, reproduction, self-maintenance, self-repair, locomotion, and related kinds of behavior.” (2008: 91) Thus, in organisms, immanent aim and goal are readily apparent;

⁵⁷ See Kass 2002 for a description of this tendency in modern biology.

and it is here, as many Aristotelians insist, (e.g., Foot 2003 & Hursthouse 1999) that we can most easily uncover the special normative features of the substantial form.

So let's return to Blackburn's non-entailment thesis. How, for example, could the non-entailment thesis be a damning critique of the reality of the formal and final cause of a daffodil? How, more precisely, are we supposed to draw a division between the subvening valueless entity and the (merely 'metaphysically' as opposed to 'logically') 'supervening' value? It is difficult to even *set up* the thought experiment. So likewise with the human realm. While it might seem coherent to ask how 'moral facts' could be real if their supervening relationship with the 'natural facts' (of the human person?) is not a 'logical' relationship, it seems incoherent to ask if particular a form ought to be the thing that it is.

So Shafer-Landau (and Nick Zangwill) are both right and wrong. They are right to point out that if Blackburn's non-entailment thesis implies anti-realism about the moral realm, that it implies anti-realism about normative relationships that hold throughout the natural world. But at the same time, since Shafer-Landau eschews talk of formal substances in his metaphysical analysis, preferring instead to enter leave the 'life-world' and enter the abstracted world of 'facts' and 'properties', he opens himself up quite easily to the precise charge that Blackburn's Non-Entailment Thesis describes.

6.20 Conclusion

This chapter has tried to show that the Aristotelian conception of natural goodness has marked differences with contemporary naturalist and non-naturalist conceptions of 'moral facts'. It has also tried to show that even though the Aristotelian does not easily

allow for someone outside of the 'virtuous circle' to easily 'read off' the contours of substantial forms the nature of true human goodness, that it is nevertheless not a version of epistemologically motivated relativism. Rather, the Aristotelian insists that moral rivals can reach consensus once we let loose into the vast ocean of being.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation has been modest, yet its conclusions, if warranted, should be of interest to those who intuitively recognize the truth of an older, pre-modern view of nature and human nature, along with the particular sort of realist theory of value that springs forth from this older vision. For while an Aristotelian philosophy of nature and its corresponding metaethics is indeed ‘intuitive’ insofar as it aligns with what common sense tells us is really there—namely, substantial forms with immanent value—it is nevertheless one that the contemporary naturalist has for a long while seen as insufficient. Against these widespread assumptions, this dissertation has argued that the contemporary naturalist does not, after all, have sufficient reasons for seeing an Aristotelian philosophy of nature as ‘outdated’, and therefore no reason for seeing Aristotelian arguments for value realism as wrong from the start. If anything, the Aristotelian has good reasons for seeing contemporary naturalism as itself wrong, and therefore good reasons for seeing as wrong from the start any resulting moral theory that derives from contemporary naturalism. But this dissertation sees no need to conclude that the contemporary naturalist’s philosophy of nature is *false*; neither is there any attempt to *falsify* any rival metaethical view; rather, these pages have merely attempted to point out 1) some of the difficulties that the contemporary naturalist might face, 2) some of the difficulties that rival moral theories face, and 3) the ways that an Aristotelian philosophy of nature can answer objections to its own philosophy of nature and the value realism that is derivative of it.

Another way of putting all of the above is this: it was mentioned on a number of occasions in these pages that Aristotelian value realism is poorly represented in introductory textbooks on contemporary metaethics. One can surmise, given the fact that naturalism is the consensus among academic philosophers, that any book on the myriad metaethical theories currently in circulation would leave out from the start any view that held to a philosophy of nature that varied considerably from the contemporary naturalist's own. So the goal of this dissertation was to provide reasons for why the Aristotelian value realist might, despite his rival philosophy of nature, be better represented in this literature.

With this said, two additional, *minor* points might be quickly mentioned here in this 'coda'. The first is that neither the Aristotelian philosophy of nature, nor its derivative value theory, was ever 'falsified' at any point in the story of modern philosophy and science. There was no definitive argument made against Aristotelian philosophy of nature, nor was there (nor could there be) any 'scientific discovery' that falsified it. So none of what is said here in these pages should be read as the author asking for a 'rematch'. It is true that the Aristotelian insistence on formal and final cause fell *out of fashion*, and it is true that a newer and milder version of efficient causation largely *replaced* the Aristotelian's older, richer version: but one will search the philosophical records in vain for an *argument* that showed that the Aristotelian insistence on and understanding of substantial form were *wrong*. Rather, as many contemporary Aristotelians have pointed out (e.g., Oderberg 2008), the Aristotelian conception of nature was simply ignored for so long that many philosophers simply *assumed* that the definitive arguments against it were made at one point, and that the modern 'shift' in

thinking, both in the realm of metaphysics and moral theory, was originally justified by such an argument. Thus, much modern thinking *vis a vis* Aristotelianism gives evidence of something akin to the ‘telephone game’.

Yet some might object (and here’s the second minor point) that an argument *had* in fact been made against an Aristotelian philosophy of nature—namely, that the *success* of modern science showed that the older Aristotelian version of it was *wrong*. We see such a view clearly on display in Leiter and Weisberg’s review of Thomas Nagel’s recent *Mind and Cosmos*. They write: “...surely we have some reason for thinking, some four centuries after the start of the scientific revolution, that Aristotle was on the wrong track and that we are not, or at least not yet. Our reasons for thinking this are obvious and uncontroversial: mechanistic explanations and an abandonment of supernatural causality proved enormously fruitful in expanding our ability to predict and control the world around us.” (Leiter and Weisberg 2012) Yet these pages have hopefully shown why this argument faces difficulty. It was suggested that what these authors see as the success of ‘mechanistic’ explanations are really the success of explanations involving formal and final cause. Modern science, as Barham and Talbott point out, have not really banished formal and final cause, despite *saying* that they have. Yet, as it was argued, one can approach this ecumenically by *granting* to these authors their assumption that mere ‘mechanism’ did the job. However, it was further argued that such ‘mechanistic’ explanations were only successful in very limited areas. No ‘mechanistic’ explanation of nature could ever fit consciousness into its story of the world. For this reason, the Aristotelian has good reason for seeing what these thinkers call ‘mechanistic’ to be *really* an explanation involving formal and final cause, given that the rival conception of nature

is incomplete in a way that the Aristotelian conception is not. Mechanistic explanations, that is, are really quite limited, even if we falsely assume one can explain *anything* in ‘mechanistic’ fashion: the mechanistic approach will simply fail to explain or ‘control’ any aspect of nature that falls outside what can be accounted for via the moving, bumping, and circulating of the various bits in nature. Thus, the argument that the Aristotelian philosophy of nature has been shown to be false because the ‘success’ of modern science is actually an example of the oft-cited allusion of mistakenly thinking that, since you have a hammer, that everything is a nail. So, simply put: a metaphysical argument against the long-assumed cogency of Aristotelian philosophy of nature was never actually given *anywhere* in the annals of the history of philosophy, and secondly, the argument about modern science’s ‘success’ does nothing to show that Aristotelianism is defunct. Thus, once again, the Aristotelian value realist has no reason to balk: if anything, as mentioned, his contemporary naturalist rivals do.

This is all that should be said about this, however, given the modest goals of this dissertation. The goal here is not to show why Aristotelian value realism is overwhelmingly superior to rival views, nor is it to show that contemporary naturalism is “most certainly false”, to quote the subtitle of the very book that Leiter and Weisberg criticize in their review. Rather, this dissertation has merely tried to give Aristotelian moral theory a place at the table and show those who are partial to the view that they might indeed be on the right track. Rather than definitively ‘proving’ anything, it has merely tried to give support to those who would charitably engage in an Aristotelian vein with those philosophers offering rival theories, and it has tried to give credibility to those who are not afraid to dive into the ocean of being.

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