

Philosophers
in
Depth

Philippa Foot on Goodness and Virtue

Edited by
John Hacker-Wright



Philosophers in Depth

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Philippa Foot on Goodness and Virtue

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ISBN 978-3-319-91255-4

ISBN 978-3-319-91256-1 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91256-1>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018940751

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Cover credit: arsenisspyros

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

For Rosalind

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Constantine Sandis for suggesting the project. Michael Furac and Tiger Zheng provided invaluable editorial assistance in preparing the volume.

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Abbreviations

- MD *Moral Dilemmas and Other Topics in Moral Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002
- NG *Natural Goodness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001
- VV *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002



Introduction: From Natural Goodness to Morality

John Hacker-Wright

1 Grammar and Frameworks: Foot's Methodology

The papers in this volume all take up issues that emerge from Philippa Foot's provocative later work concerning natural normativity. Natural norms pertain to any living thing, and tell us what it is for a thing to be a good member of its kind. A good tiger, for instance, is one without any physical defect that would prevent it from living its species-characteristic life. The provocative thesis of Foot's later work is that the moral evaluation of the goodness of human actions involves natural norms that apply to human beings. What Foot means when she makes this claim has been the subject of considerable controversy.

In this introduction, I will situate the essays in this volume as well as take an interpretive stance of my own on one of the central issues that comes out of Foot's late work. Specifically, I will speak to the relation of

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Foot's work on natural normativity to morality. The question I aim to address is: how does Foot's work on natural normativity pertain to substantive questions of right and wrong? These thoughts take their departure from a remark Foot makes in the Postscript to *Natural Goodness*:

I have been asked the very pertinent question as to where all this leaves disputes about substantial moral questions. Do I really believe that I have described a method for settling them all? The proper reply is that in a way nothing is settled, but everything is left as it was. The account of vice as a natural defect merely gives a framework within which the dispute takes place. (NG 116)

This passage might be taken to settle my question straight away in a surprisingly negative way; it suggests that natural normativity does not settle anything substantive about morality. Yet the passage is perplexing, especially when read in light of all that she says in *Natural Goodness*. There is a crucial qualifier that modifies leaving everything as it is ("in a way"), and further it raises the question of what is meant by "giving a framework within which a dispute is to take place." The claim that natural normativity provides a framework for disputes about substantive moral questions raises the further question: what is the function of such a framework? Although the Postscript seemingly minimizes the contribution of such a framework to answering substantive moral questions, other statements in *Natural Goodness* seem to contradict that minimization. After all, Foot apparently takes her framework to rule out utilitarianism, which would seem to be a significant upshot for debates about substantive moral questions (NG 48).

From the Postscript, it is also clear that Foot does not think her framework contributes substantively to settling questions about the virtues and vices. There she states that the framework cannot tell us whether cruelty to animals is wrong. Elsewhere in *Natural Goodness*, she disavows any insight into the question of whether charity rather than hardness makes for a happy life, stating, "we are now... in an area in which philosophy can claim no special voice: facts about human life are in question and so no philosopher has a special right to speak" (NG 108). So, Foot's view seems to be that philosophers have special insight

only over a range of issues that pertain to a framework. The framework she refers to is her attempt to render explicit the “logical grammar” of moral judgments (NG 2). This is a term she is evidently borrowing from Wittgenstein. Grammar, in Wittgenstein’s idiosyncratic sense, is a matter of how words function in the various practical contexts in which we take them to have an appropriate application; “grammar” does not, for Wittgenstein, refer to the systematization of syntactical rules and word morphology. It is part of Wittgenstein’s philosophical methodology to conduct “grammatical investigations” (Wittgenstein 47).¹ His thought is roughly that many philosophical problems are caused by our failure to attend to the grammar (in his sense) of the terms in which the problem is posed. Philosophy often removes terms from those various practical contexts and its problems stem from failing to attend carefully to the variety of the ways in which the words in which philosophical problems are posed are actually used in real contexts. Foot exemplifies a grammatical investigation in her treatment of G.E. Moore’s understanding of goodness as a simple predicate, as in “pleasure is good” (NG 2). This form of statement, she claims, is “rarely appropriate.” In other words, it is difficult to think of a non-philosophical context in which one could meaningfully utter “pleasure is good.” On Foot’s view, an important step toward grasping the real logical grammar of “good” was uncovered by Peter Geach (1956), in his argument that “good” is unlike “red” and more like “large” in that it must be tied to a noun when used meaningfully.

Foot builds on Geach’s insight; her task is to map the logical grammar of judgments of goodness pertaining to human actions. On Foot’s account, the grammar of judgments about the goodness of an action in a human being is the same as judgments about “good sight” in a non-human animal: “...there is *no change in the meaning of ‘good’ between the word as it appears in ‘good roots’ and as it appears in ‘good dispositions of the will’*” (NG 39). An understanding of the grammar of claims about goodness in roots and eyes is therefore pertinent to a proper understanding of the grammar of claims about the goodness of actions and the will. Yet Foot is careful to point out that the goodness

¹See McGinn (2011) for a detailed discussion.

of human actions and dispositions of the will does not track the same features of a human being as determine the goodness of, say, eyesight in a non-human animal. The features that determine goodness in the latter case pertain to whether the eyesight of the animal in question suffices for it to pursue its species-characteristic life, and this will turn on how it achieves the goals of survival and reproduction. Good eyesight in a creature that relies on hearing, say, in a bat, will be something quite different than in an animal that uses eyesight for hunting at a distance, as in a raptor. But humans are distinctive in that the goodness that pertains to being a good human is not tied directly to what allows for human being's individual survival and reproduction:

Take reproduction, for instance. Lack of capacity to reproduce is a defect in a human being. But choice of childlessness and even celibacy is not thereby shown to be defective choice, because human good is not the same as plant or animal good. The bearing and rearing of children is not an ultimate good in human life, because other elements of good such as the demands of work to be done may give a man or woman reason to renounce family life. (NG 42)

Thanks to our rationality, the human good is more complex than the good of non-human animals. We can have straightforward physical defects, as in the case of infertility, but it does not follow from the fact that infertility is a physical defect that choosing not to have children is a defective choice. The goodness of our choices is not determined by whether they are conducive to our individual biological survival and reproduction; rather, the way that human actions relate to survival and reproduction for human beings is quite different from how non-human organisms relate to those ends. "Survival" and "reproduction" specify ends only formally, as Matthias Haase points out in his essay for this volume. As such, they are carried out in entirely distinctive ways for different forms of life. We reproduce ourselves in ways more elaborate than simply having babies. Through serving others in various ways, we contribute to our survival and reproduction as humans. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that, in the context of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism, this does not mean contributing to making a greater

number of human beings or the replication of our genes. Rather, it means that we have a species-characteristic way of achieving survival and reproduction, and only what supports that species-specific way of surviving and reproducing actually counts as furthering those ends. Someone who develops a way for an individual human to produce twenty genetic offspring in vitro has not necessarily developed a better way of achieving those ends by the criteria of natural normativity, and we are not at all constrained to consider this a good choice for humans. Rather, the criteria of good choice would include everything that we can reasonably take to fall under the heading of “practical wisdom,” standards for which are not reducible to what allows for an individual to survive and reproduce. The exercise of practical rationality allows us to take up many different aims that are productive of good things: goods for ourselves and others, and that’s what it is for a human being to survive and reproduce; there are various ways of contributing to human survival and reproduction that don’t involve an individual biologically reproducing himself. It is even possible that a good choice is one that leads us to lay down our individual lives for the sake of our family or community, and though it has a somewhat paradoxical sound perhaps, on the neo-Aristotelian view, this is characteristic of the human way of survival and reproduction. Yet even on the narrower understanding of reproduction as having a baby and rearing a child, the good of having children is different for us than for non-human animals. For a non-human animal, the good that is achieved in reproducing and possibly rearing an offspring is an ultimate good. For us, that good is tied to the love of parents for their children in a way that is not found in non-human animals, or at least not in all of them. Hence, to achieve the good of having children requires more than simply passing an infant through the birth canal alive, or even feeding the child successfully to maturity. It requires the creation of a loving relationship. This feature of our form of life raises the difficult general issue of how to determine what really belongs to the good in human life. Although in the passage cited earlier Foot seems willing to weigh in on the human good, she elsewhere begs off and claims not to have the authority, as a philosopher, to speak on these matters. Specifically, she claims not to have the authority as

a philosopher to weigh in on whether charity makes one happier than hardness.²

Yet, there is a crucial difference between these two cases from the standpoint of Foot's methodology. In the one case, she is appealing to general features of human life to argue that we cannot take the human good to follow from survival and reproduction in the way it does for plants and animals. For her, this reflection appears to be included in a consideration of the grammar of human goodness; it is a matter of "good" in the case of "good human" being tied closely to the dispositions of the will, which are a function of the exercise of our rationality in making choices. Note that the meaning of "good" stays the same between cases involving humans and non-humans: "good," in either case, means "in a condition to allow the individual to fulfill its species-characteristic life." It's just that the species-characteristic life of a human is quite different from the species-characteristic life of any non-human because we are rational animals. The case of considering whether charity is a virtue, where Foot disavows any authority to speak as a philosopher, is not merely a grammatical matter. Deciding this matter requires substantive insight into human life. That is because it requires us to consider whether there is something specifically good about charity, the appreciation of which might make a distinctive contribution to our happiness.³ In some places Foot appears to say something tantamount to endorsing charity as when she writes, "there is no good case for assessing the goodness of human actions solely by reference only to the good that each person brings himself" (NG 16) and in stating that charity is a prime candidate for a virtue (NG 108). She appears to think that even allowing the goodness of individual actions to be considered in a broad sense including the good that we do for others, and acknowledging our need for love and kindness, it could still be that we do best to cultivate hardness rather than charity. In other words, she is unwilling to rule out a substantive Stoicism, which takes

²On these issues, see especially the papers by Rosalind Hursthouse and Matthias Haase in this volume, discussed below.

³For more on Foot on happiness see the contributions to this volume by Gavin Lawrence and Micah Lott.

self-sufficiency to be a central part of the human good. That is the case even though she rejects, on grammatical grounds, the Stoic *framework* that identifies virtue with happiness (NG 97). There is no doubt that, as an active member of Oxfam, Foot has strong commitments on the issue of whether charity makes for a happier life than hardness, but the point is that this commitment outstrips what can be determined within the scope of a grammatical investigation, and so does not fall within her expertise and authority *qua* philosopher.

Hence one can see that Foot separates framework matters, which concern grammar, from substantive matters, which concern our conception of the human good. The relation of the two is indirect: properly grasping the grammar of goodness can rule out certain sorts of argument, including arguments that might be taken to give decisive philosophical support for a position. That is what is happening in the treatment of utilitarianism in *Natural Goodness*. Although this might appear to be a place where the grammatical investigation is doing some substantive work in determining our normative commitments, on closer inspection, that is not what Foot is up to. Her argument against utilitarianism is, in fact, a general argument against any consequentialist understanding of value, and it is grounded in her grammatical investigation of goodness. The argument attempts to rule out the idea that good states of affairs can play a foundational role in morality. The idea of good states of affairs does not have a foundational place within the framework of natural normativity, which is the grammar of goodness as we apply it to evaluating human actions. Yet she admits that the goodness of states of affairs has applicability “somewhere within morality,” only not as a foundational proposition. The idea seems to be that we often say “it is a good state of affairs” that some disaster was averted (MD 65). But this is from our perspective as moral agents who possess the virtue of charity or benevolence. It is not that there are states of affairs that feature the property of goodness apart from such agents. This way of valuing states of affairs differs from the consequentialist understanding in that the value of good states of affairs is conditioned on their not conflicting with other virtues, such as justice. So, it makes a big difference where the states of affairs are “located,” whether as the foundation or inside morality, to use Foot’s metaphor. Yet in all of this,

she thinks she is limiting herself to considerations of the framework. She notes:

... I am not wanting to run an everyday expression out of town; only to give it its proper place in the whole of a conceptual scheme. As an architect must distinguish a pillar that merely holds up an internal arch from one that is weight-bearing in relation to the building itself, so a philosopher must be careful not to exaggerate the importance of some common form of words. (NG 49)

This shows that she is engaged in a grammatical investigation, situating an expression within its appropriate place, and her goal is limited to contesting the idea that we can conceive the goodness of the will in terms of promoting states of affairs. Yet, this leaves open the question of the nature of the human good, conceived in terms of natural normativity. What is it that makes a human good, in this sense? It could be that human good consists solely in promoting the pleasure of others and alleviating suffering. So, Foot gives no argument that would preclude beneficence from being the sole human virtue and allowing utilitarian norms to govern human goodness, even if the theory of value often deployed by philosophers with utilitarian commitments is mistaken. Still, Foot appears to think that once we have done away with the foundational conception of the goodness of states of affairs, one of the main conceptual supports for arguing in favor of utilitarianism is undone. It is evident from her writings on substantive moral issues that she believes both justice and charity to be on the list of virtues, and hence, to be needed by human beings. This gives us insight into how she does in fact fill out her picture of the human good, even though it is not entailed by her framework.

2 Virtues and Moral Codes

The next step in the connection between the framework of natural goodness and morality is to note there are conceptual connections between the virtues, which are qualities of the will that are needed by a

good human, and the content of any moral code that is worthy of the name. This is the notion of “definitional criteria” or a content restriction for morality that she advocates consistently through most of her career. The virtues are crucial to the definitional criteria for a moral code because having such a code is a matter not only of having the right content (something more significant to human well-being than placing one hand on top of the other three times in an hour) but also having reactions of the right sort to that content. As Foot puts it, it does not make sense to speak of a group of people as thinking that stealing is wrong unless they respond to it “as we do when we speak of treachery, cunning, or cruelty” (1954, 109; see also MD 5f.). That is, if a group had a set of norms that appeared to overlap with ours in ruling out acts of theft, but these acts were responded to with modest “tut-tuts,” as to violations of good manners, we would be mistaken in attributing to that group a moral norm against theft. So, morality is the subject matter that is specified by that content and by agents taking that content seriously in a nuanced set of emotional responses such as those exhibited by virtuous agents.

But Foot does not think morality yields a single set of moral principles such that every society must have one set of norms that govern its judgments of good conduct. Rather, according to Foot, there is room within morality for “contingent principles” that stipulate certain matters that are not settled by the concept of morality. She believes, for instance, that whether to count a fetus as a human being is a matter of choice for a society, and this introduces an element of relativity in her theory of morality: here she speaks of morality as embodied in moral codes, which will have significant overlap, and yet due to contingent principles, also have their differences. Further, a moral code or moral system is something distinct from the concept of morality in that it must be specified and codified for a society. Foot looks at the work of John Rawls and T.M. Scanlon in this light: they provide theories of how to specify the concept of morality into a social system. A good moral code must be able to urge conformity on any individual, through pointing to some benefit that the existence of the system provides to him as an individual (MD 103). Foot’s view is therefore quite distant from the views of virtue ethicists, such as Rosalind Hursthouse or Christine

Swanton, who wish to frame a criterion of right action in terms of what a virtuous agent would do or aim at. Although the virtues are significant for Foot, they are only a starting point for a constructive project of determining a moral code, and that project must appeal to features of the society to be governed by that code.

Moral codes are enumerated by Foot as among the things needed by human beings, as something without which we would be deprived, and as something that is unavailable to us without virtue (NG 44). Natural normativity demands that we develop and abide by moral codes, on Foot's account, although it only loosely defines the scope of those moral codes. Nevertheless, virtuous agents will have reason to abide by moral codes, including its contingent principles.

3 Ethical Naturalism and Philosophical Anthropology

We can now, perhaps, see why Foot takes such a limited view of the role of a philosopher in spelling out the good human life. Her framework explores the grammar of goodness in the Wittgensteinian sense, and, on her view, such an investigation can at best rule out certain sorts of argument that might tempt us when we are attempting to justify a normative principle. In her work engaging with substantive moral issues, Foot presupposes a certain moral code, our "common moral code" (MD 71). A philosopher can help us to sort out confusions about the common moral code, but the moral code itself is a product of a social process rather than the product of philosophical reflection.

But perhaps Foot is taking too austere a view of the philosopher's role in relation to justifying norms, even from the perspective of her own framework of natural normativity. She believes that philosophers have no special expertise in determining facts about human life. This may make it sound as though what is called for is filling in with scientific biology and anthropology. As Micah Lott and I have argued in

several articles, this appearance is misleading.⁴ The relevant features of our form of life are not facts of the sort that we need an empirical investigation to supply. Rather, we need an understanding of what it is for a human being to function well, and this includes what it is to reason well. There is an implicit understanding of our life form that we employ whenever we think and act. It is not a set of biological facts, but an interpretation of our life form that is in question when we reflect upon whether charity or hardness makes for a happy life, and it is difficult to believe that philosophers have nothing to contribute to such a discussion, given significant philosophical argumentation that directly addresses this issue, such as can be found in Aristotle's discussion of the importance of the closely related virtue of friendship. Yet Aristotle's methodology is not a grammatical investigation, and that no doubt accounts for his willingness to engage in a wider philosophical investigation of our ethical life.

In the tradition from Aristotle to Aquinas, at least, philosophical insight into human moral psychology plays an important role in explicating the nature of the virtues. Aquinas in particular develops his account of the virtues on the backbone of a conception of the distinctive powers of human beings. We all have the powers of thinking, willing, and desiring, and each of these powers can be perfected, giving rise to cardinal virtues of prudence (the perfection of the intellect in the practical domain), justice (the chief perfection of the will as rational appetite), courage (perfection of the irascible appetites), and temperance (perfection of the concupiscible appetites). Even if we do not accept Aquinas' account of human powers and their correlative virtues, his work could provide a template for how to proceed in our understanding of the virtues. Whatever our powers turn out to be, the virtues are perfections of those powers. Such a traditional understanding of virtue embraces the understanding of virtue as a perfection of the powers of the human soul and so defines us in terms of our powers for realizing a certain end or set of ends. The virtues, on such a view,

⁴Lott (2012a, b). Hacker-Wright (2009a, b, 2012, 2013). See also Rosalind Hursthouse's contribution to this volume.

are qualities of those powers, perfections of our form such that we can attain our final cause in acting as a human being should act. Often, the neo-Aristotelian project in ethical theory is framed as an effort to separate the virtue theory from Aristotle's "metaphysical biology."⁵ Yet, perhaps the neo-Aristotelian effort, so conceived, is an error. One could also take it that what is appealing about virtue ethics points to a way of defending at least parts of Aristotelian metaphysical biology. It could be that, as agents, we must take ourselves, however loosely, to be animals with intellectual and appetitive powers. A fully coherent and worked out self-understanding may then require us to posit the virtues as qualities that we are committed to pursuing along with whatever else we see as good. That is, in understanding ourselves as agents, we must understand ourselves against the background of some idea of what it is to exercise our agency well. If our well-functioning agency consists of having a conception of what is worth pursuing and desires that are generally in-line with that conception, then we are in the vicinity of the traditional understanding of the good, in which the perfection of the intellect and appetites are needed to become a good human. Further, if the moral norms that follow from our commitment to a certain understanding of our form of life are to have the status of something more than an upshot of how we happen to understand ourselves, we may need to carry the project to the point of vindicating the traditional understanding of human nature as capturing what we essentially are. For traditional Aristotelian accounts, we really are, essentially, rational animals. From that it follows that certain qualities really are virtues of human beings, and our failing to develop those virtues really is a defect. These claims would fail to describe ourselves as we truly are if they are merely a particular, optional mode of representation. In short, the way forward for neo-Aristotelian ethics may lie in shedding the methodology of the grammatical investigation in favor of a more full-blooded metaphysical exploration of the human life form. The way forward may lie further back.

⁵MacIntyre (1981, 196).

The results of this metaphysical route would still be formal, leaving questions to be filled in, beyond the “special voice” of philosophy, but it would yield a more detailed philosophical framework for the virtues than that provided by Foot. The suggestion of this interpretation, then, is that Foot opened up a path of investigation that her methodology may have hampered. Perhaps we can develop further her insights by being more full-blooded in our Aristotelianism and rejecting the austere methods of grammatical investigation.

4 Overview

The volume begins with a paper by Rosalind Hursthouse that traces the development of Foot’s thinking about natural goodness over the course of her career. The notion of natural goodness developed in Foot’s *Natural Goodness* was first recognized by Foot in her 1961 paper “Goodness and Choice,” where she noticed that “good claws” and “good roots” seem to fall in a distinct class of goodness, objective and utterly divorced from choice. That is, that a tree has strong, deep roots or a tiger has sharp claws may give us no reason at all to choose such a tree or tiger. Yet, precisely because of the sharp divide from choice, Foot did not notice the possible connection between members of this class and the moral evaluation of human beings. After all, the latter sort of evaluation does have a connection to our choices. The pressure to maintain objectivity and yet account for the practicality of moral judgment drives Foot into her infamous externalism, which is, on Hursthouse’s view, a regrettable turn in Foot’s thinking. Then later Foot recognizes that the functioning of our rationality is itself something that can be subject to evaluation on criteria of natural goodness. The sea change that occurs between non-rational and rational organisms can be incorporated into the account of natural goodness, such that someone who is not responsive to moral reasons is defective, a bad person. Hursthouse notes the distance between Foot’s natural goodness account and other views she calls “biological naturalism.” Hursthouse highlights the distinctiveness of the human life form such that what goes into reproduction for us is

quite distinctive: we need such things as attentive love and security in order to become human rational agents.

The next two chapters, by Jennifer Frey and Matthias Haase, each take Foot's view to be subject to a dilemma. They believe that Foot must choose between affirming the univocity of goodness among living things or embracing the distinctiveness of the human good. If Foot embraces the univocity of goodness, she must treat practical rationality as one trait among others, and it is not obvious how the natural norms of human nature gain a practical status. After all, the fact that humans have two legs does not seem to generate a practical imperative for me should I be lacking one of my legs. On the other horn of the dilemma, if Foot embraces the distinctiveness of the human life form, the naturalism of the project seems to fade into the background, and the appeal of the view as a form of naturalism is lost. Each of these two papers suggests a way forward.

Jennifer Frey's paper offers a crisp formulation of the goal of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism: it is to show how the teleology of living things and the teleology of rational action "can be unified within one and the same account." As John McDowell (1995) showed in his landmark essay, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," they don't obviously come together. Indeed, rationality bequeaths the capacity to stand back from any end that belongs to us by nature and to raise the question of whether pursuing the proposed end is indeed good. Frey argues that neither Hursthouse nor Foot offer adequate accounts of how our practical rationality fits within our natural teleology as humans. In Hursthouse, Frey finds an account of our natural ends that is too general and too external to the ends that we take up in acting morally. We would not encourage children to be charitable in order to live longer, avoid suffering, and enjoy more things, but this is what Frey finds in Hursthouse's account. With Foot, Frey finds a flawed account of practical rationality that concedes practicality in order to maintain a connection with natural norms. Natural norms are theoretical third-person norms, and practical rationality is a matter of recognizing goods and forming judgments about what I have most reason to do given available goods. Frey finds that the judgments arrived at are of the wrong sort; they don't issue in an action or a performance but a judgment. Frey also

finds problems with “second nature naturalism” of the sort defended by McDowell. There she sees a loss of any significant role for human nature, since on that view, according to Frey, we are appealing to an acquired second nature, instilled by culture or *Bildung*, rather than to our “first nature” which, according to Frey, seems to have been behind the promise of ethical naturalism.

Frey thinks that the answer lies in a deeper appreciation of the views of practical rationality espoused by Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, we are rational animals, and our form of life is specified by distinctive appetitive and cognitive powers. Our appetites play out in a world that is understood by a creature that is self-conscious, and thus our nature is such that we desire things under a conception of the good. There are desires that we have in virtue of our animality, but what these desires point us to will be presented to us as good, and will enter our practical reasoning as we attempt to realize our ultimate aim of happiness. On this Thomistic view, practical reasoning is set in motion by appetites and there are distinct principles of practical reasoning, including the first principle that good is to be done and evil avoided. The human good is grasped for us in a distinctly practical register: it is what we go for on the basis of our rational appetites. Aquinas therefore shows us how to be an ethical naturalist, on Frey’s account, inasmuch as he shows us how there can be objective and yet practical truths about human nature.

Matthias Haase’s paper, like Frey’s, argues that Foot has failed to appreciate the dilemma mentioned above. Haase sets out to understand how to situate the distinctiveness of the human good within a framework that still adheres to the centrality of life within an account of ethics. The key, for Haase, is appreciating the way that distinctively human powers relate to other powers that are shared with non-human animals and plants. He distinguishes various ways of conceiving the relationship between rational and other powers. On one account, which Haase dubs the Abstractive model, there are general ends that can be specified (health, survival, and reproduction), across all forms of life, and there are general methods of achieving those ends. This means that photosynthesis contributes to a plant’s health as a good diet and exercise does to ours. On this view, we would find out about our good the same way

we would find out about any other organism's good. But even though some versions of ethical naturalism would not find this troubling, Haase thinks it is troubling on the grounds McDowell argues in "Two Sorts of Naturalism." Norms that are delivered empirically would have a theoretical status for us: we could always step back from them and ask why we should take them to be authoritative for us. Another model, Haase finds in Hursthouse, and dubs the Additive Model. On this model, our rationality adds a further set of ends but does not displace the ends possessed in virtue of our animality. Rationality adds a further end, of being rational, and that rationality occurs in our pursuit of our other non-rational ends. But this conception of the relation of the powers actually renounces the centrality of the concept of life; it simply stipulates that what counts as rational is a function of fulfilling our non-rational ends.

Haase finds in Aristotle himself the grounds for rejecting both the Abstractive Model and the Additive Model. Aristotle pointed out in *De Anima* that it was a mistake to think one could find a definition of the principle of life (the soul) which is common to all and found in no particular existing thing. It would likewise be impossible, on Aristotle's account, to identify the *telea* of vital powers independently of the life forms of which they are a part and then identify the *telos* of a life form with the sum of those powers. Haase proposes that the proper understanding is what he dubs the Transformative Account. On that understanding, our possession of rational powers transforms the point of our possession of our sensitive and nutritive powers, giving rise to a new, *sui generis* unity. For Haase, this account opens the door to understanding Marx's notion of a species-being in connection with the project of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism. On that account, the notion of practically self-conscious life "constitutively excludes that the wills of its multiple exemplars are inevitably in contradiction with each other." In other words, the door is opened to thinking that as practically self-conscious life forms, norms of justice apply to us non-contingently.

The next paper, by Kristina Gehrman, takes up Foot's conception of practical reason from a closely related perspective. Gehrman raises the question of whether Foot is employing what Gavin Lawrence terms a "traditional conception of practical rationality." The traditional

conception of practical rationality comprises a set of commitments: to the objectivity of goodness, to the good as the formal end of practical rationality, and to the rational assessability of both means and ends. On Gehrman's view, Foot does seem largely committed to the traditional view of practical rationality, yet Gehrman worries that the traditional conception does not play the proper explanatory role in Foot's naturalism. Foot focuses on what humans need as a central criterion for justifying the virtues. For example, Foot believes, following Anscombe, that we need fidelity to promises since we need promises to coordinate our actions without violence. Instead, Gehrman argues that the objectivity of morality is grounded, not in a necessary connection between human needs and the virtues, but rather in the fact that it is human nature to be practically rational (according to a traditional conception of practical reason). To develop this "traditional" alternative to Foot's needs-based naturalism, Gehrman begins by challenging Foot's story about the relationship between the individual and the species-typical good, arguing that departure from species-characteristics cannot automatically be construed as a form of natural defect. This point, she claims, emerges when we attend to the sheer pluralism and diversity of species-based norms, not all of which can ever be met by a single individual. Next, Gehrman argues that when combined with the traditional conception of practical reason, this amended conception of natural normativity yields a more circumspect, but also more fully articulated, conception of human practical excellence as compared to Foot's account. She concludes by offering what she calls an "ecological argument" in support of the view that it is indeed human nature to be practically rational according to a traditional conception of practical reason.

Anselm Müller's paper confronts Foot's naturalism with various types of skepticism: theoretical, epistemic, and practical. On Müller's understanding of Foot's ethical naturalism, she leans heavily on the notion of Aristotelian necessity, as highlighted by Anscombe in her writings on promising and rights. Something is necessary in this sense if, without it, some good cannot be or come to be. Anscombe thinks that promising fits this conception because without it, one cannot get others to do as one wishes without the use of force. Müller understands Foot to be arguing that the virtues are generally grounded in Aristotelian necessity:

they serve human well-being. The theoretical skeptic questions this claim. Anscombe argues that some prohibitions, such as the prohibition against murder, do not have a justification grounded in Aristotelian necessities; indeed, Anscombe thinks that they have a “mystical value” and Müller agrees with Anscombe that some norms require a justification that outstrips any possible appeal to Aristotelian necessity. The epistemic skeptic doubts that moral knowledge can be generated out of knowledge about human life. Müller thinks there is good reason to so doubt. After all, it is difficult to demonstrate Aristotelian necessities really hold. Promising may help us to bind each other’s wills, but can we demonstrate that there are no alternatives? Can it be shown, he asks, that “paedophilia, incest, occasional torture are incompatible with a people’s doing well?” The practical skeptic denies that we have reason to do what is recognized as a moral requirement. As with Frey and Haase above, Müller questions whether Foot manages to get us from natural historical judgments about human life, which are in a theoretical register, to genuine practical judgments. Like Frey, he turns to Aquinas for an answer to this question. Müller finds that Aquinas’ notion of *synderesis* might help to bridge the gaps left in Foot’s account. *Synderesis* is a natural disposition to recognize indemonstrable practical truths, including the first principle of practical reason mentioned in the discussion of Frey’s paper above. This idea helps with theoretical skepticism, because it goes beyond Aristotelian necessities; it helps with epistemic skepticism because it does not depend on any derivation from Aristotelian necessities. Finally, it helps with practical skepticism inasmuch as the principles so grasped are taken up in a specifically practical mode.

Gavin Lawrence’s paper is a ranging study of the nature of the good life that launches from some remarks Foot makes in *Natural Goodness* and in “Virtues and Vices.” In *Natural Goodness*, Foot argues that there is a distinctive, deep sort of happiness that is available to virtuous agents that is not available to the vicious. The possession of virtue is, on Foot’s view, a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the attainment of that deep happiness. In “Virtues and Vices,” Foot argues that a component of wisdom is knowing which ends are worth pursuing and which not. She argues there that many people waste their lives in pursuit of unimportant ends. These issues plunge us into the core of Aristotelian moral

philosophy, an examination of the good life and its relation to virtue. As Lawrence reads Foot, she thinks that worthy candidates for the ends of a well-lived life that may achieve deep happiness are subject to a content restriction similar to the famous content restriction for morality she set forth in "Moral Beliefs." In this case, she holds that candidate ends must be basic in human life, and so include things like home, friendship, family, and work. This excludes petty and trivial things like winning a dispute with a neighbor over milk bottles or a newspaper. The idea is that one cannot intelligibly find deep happiness in the latter sort of thing. Yet Foot thinks that this content restriction does not rule out finding deep happiness in wicked ends. One can intelligibly find deep happiness in vicious projects, perhaps in service of the Nazis. A further stretch of argument is needed to reject the possibility of deep happiness in wicked projects. On Lawrence's nuanced reading, Foot takes two steps to show the impossibility of deep happiness in wicked projects. First, she argues that one cannot be said to benefit someone by aiding them in the completion of wicked project. Second, she argues that one cannot attain deep happiness by taking up with the wicked in their project. In this she refers to the historical case of young men who wrote letters home after being tried and condemned to death for opposing the Nazis (NG 94–5). Lawrence questions Foot's argument by pressing a comparison with eating chocolate cake. Although this is admittedly not a source of deep happiness, but rather sensual enjoyment, it is nevertheless illuminating to juxtapose this case with those involving potential objects of deep happiness. Lawrence presents Foot with a dilemma. It is either the case that deep happiness cannot be attained through vice or that for any given activity there is a distinct way of doing it that involves virtue. On the first horn, drawing the comparison with eating chocolate cake case, that would mean that just eaters would likewise deny that they can get more chocolate cake by taking a second slice. But, Lawrence asks, why? It could be that this means that it would be wicked to attain it in that way, but this leaves Foot with the original problem of showing how it is not rational to so act. Or Foot could mean to say that it would not be or count as deep happiness if attained in that way. But this seems like the assertion of the solution rather than an argument for it. On the other horn of the dilemma, virtue just is the part of the end

that we pursue. Just eaters aim at a sort of just eating and have an end such that they are happy to share and would be unhappy to take more than their fair share. Of this horn, Lawrence worries about whether it was correct to separate happiness from virtue to begin with.

One way past these difficulties is to argue that Foot's content restriction on deep happiness gets us further than she recognizes. Lawrence argues that if friendship is basic in human life, then justice, among other virtues, is necessary for the attainment of friendship. Likewise, injustice is incompatible with possessing such basic goods. After all, injustice undermines our ability to relate to other human beings, and so undercuts our ability to make friends. Another approach, less direct, is to point out that an agent, to be a candidate for deep happiness must have some thoughts about what he is doing, and regard his ends as worthy of pursuit. This raises the question: must he be correct that the ends are worthy of pursuit? One could state the criteria formally: he must be correct about his ends, but it is a further, empirical, question which ends are actually the truly worthy of pursuit. Whatever the merits of such an approach, Lawrence points out that it is not Foot's solution. Lawrence next turns to an examination of contrasts between Aristotle and Foot, pointing out various ways in which Aristotle's account of the relation between goodness and virtue is more nuanced than Foot's account. He concludes with some original reflections on the "marks" of deep happiness.

Micah Lott's paper discusses the different senses of "good" in relation to natural goodness. He finds in Foot four different senses of goodness: the good of, good as/good in, good for, and goods/good things. The primary among these senses is "good of" in reference to an organism. The good of an organism is its characteristic way of life, and this sense of goodness provides a criterion for what it is to be good as an organism of that sort. It also helps us to grasp what is good for an organism of a certain sort: it will be what helps an organism of that kind live its characteristic life. And further, it defines the scope of things that count as good things for that sort of organism. Although Lott does not say so explicitly, the first two senses seem to correspond to what Foot calls "primary goodness" and the latter two senses to what she calls "secondary goodness" (NG 26). With these distinctions in hand, Lott now turns to addressing some misunderstandings and objections to Foot's

views. He first takes up the case, discussed by Foot, of the swiftest deer who gets caught in the trap. For some readers of Foot, this has been taken to suggest that being good as an organism is not necessarily good for that organism, but rather that there is only a statistical connection: being good as an organism is likely to be good for that organism. Lott argues against this reading by appealing to a distinction from Aristotle between “first actuality” and “second actuality.” Possessing a well-formed capacity to do something is a “first actuality,” bringing that power to bear is “second actuality.” This distinction intersects with goodness in that goodness involves both first and second actuality: having properly formed capacities and employing them. Likewise, these are both part of the good of the organism. The hunter’s trap impedes the deer’s second actuality and thereby is bad for the deer. But this does not make the connection between “goodness as” and “goodness for” merely statistical: the connection remains conceptual, since the well-formed capacities “*just are* those capacities that fit the individual for its characteristic vital activities.” Lott proceeds to use this distinction between first and second actuality to address further objections to Foot’s account.

The final paper, by Parisa Moosavi, questions Foot’s naturalism: can it really be a form of naturalism while side-stepping evolutionary biology? On her view, the success of those taking up Foot’s project depends on acknowledging the relevance of empirical science. Moosavi starts from a reconstruction of a set of objections to Foot’s naturalism that have been raised in the literature in terms of a dilemma. The dilemma is between maintaining naturalistic credentials, offering a properly naturalistic account of moral norms as natural norms, on the one hand, and offering an account of moral norms that is plausible, that captures what we would ordinarily think of as moral goodness in a human. Two major lines of objection to natural goodness are both instance of this dilemma, Moosavi argues. One line of objection, often called the Pollyanna Problem, argues that it is naively optimistic to think that what is naturally normal for humans will coincide with what is morally good. The second line of objection argues that it is mistaken to think that what counts as good functioning will coincide with an organism’s flourishing. The proper functioning of an organism’s components consists rather in what will promote the replications of its genes, and this may well be

bad for an organism. Moosavi calls this the Selfish Gene problem. Both objections start from what they view as a scientifically respectable naturalism and draw conclusions quite different from those Foot draws. In the case of the Pollyanna Problem, it is argued that rather nasty behaviors may be natural to humans, as they are likely involved in human evolution: rape, infanticide, and xenophobia are all plausibly natural to human beings. Moosavi takes up Lott's and Hacker-Wright's responses to this line of objection, on which practical reason is characteristic of human life. Empirical science cannot inform us about the proper use of practical reason, on that view, and so we cannot derive conclusions about moral virtue from empirical science. On Moosavi's view, these arguments defend Footian naturalism from the problem of extensional adequacy, but raise the problem of naturalistic credentials. Turning to the Selfish Gene objection, Moosavi assesses Lott's response here: that there is a distinctive notion of function in the context of the characteristic life of a given species, that is not reducible to its evolutionary history. This shows that there is continuity in the notion of function employed in the neo-Aristotelian account across different life forms, but again raises questions about the naturalistic credentials of the view. Moosavi here raises the question "how can neo-Aristotelians offer a non-reductive naturalization of flourishing-based functions?" It seems that the neo-Aristotelian account can be subsumed by a mature scientific conception that is a development the Selfish Gene idea. One defense of the neo-Aristotelian idea is to argue that the neo-Aristotelian notion of the life form is operative in any judgment about a living thing, and therefore has a sort of logical priority over empirical science: the life form is presupposed in picking out the object of study in empirical science. But Moosavi questions this, arguing that the neo-Aristotelian notion of life form is not privileged in picking out living things. She concludes with some recent results in biology that question the genocentric approach of Dawkins in favor of an organocentric approach, that is, an approach to evolutionary biology focused on the organism. On Moosavi's view, this puts evolutionary biology more directly into contact with the domain of neo-Aristotelian naturalism. She thinks that neo-Aristotelian views are potentially refutable on by findings in modern biology, despite Lott's arguments to the contrary.

The works in this volume reveal, I think, a rich range of philosophical inquiry into the issues raised by Foot. They show her writings to have been the beginning of a larger project with many issues yet to be fully explored.

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The Grammar of Goodness in Foot's Ethical Naturalism

Rosalind Hursthouse

Not a lot of people know that Foot's original title for her book *Natural Goodness*, was actually "The Grammar of Goodness." With hindsight, it seems that this would have been a better title, making it clear that the book really doesn't have much to do with the natural, biological sciences but *is* about the logical grammar of moral judgements.

It also seems that not many people know why this was *bound* to be so, namely the fact that, from her earliest years as a philosopher, under the guiding hand of Anscombe, Foot was always a Wittgensteinian, through and through. Hence she was anti-foundationalist and anti-reductionist on principle, and the most unlikely philosopher in the world to think that any of the natural sciences had any bearing on the philosopher's task, let alone if that were moral philosophy. What she has always been doing is what Wittgenstein says is the work of the philosopher namely assembling reminders for a particular purpose (§127). The *general* Wittgensteinian purpose is always to "*command a clear view of our use of words*" (§122); the *particular* purpose in Foot's case has

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always been to get clearer about our use of words when we are making moral judgements. When we evaluate someone as a good person, their action as right or wrong, their character as good or bad, what are we doing, what grounds do we typically give for our judgements, what do we expect from someone who has said it, what other uses of these words are these uses in moral judgements like, what background do these uses presuppose, what is the standard role or function of their use, and so on.

Looking back much further, to her earliest philosophical work, we can also see that such an account of the nature of moral judgements was what she had been looking for right from the very beginning, but found only very late in her philosophical career.

In her preface to the first edition of *Virtues and Vices* (1978a), which collected most of what she had written in the previous twenty years, Foot described the last eight essays as representing “the development of a certain line of thought on the theory of moral judgement” and also as ones in which she was making “a painfully slow journey, ..., away from theories that located the special character of evaluations in each speaker’s attitudes or feelings, or recognition of reason for acting” (VV xvi). But, given what was in that collection that seems to be inaccurate on both counts. There was nothing *slow* about her journey away from the contemporary subjectivist theories of moral judgement that appealed to the speaker’s attitudes or feelings or motivating reasons. She was dead against them right from the word go, as is clear in the earliest of the essays reprinted—the “Moral Arguments” paper in which she discussed the use of the word “rude.” But, on the other hand, we do not find her developing her own “line of thought on the theory of moral judgement” until the two papers “Rationality and Virtue” (1994) and “Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?” (1995) which prefigure *Natural Goodness*.

By her own account (in two of the three post-*Natural Goodness* interviews I have read), her opposition to subjectivism was born of her reaction to the films of the concentration camps that came out after the war. According to Hare and other non-cognitivists, it could not be an objective moral *fact* that what the Nazis had done was wrong; the judgement that it was merely expressed the speaker’s personal attitude to what had

been done, and the Nazis' attitude was presumably different. And, Foot tells us, she thought this *had* to be bad philosophy, and that there *must* be grounds for moral judgements (*The Harvard Review*, 34–5). So she set out immediately on the task of chipping away at the bad philosophy, but it took her a long time to find what she thought should supplant it (Baggini and Stangroom 2007).

Now actually, she had the germ of the idea of what she would eventually produce *very* early on, right back in that 1958 “Moral Arguments” paper. For already there, she is defending the idea that moral judgments had to be connected to human benefit and harm *somehow*.

Why then, it might be wondered, did she not go for utilitarianism as Hare wound up doing? To my regret, I never asked her what her earliest reactions to utilitarianism were, and I have never heard anyone reporting anything she said about it. But if we remember that Anscombe's “Modern Moral Philosophy” also came out in 1958, and that, by then, Foot and Anscombe had been talking philosophy almost daily, at least on weekdays, for over ten years, we shall not be surprised that it was the relation between the *virtues* and human benefit and harm that she is already thinking of in this early article, rather than act consequentialism.

In one of the post-*Natural Goodness* interviews, she says a very interesting thing about how (it seemed to her with hindsight) she had been thinking back then. She had (following Anscombe's advice) been reading Aquinas on the individual virtues and vices and was struck by the fact “that there were always good reasons” for saying of one of them that it *was* a virtue or a vice, and with this, she says:

[T]he whole subject of moral philosophy *thickened up* in my mind. Before that, I had simply thought ‘there must be objective grounds for moral judgement,’ without being able to say much except that they would have to be connected to human welfare or something like that. But *looking in detail*, as Aquinas made me do, made me see that a virtue-vice point of view provided an excellent way to make an idea of objectivity in moral judgement *concrete*. If one only considered a proposition such as ‘this act is wrong’ it didn't lead one on to *particular* reasons or judgements in the way ‘such and such is a vice’ did. (*THR* 35–6)

Notice all the emphases on the non-general—the thickening up and looking in *detail*, making the objectivity *concrete*, the being lead on to *particular* reasons.

Here's the way she described "the progression of her thought" later in that interview: "from thinking subjectivism must be wrong to thinking that *when we look at the individual virtues and vices* we can actually begin to see an objective basis for particular moral judgements and on from there" (*THR* 36).

But, as in her preface to *Virtues and Vices*, that's not quite accurate. Again, she got from "thinking subjectivism must be wrong to thinking that when we look at the individual virtues and vices we can begin to see an objective basis for moral judgement" almost immediately. Right after she wrote the "Moral Arguments" paper, she wrote "Moral Beliefs" in 1958; there she takes a position influenced by Plato and Aristotle, arguing that, given "the facts of human existence ... any man has reason to aim at virtue and avoid vice" because the virtues are what we need, rather as everyone has reason to avoid injury because an injury, by its very nature, disables one (VV 123). And in that she is, albeit *very* briefly, sketching the Thomistic details peculiar to the individual virtues, citing *particular* facts about human existence—such as the fact that anyone of us may need to face something fearful for the sake of some good on the one hand, and the fact that anyone of us may need to resist the temptation of pleasure when there is harm involved on the other as the grounds for courage and temperance respectively being virtues (VV 123–4). That is, in *general* it's the virtues that we need, there is that general connexion with human welfare, but there are these *particular* reasons why we need courage and these other ones for why we need temperance, and they concern different facts about human existence or human life. So *there* she is in 1958.

But, as we know, she didn't just go "*on from there*" for *there* is pretty much where she wound up in *Natural Goodness* over 40 years later. As we know, rather than *going on* from there back in the 60s, she stalled almost immediately, because of the conclusion she reached when working on the relation between "Goodness and Choice" (published in 1961). There she concludes that "we may not be able to give a reply" to someone who demands a reason for choosing to be a good daughter

or good friend, these being attributive uses of “good” which, unlike for example, “good knife” and “good rider” are attached to what, she says “should be called moral terms” (VV 138). Notably, she does not go so far as to say that this suggests we may find ourselves similarly helpless when someone demands a reason for choosing to be a good—that is a virtuous person—but that is obviously the way her thought is tending, abandoning that confident “Moral Beliefs” claim that *anyone* of us has reason to aim at virtue.

And then she didn't do *anything* on her theory of moral judgement for ten years, at the end of which she devastated all her objectivist followers by coming out with “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives” whose whole point, one might say, is to assert explicitly that we can't give anyone a reason to be a virtuous person unless they have virtuous ends or desires.

Why did she arrive at this view? When we look back at “Goodness and Choice,” we can see a couple of significant things she overlooked, which, I believe, lead her astray. In this paper, she is just looking at our use of the word “good.” She begins with words such as “knife” and “pen,” “functional words,” which name things in respect of their function or “*ergon*,” in Aristotle speak, and, more or less in passing, she goes on to mention some other words, “roots” and “claws,” “lungs,” “eyes,” and so on, which also name things in respect of their function. In Aristotle's terms, we would say the same of the third batch of examples she then went on to, namely “farmer,” “rider,” “teacher,” “tailor,” though, in keeping with ordinary usage, she denies that they too are “functional” words. And she discussed a whole lot of others, including, as I just mentioned “good daughter,” father, and friend. The *general* point she wanted to make about all these words was, contrary to Hare, that a connexion with the choices of the speaker was neither necessary nor sufficient for the use of the word “good” in combination with them; since “good” was an attributive adjective, the criteria for goodness in every case was determined or at least strongly constrained by the meaning of the noun (or noun phrase as in “good Cruft's show spaniel” or, indeed “good *x* for my purposes”) that followed it.

However she was not maintaining that choice was irrelevant. She spent some time exploring the many ways in which we (and hence

speakers) *do* choose a good A (and would normally choose it, and choose it if such and such is the case), and showing how they are relevant. In the course of doing so, she encountered an anomaly, though she did not recognise it as such at the time. Indeed, if anything she hailed it as the final endorsement of her objections to Hare.

The anomaly was the goodness of features of organism such as good roots and claws. Of these she truly—and triumphantly—remarks that in these cases:

[T]he A that is called good may be one that *no one* has reason to choose. We say, in a straightforward way, that a tree has good roots meaning by this that they are well suited to the performance of their function [...]. Our interests are not involved, and only someone in the grip of a theory would insist that when we speak of a good root we commit ourselves in some way to choosing a root like that. (VV 145)

So she has spotted that the good roots and claws form a terrific set of counterexamples to the prevailing crude forms of subjectivism. The goodness of these sorts of things just has nothing to do with *us*, our interests, desires, choices, attitudes, whatever, *at all*. But then, that's just what makes these anomalous examples. In all the other cases she discusses, *we*—what *we* want or *we* use or *we* need or *we* take an interest in—are forming the necessary background to the evaluative judgements somehow.

When the roots and claws examples strike us as anomalous in this respect, we can notice something else which is peculiar to them that she also overlooked. She says “Good roots are like good eyes, good pens and many other things that are good, in being of the kind to perform their function well,” passing smoothly from the natural examples to the manufactured ones (VV 145). But just before that she says “*Because* the root plays a part in the *life* of the organism we can say ‘it has a function’, relating what it does to the *welfare* of the plant” and what she overlooked is that you can say the same sort of thing about other parts of living organisms and indeed their behaviour or “operations” as she came to use the term in *Natural Goodness*, but you can't say anything *remotely* like it about pens or knives, not even about their parts. As she will come

to recognise through Michael Thompson, the evaluations of the parts and “operations” of living things, not only, except in special contexts, have nothing to do with us, but moreover, and uniquely, they all *do* have to do with the *life*, or life-form of the organism, and to do with its *welfare*. They really are in a *sui generis* category.

But not having noticed these things, she got stuck. She was in search of an account of moral judgement—in particular, our moral evaluations of *ourselves*. I don't suppose for a moment that she set off to write “Goodness and Choice” purely with a view to doing down Hare; she did it because she expected that if she could get clearer about why he was wrong about goodness and choice, she would thereby get clearer about what the right account of moral judgements would be. So she argues that there isn't a special, isolable *moral*, or *peculiarly* evaluative use of the adjective “good”. It's always doing the same job, just sitting there in front of its noun or noun phrase, waiting for that to determine the criteria for goodness in question. But what, now, can she say about our moral evaluations of ourselves? What can she say about (as she continued to express it for many years) the judgement “X is a good man” or (as she at last got round to saying in *Natural Goodness*) “a good person”? It cannot have escaped her attention that although, in one sense, there isn't a special moral use of “good,” in another sense there is; when we attach it to the word “person,” we are usually bound to be making a moral judgment. “Person” or “man,” like “daughter” and “father” is a “moral term.”

I'm just not sure *what* she thought about “good person” at the time she was writing “Goodness and Choice”; however I am sure that she was taking it as obvious that a good person had the virtues, and that whether or not someone had the virtues was a matter of fact, and hence that whether or not someone was a good person was a matter of fact.

So, even if “good man” didn't quite fit into the “Goodness and Choice” picture, one might say, she had got “good” judgements all sorted out as objective. But now what about “ought”? There is a bit in her reply to Frankena where she makes it clear that she *was* thinking of the moral judgement “x is a good man” as belonging with good doctors, good friends, good citizens, “and the rest,” that *they* are all equally unproblematic as far as their objectivity is concerned, but that the

“true gap” between is and ought “comes within what has been called evaluation”—that is, quite generally in the case of all these judgements of the form “good F” (VV 178). It seemed clear enough—and quite unproblematic—that someone *ought* to choose a good pen, tailor, novel, whatever IF (but only if) they were selecting the whatever for the usual reasons. But if what they want is to make blots, or an ill-fitting suit, or trashy chick-lit book to read on the beach then they have no reason to choose such things; that is just what she had argued. And, as noted above, she thought that it was obviously true that not everyone had a reason to be good friend and good daughter. So it seemed that the same would have to be true of “good man.” We can establish that Hitler was a thoroughly bad person, a wicked man, that, indeed, he acted badly, but we cannot move from that to “He had reason to choose to do other than he did.”

And she knew that wasn’t what she wanted. So in effect, she stalls for ten years. She does a bit on abortion, she does “Morality and Art” (which she was so dissatisfied with that she wouldn’t have it in the original *Virtues and Vices* collection) and in 1963 she produces a paper on Hume on moral judgement. Perhaps she went back to look at him in the hope of nailing something wrong in him that would show her the way round her problem. But all she finds there is the familiar mistake about the fact/value dichotomy she is confident she has sorted out all mixed up with the is-ought gap that is the very thing that is bothering her. And then it looks as though she turns to Kant hoping to find something there. But, far from finding a solution in the categorical imperative, she becomes even more convinced that “Goodness and Choice” was right; and armed with the famous example of etiquette, she now turns the thought “has no reason to” into “can’t be convicted of irrationality if he doesn’t” and produces the swingeing “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives” (1972).

And then she stalls again. She goes back to the virtues and vices in the new paper for the collection (1978) but by then is so lost that she actually gives up the tight conceptual connexion between possession of the virtues and being a good person, allowing herself the idea that a villain may be courageous (though perhaps courage is not a virtue “in him” whatever that is supposed to mean) and that similarly that

someone might be too temperate, or too hopeful or too prudent. She doesn't consider the possibility that someone might be too charitable or too just, but, consistently with what she says, she could well have done so. And then, for the next ten years, she turns to other issues—quite a bit in applied ethics and her two deservedly famous papers on utilitarianism. But somewhere in the mid-1980s (I have a draft of hers dated March 1987), perhaps as the result of conversations with Michael Thompson, by then a graduate student of hers at UCLA, the significant points in “Goodness and Choice” she hadn't appreciated before came back to her, and she started on the *Natural Goodness* work.

I said that these points were, firstly, that the roots and claws examples were anomalous because they just didn't have anything to do with us—our desires, interests choices, attitudes, whatever, *at all*. In all her other cases she discusses, *we*—what *we* want or *we* use or *we* need or *we* take an interest in, what *our* lives are like—are forming the necessary background to the evaluative judgements somehow. The second point was that they *do* all have to do with the *life*, or life-form of the organism, and to do with its *welfare*.

And there was a third, which I have not yet mentioned. Once again truly—and triumphantly—she had taken Hare to task for implying that someone can set up his own criteria for whether or not something is a *good cactus*. She complained that “There is no reference to the fact that a cactus is a living organism, which can *therefore* be called healthy or unhealthy and a good or bad specimen of its kind” and that without this it is unclear “how the criteria could be criteria of *goodness* at all” (VV 141). Quite true—but she overlooked the fact that *nowhere* else in the article did she say *anything* about the evaluations of living things as good or bad specimens of their kind; she didn't have anything but the evaluations of their *parts*—the roots and claws.

And one might say the new dazzling thought she got from talking to Thompson was: when we evaluate ourselves we're evaluating *living things* which can *therefore* be called healthy or unhealthy or a good or bad specimen of their kind or, as she might well have added, good or excellent or *defective* specimens of their kind. And of course, to her ear, trained as it was in ancient philosophy and by Anscombe, this was not going to sound like a thought that was limited to medical evaluations.

We drop the “healthy” and “unhealthy,” and the use of “specimen” but, keeping the terminology of excellence and defect, we find, when talking about ourselves in this way, that we are back with talk about the virtues and vices.

So, back to the Wittgensteinian technique of “assembling reminders” or examples, for the purpose of understanding our moral judgements. She now sees that “Goodness and Choice” told us damn all about “the grammar of goodness” in living things, and that what we need are lots of examples of judgements of that sort, rather than all the others. And she found these in Thompson’s “The Representation of Life” (1995). I don’t want to spend much time talking about Thompson rather than Foot, but, on the other hand, I don’t want to leave what follows unintelligible to those of you who haven’t read him, so I’ll try to say just enough to keep the discussion of foot afloat.

According to Thompson, there are many judgements which are (a) indisputably part of *some* (n.b.) of the biological sciences and (b) are normative. These are, typically, what Thompson called “Aristotelian Categoricals” which take the form “The S is (or has or does) F,” or “Ss are (or have or do) F”; doesn’t matter which (2008, 65). These say, of a species or “life-form” of living thing, the S, that “it” has certain characteristics or features (is four legged, has a long curved beak, has a tap root) or that it “operates” or behaves in a certain way (sees in the dark, hunts in packs, self-pollinates, curls up its leaves when it’s short of water). The class of Aristotelian Categoricals also contains slightly more specific judgements such as “The female S (or “the mature female S”) has/does F,” “The larval stage of the S, the immature S, the young S has/does F”, and these also count as being about “the S.” And it also, importantly, contains more complicated judgements of the form “The S has/does F in order to ...” A set of Aristotelian Categoricals about the S itemises the Fs that, in the life of the S, have the function of achieving what is needed for development, self-maintenance, and reproduction, and thereby, of what an individual S needs in order for its life, the S life, to go well. Hence they are not merely statistical. They supply a standard—a “natural norm” in Foot’s terminology—for evaluating individual Ss. If it is true that “The S is F,” then an individual S which is not F is defective in that respect—not “as it should be” or “as it is supposed

to be.” But if it *is* F then it is, in that respect at least, a good F—it has, again in Foot’s terminology, “natural goodness.” Hence they supply the norms we use to evaluate individual Ss as strong or weak, healthy or diseased, good or defective, Ss, or specimens of the kind S.

Critics often say that the use of the Aristotelian Categoricals relies on a notion of function and/or species—which *is* indeed Aristotelian and has thus been refuted by post-Darwinian biology. But Thompson, and following him Foot explicitly disavow any intention to use the terms “function” or “species” in the technical senses of evolutionary biology. In fact I think it is a pity that Thompson didn’t stick with “life-form” or “kind of living thing,” because everything he, and Foot, want to say, can be expressed in those obviously non-Darwinian terms. The claim is only that this strange, but immensely useful, form of judgement is alive and well in *some* of the biological sciences, whose researchers, we may presume, are proceeding in full knowledge of the post-Aristotelian insights of evolutionary theory. These biologists know that the concept of species is theoretically problematic; they know that the feature they identify as serving a certain function in the current life of the Ss they are interested in may be a spandrel, but, concentrating on, say, the threatened indigenous New Zealand kokako, and the failure of two of the males to feed their mates while she is incubating, they put this knowledge to one side as not affecting their research, for which the everyday concepts serve their purposes.

In making this claim about some judgements in some of the many biological sciences, Foot’s ethical naturalism becomes involved in a current debate in philosophy of biology, basically the debate about whether the concept of function and, relatedly, teleological explanation, have a place in the post-Darwinian biological sciences, and, if so, whether or not they can be “naturalized,” that is, made value-free. So that is a major issue that seems to arise. But, as I shall say below, this really is a red herring. Unlike “biological ethical naturalists,” as we may call them, such as Casebeer (2003) and Arnhart, Foot’s ethical naturalism is not aiming to provide ethics with an explanatory biological foundation, so she does not need to deny that some analysis of the Aristotelian Categoricals about plants and the other animals might show that they can be interpreted in such a way as to be value-free in some sense. All they need is

that they obviously can be interpreted as both evaluative or normative and fact-stating, and that, when they are, their truth has nothing to do with our desires or pro-attitudes.

So, supposing that the Aristotelian Categoricals are normative, and leaving it open whether they might in some way be naturalised, what follows? Well, it certainly does not *follow* that our moral evaluations of ourselves share, in Foot's words, "a conceptual structure with evaluations ... of other living things" but *that* they do is her distinctive ethical naturalists' claim—her new dazzling thought (NG 1).

On the face of it, especially when we remember that the claim includes our evaluations of plants, it seems this cannot be right. Only human beings have virtues and vices (good/excellent or bad/defective character traits), only human beings act "for reasons" in the sense relevant to moral evaluations, and plants do not act at all.

But note, the claim is about an abstract "conceptual structure," not about details of similarity between moral evaluations and evaluations of other living things. With respect to the latter, we evaluate their characteristics or properties, their behaviour or operations (even plants "do," and fail to do, things—they set seed, curl up their leaves to conserve moisture); when we evaluate ourselves, the relevant characteristics include our character traits and the relevant behaviour pre-eminently includes our acting for reasons.

On Thompson's picture, we have a cluster of concepts, combined with a special way of talking, that apply to all, but *only* living things, and our talk of good—and defective—roots and claws is to be located in this "way of talking," which has, she says, a "special 'grammar'" (NG 26).

On Thompson's picture, we make factual judgements about how particular kinds of living things, say owls, get on in their lives, such as "Owls see in the dark and hunt at night." These tell us what owls need in order to live well as owls. The peculiarity of such judgements is that, combined with the judgement that a particular owl can or cannot see in the dark, or does or doesn't hunt at night, they yield an evaluation of that owl. If it can and does then, in those respects, it is a good specimen of its kind, a good owl; if it cannot or does not, it is, in those respects, a defective one. And Foot's thought is that our moral judgements have the same "conceptual structure" (NG 5). There are true judgements to

be made about what human beings need in order to live well as human beings, and in these we will find the objective grounds for maintaining that, for example, justice and kindness are virtues, or forms of “natural goodness.” A just human is, in that respect, a good human being—or person as, colloquially, we say when making moral judgements.

This gives her the new version of her original position on the fact/value dichotomy with respect to good, that is, virtuous human being. Those “facts about human existence”—different facts and details for the different virtues—which figured in “Moral Beliefs” as the grounds for saying that everyone had a self-interested reason for aiming at virtue—are now fitted into this very general structure, with no insistence on self-interest or the “profitability” of justice.

But what of the is-ought gap? Her new approach to this involves, firstly, abandoning the idea that reasons for action must be related to the agent's interests or desires. To this extent, she agrees with Kant and accepts “externalism” about reasons. But, for Foot, there are no such things as the principles of *pure* practical reason; practical reason, as we know it, is not a feature of rational beings or rational agents as such, but simply a feature of us—terrestrial hominids.

But of *course*, we are a special sort of living thing. She is not denying the significance of the fact that most of us are persons, that is, that we are moral agents, and have a special sort of rationality. That would be odd, would it not, given that Foot's naturalism is Aristotelian and Aristotle is hardly an exemplar of a philosopher who downplays the point that our rationality distinguishes us from the other animals. That significant fact is present—it is us we are talking about after all—but in a relative-to-the-kind-of-living-thing-that-we-are way. Acquiring the rationality that makes *us* moral agents or persons fairly early in our development, and, if we are lucky, keeping it until we die, just is normal, healthy *human* development. But it is a stage in *human* development. The rationality and “personhood” in question are human rationality and human personhood; the two concepts apply only to human beings, and thereby only to beings with certain biological and consequent psychological properties, each of whom is, moreover, culturally and historically situated. We are not a whole different order of beings just because we spend most of our human lives being persons,

and there is no reason to suppose, in advance of our encountering some promising candidates, that the concepts could also be applied, by family resemblance, to aliens or divine beings.

This *human* practical rationality is conceptually inseparable from the *human* virtues, since anyone with a virtue is necessarily someone for whom certain considerations are reasons for action. And thereby she gets the version of “the rationality of morality” that she wants. To establish, within the Thompson structure, that a certain character trait is a virtue, is also to establish that a human being who does not recognise certain considerations as reasons for acting is thereby defective in practical rationality. As she recognises, common usage doesn’t really allow describing the actions of the Great Train Robbers as “irrational” (NG 14)—which was what bothered her so much in “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives,” but she can now express the point she wanted in terms of defect, and she is happy to say that what they did was “contrary to reason,” or that in saying truly that what they did was dishonest and callous we *would* be giving them reason to do other than they did, regardless of whether they recognise it.

So I think she achieved what she had always been aiming at—a theory of moral judgement. Throughout the book, she emphasises the fact that she is outlining a “conceptual structure” and I now want to turn to saying some more about what *goes into* that conceptual structure when our topic is the moral evaluation of ourselves. Given that we are talking about the goodness of this special sort of living thing, rational agents, we fit into the Thompsonian structure in a special way; it undergoes, as she wonderfully puts it, a “sea change” (NG 52)—a remark that few of her critics have noted. Perhaps not many people know where the expression “sea change” comes from. Foot knew all right, and I have no doubt that she used the term advisedly. It comes from Shakespeare’s *Tempest*:

Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange. (*Tempest* 1.2.560–5)

Now, as we learn from the extraordinary nature programmes now available, the Aristotelian Categoricals that describe how many of the other animals live are breathtakingly wondrous, but wondrous, strange, and in the case of the higher animals rich as they may be, ours, so Foot assumes, is *incomparably* so, for we, unlike any of the others *are* rational agents. So it is a bad mistake, I think, to suppose that the Aristotelian Categoricals that figure in the conceptual structure when we are morally evaluating ourselves are all supposed to be, like the biological ones which Thompson discusses, the sort of natural facts with which the natural sciences deal. That's why I said above that debates about whether the biological ones can or cannot be made "value free" is just a red herring.

Many of Foot's critics take McDowell's (1995) "Two Sorts of Naturalism," to deal a fatal blow to Foot's naturalism. In this, you may remember, he invokes the rational wolf, who stands back from his fellow wolves joining in the hunt and says to himself "Yes, indeed, wolves hunt in packs, they cooperate, they need to pool their energies if their style of hunting is to be effective, but why should I—what reason do I have?—to pull my weight?" But in my view, far from intending to undermine the sort of naturalism he knew, at the time of writing the paper, she was developing, (this was in the late 1980s, before she had published anything on it, but she has been doing versions of it in lectures in the US and he, like Gary Watson, has heard them) nothing could be further from the truth; his paper is intended to *pave the way to it*. I mean look at the title!—*Two Sorts of Naturalism*. In the very opening paragraph, he makes it clear that his topic is ethical naturalism, and that he is going to argue that there are two sorts, one of which is "the radical and satisfying alternative to subjectivism and supernaturalist rationalism" in ethics, and the other of which is, to put it mildly, a "less satisfying variety" (McDowell 149) Well, in a paper for Foot's *festschrift*, offered, as he explicitly says, as "an appropriate token of friendship and *admiration*," why on earth would he be supposing that it is the *less* satisfying variety of ethical naturalism that she is espousing! Of *course* he thinks she is shaping up to producing the *other* sort—"the radical and satisfying alternative to subjectivism and supernaturalist rationalism" in ethics.

But alas, the paper by and large, didn't work because so many of Foot's, and McDowell's, readers are so gripped by the picture of nature, or reality, that he rejects. That is the "natural-scientific" conception of nature, the view that anything that can rightly be called a "natural fact" *must* be the sort of fact that the natural sciences discover—the sort that (in theory) everyone can recognise from the neutral point of view. No. The structure remains the same; the sea change occurs in what goes into it.

By way of illustration, I want to look at "survival and reproduction" as they figure in the Aristotelian Categoricals that are pertinent to moral judgement, i.e., the ones that pertain to us as human rational agents.

Foot says that the "natural goodness and defectiveness" of the features (e.g., eyes) and operations (e.g., hunting at night) of all the other living things is conceptually determined by the relation, for that sort of thing, of that feature or operation, to survival and reproduction. Actually, she hardly ever talks about *survival* and reproduction (in fact I think only twice, on pages 42 and 43 in *Natural Goodness*); instead she talks about development and self-maintenance and reproduction.

Now the obviously Darwinian ring of that phrase is undoubtedly one of the things—like her use of "species"—that mislead people into expecting something much more "scientific" to go into our Aristotelian Categoricals than she is offering; they forget about the sea change.

This brings with it two distinct upshots. One is that she claims that there is an *enormous* amount more to "the human good," that is, the life that is the human's good to live, than there is in the life that is any other animal's good to live. For all of them, their life just *is* the life of survival and reproduction; our sort of life contains many goods which have nothing to do with either, and the human good is "deep happiness." That's one sea change, and a big topic on its own in Foot that I can't go into here.

But the other, which I do want to look at, is that what goes into survival and reproduction *themselves*, in *our* lives as rational agents, also undergoes a sea change.

Whatever the life that is the human's good to live may be, individual survival is bound to be significant, since one has to survive to live. And the first way the significance of individual survival fits in when we are thinking of ourselves as human rational agents is in terms of the sorts of

considerations we need to recognise as reasons for action. "That might well kill me" is a consideration that *we need* to recognise as a reason for action, and as a reason of a certain weight, frequently compelling, in order to live well/live the good human life, because we need to recognise it in order to live at all (NG 12). But note that nothing immediately follows from this about action or, in the term she uses for the animals "operations." It is about the recognition of reasons and it is among the grounds *not* for saying that we are defective if we don't kill aggressors, but for saying that we are defective without *prudence*. The virtue of prudence involves recognising (amongst other things) exactly that—"It may well kill me" as a frequently—but certainly not always compelling, reason for action; so we need prudence (NG 24). Hence also the need for courage *as opposed to* recklessness which involves the same recognition. Moreover, hence the need for courage *as opposed to* timidity or cowardice which also involves it; if fear prevents me from seeing clearly that it is running away rather than standing still, or *not* going to the doctor with the lump I have discovered rather than going that might well kill me then I am not well equipped for survival.

And also perhaps the need for temperance? Perhaps only in the modern days of AIDS and really dangerous drugs do we need to recognise "that may well kill me" as a compellingly good reason for not choosing *that* way to get pleasure, but "that may well shorten my life or undermine my physical health so I die before my time" must have been pertinent for a good way back.

So even keeping "survival" at the rock bottom—merely "biological"—level, it hasn't departed from the scene; it's still in the conceptual structure.

And there is much more to be said. As she notes "the good of survival itself is something more complex for human beings than for animals" and mentions memory (NG 42–3). She might also have mentioned the retention of the other multiple capacities that go into our being rational agents, and "the *same* rational agent" (or "same person" as we would say if we *weren't* talking philosophy). It is so reasonable to fear Alzheimer's if one of the things it can do to you is make you mistrust and hate the very people you used to love—which I gather it does—and undo your painstakingly acquired virtue of "mildness" so that you

become aggressive and irritable. As everyone around you will say, alas, she is not the person she was, for all that her memory isn't so bad. If there were a drug that brought an Alzheimer's sort of condition on while prolonging biological survival, then one would be ill fitted for *survival as the same rational agent* if one didn't recognise "That will be death to *me*" as an almost certainly compelling reason for refusing it.

Note that qualification of "almost certainly compelling." The very reason why we don't get anything straightforward about action when we are talking about *our* "strategies" (if someone wants to insist on the term) for individual survival, is that they are the strategies of rational agents and hence involve reason recognition. But, in particular circumstances which call for action, reasons compete with other reasons. Not only "That may well kill me" but also "That will *certainly* kill me" or "will be the death of me" is a consideration that, in certain circumstances, may well not be a compelling reason, that is, decisive, but give way to others, such as "That is the only way to save or preserve my fellows."

Foot notes the important point that, while we are still using the plant and animal Aristotelian Categoricals, what goes into the Ss features and operations regarding "reproduction" does not *merely* cover the bringing into existence of more Ss. As we understand better after Darwin, though I bet it's in Aristotle too, "reproduction" covers bringing into existence Ss that will *have* a life, not just *begin* one, that is, at the very least, have enough of a life to reproduce in turn. So most non-defective plants produce thousands of seeds and the mayfly lays thousands of eggs (as I remember) in order that there will be some that survive to have a life. If an individual one only produces a few, it's defective; that's a failure in their reproductive operation regardless of whether the few they produce all miraculously survive. And as we move up the ladder of nature to the more complex living things, "reproduction" comes to cover yet more, in particular, as she rightly notes "defence" and "rearing" (NG 33). For many Ss, part of the Ss reproductive strategy is defending the few offspring produced, in order that they survive to have a life.

Now "rearing," when we think about it, covers quite a variety of things. For a start, in (I think) all birds, and certainly in all mammals, it

covers *feeding* the young (or making arrangements for feeding as in the case of the cuckoo) and moreover feeding them the right food, without which they won't *develop* as they should. Now as I noted above, rather than talking about survival, Foot mostly talks about development and self-maintenance, but as soon as we get to the stage where a failure to develop the S way can be attributed to a defect in the "operations" of the parent rather than a defect in the offspring, we can see that "development" *also* comes under "reproduction" with respect to the "rearing" of young. If a baby elephant doesn't suckle, and hence doesn't develop, despite being offered the opportunity, it is defective; it lacks a feature it needs to survive. But if the mother elephant won't let it, and it hence fails to develop, the defect lies with her; elephants reproduce by suckling their young until the young are able to feed themselves, and she lacks a feature she needs to "reproduce."

Now under "rearing" in the biological Aristotelian Categoricals, Foot also includes, where relevant, teaching, and I want to add a bit to what she says that I think she missed. Her favourite example of teaching as part of the rearing of the young, is the lioness teaching her cubs to hunt, but this is, I think, a misleading example in two ways. One is that it is so blindingly obviously related to teaching the cubs what they need to learn simply in order to survive—to maintain themselves. In that respect, it's just like the suckling. But that it has this terribly obvious feature makes it easy to overlook a more pertinently detailed description, namely that she is teaching them the *lion's* way of hunting (which, according to Midgley, is quite different from the tiger's way of hunting; 106) that is, she is teaching them, in this respect, *how to live the lion life*.

The second reason the example can be misleading is that, the big cats being pretty sophisticated animals, what the lioness does really *can* be called teaching. There is a pattern of action—her taking them somewhere suitable, her not hunting down the prey herself but hanging back while they chase it around, her heading it off back towards them when they have lost it,—which we can see as intentional. But although there are many cases in which the animal Ss' ways of rearing their young—that is, providing the wherewithal for their proper development, involves what we might call *teaching* there are others which might better be described as "providing opportunities for learning."

When ducks hang out with their ducklings, and hens hang out with their chicks, we don't see any pattern like that in the lioness's behaviour that we could call teaching. Nevertheless, the ducklings and chicks learn *from* the adults around them just going on in their ordinary way, how to live the duck or chicken life. I don't know whether there is any case in which this applies to *hunting*, but I think it certainly applies to some cases of *foraging* for food. And Midgley says that "a solitary duck reared among chickens" will never get the clues it needs to perform many of its central behaviour patterns. And, she says "It is therefore a deprived duck" unable to live the *duck* life (106). And of course it can't live the hen life either, because it wants to swim and mess about in the water with other ducks.

So I would say that what goes into being reared, and hence "reproduction," for a whole lot of birds and animals, is learning, from the ones that are doing the rearing, *how to live the S life*, the life that it is *that* sort of bird or animal's good to live. I think there must be a lot of biological ACs which are roughly of the form "The young Ss learn from the adults around them to avoid such and such and go for so and so and do this not that" though I don't know of any.

So bearing all that in mind what happens when we look at "reproduction" after the sea change and come to consider the ACs that pertain to us as rational agents? Well, *now* what goes into "the rearing of the young," i.e., providing for their appropriate development, is providing for their development *into human rational agents*.

And I might say, given the way *we* live, that the catch phrase "it takes a village to rear a child" is basically true. Given the way *we* live, children's acquisition of reason recognition is far from being solely in the hands of their parents; what they come to recognise as reasons for action, for well or ill has all sorts of inputs. So—I suspect that as part of filling the conceptual structure in with the ACs that are relevant to our moral evaluations of ourselves, we would need lots of ACs about children's development. As what I take to be a very obvious candidate, consider "Human children need attentive love and security," and note that whether it is to be classified as a "natural fact" under the natural-scientific conception is at best unclear.

I take it to be obvious that there is a lot of work to be done in finding the relevant descriptions of how human life goes—the Aristotelian Categoricals that are to parallel “Owls see in the dark and hunt at night.” And I think it is perfectly clear from what she says that they may include many that are not biological at all, but such things, perhaps, as “Humans can derive an enormous satisfaction from what they think of as a good job well done” and “Humans do not need lots of material possessions to be happy” and “The human being risks life and limb, even lays down her own life, for the sake of something she sees as good” and “Human beings can acquire a second nature which enables them to enjoy virtuous activity,” and “Human beings form life-long loving relationships” and “human beings pursue theoretical knowledge for its own sake” and.... well, “that sort of thing.”

I also think that doing this work is going to be a most rewarding and enlightening task.

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How to Be an Ethical Naturalist

Jennifer A. Frey

It is my opinion that the *Summa Theologica* is one of the best sources we have for moral philosophy, and moreover that St. Thomas's ethical writings are as useful to the atheist as to the Catholic or other Christian believer. —Philippa Foot¹

Moral judgment is, for us at least, an inescapable practice. We call certain actions, attitudes, and dispositions good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust, and it is impossible to imagine getting on in life without continuing in this way. Moral philosophers are typically charged with the task of giving an account of the judgments that constitute this practice, and thus of our entitlement to use words like “good” and “ought” in these contexts. What normative standard licenses these judgments, and how are we to think about that standard? Is the standard objective,

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such that we might come to possess knowledge of it, or is it subjective and dependent upon contingent, non-cognitive attitudes?

Neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists attempt to answer these questions by utilizing the concept of natural goodness and defect. To put the evaluative scheme of natural goodness in the simplest possible terms, we can say that an action, disposition, thought, or feeling is naturally good insofar as it exemplifies the life that is characteristic of the species, and bad insofar as it fails to do this. Just as strong, deep roots are naturally good for the oak tree, since they are necessary to carry out the activities that constitute oak life, so too virtues like justice and prudence are naturally good for human beings, since they are necessary to carry out the activities that constitute human life. The promise of ethical naturalism is that it will show that the virtuous life is objectively valuable, that our moral judgments are grounded in natural facts about what is objectively good for human beings, and that when we get onto these facts in the correct way, we can be said to possess moral knowledge.

The ethical naturalist asks us to take seriously the idea that practical normativity—norms that license our talk about what it is good for us to be, do, and have in general—are to be understood in terms of the general grammar of natural normativity.² Or to put it another way, that moral goodness and badness is a kind of natural goodness and defect in a species of living thing.

Philosophers have, by and large, balked at this suggestion, and for disparate reasons. For the purposes of this essay, I want to focus on one particular line of resistance. The objector I have in mind does not want to deny the ethical naturalist her theory of natural normativity in general, nor does she want to deny that there are natural norms that pertain to specifically human life. Rather, she denies that the standards that govern the operation of a power of practical reason can be specified in terms of the characteristic ends and activities of just one species of rational animal. Though it is of course quite natural for human beings

²Foot puts it this way: "Moral judgment of human actions and dispositions is one example of a genre of evaluation itself actually characterized by the fact that its objects are living things" (NG 4).

as rational animals to act for reasons, the objector contends that the account of whether one reasons well or badly has nothing *essentially* to do with any substantive facts about the material form of life we happen to bear. We typically think of rational norms as formal canons that are universally binding on all beings with a power of reason. If this standard account of the norms of right reason is correct, then nothing about the vicissitudes of one form of material, animal life over another could possibly make a difference either to the constitution or force of such norms.

Besides looking to Kant as a source for this view, we might also look to Aristotle.³ After all, in his ethical treatises Aristotle is not at all concerned with different species of living things; instead, he focuses on different levels or kinds of life—vegetable, animal, and rational. And the upshot of his famous “function” argument is that the standard of good human life and action just is “activity of the soul in accordance with reason” (NE I.7.1098a8–18). Now, if living well as a human being just is to live in accordance with the norms that govern a power of reason, then it looks like the search for the norms of good or bad human action is just the search for rational norms, which govern all finite rational agents equally.

We can put this line of resistance into the form of an argument:

1. All norms (or principles) of reason are species transcendent—they govern all beings with a power of reason.
2. Natural norms (or principles) are not species transcendent.
3. So, natural norms (or principles) are not norms of practical reason.
4. A rational will is good if and only if its acts conform to the norms (or principles) of practical reason.
5. So, natural norms (or principles) are irrelevant to our evaluations of the goodness or badness of acts of will.

In short, the objection questions the relevance of the concept “human being” for a properly philosophical theory of practical reason, because it looks like a placeholder for something more interesting

³This is Korsgaard’s reading of the function argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. See Korsgaard (2008, 151–173).

and important—"rational agency," or "rational form of life." After all, whatever is naturally normative for a human being is still subject to the critical tribunal of reason. It may be that a rational creature has good reason to question, ignore, or overcome the demands of *mere* nature.⁴

The irrelevancy objection is a more sophisticated presentation of the so-called "naturalistic fallacy." But rather than crudely rejecting any move from "is" to "ought," it merely blocks the inference at one crucial juncture—the inference from the "is" of the species, to the "ought" that governs the rational will. Given the presumptive authority of the objector's conception of rational norms, the burden is on the ethical naturalist to show that premise (1) is false.⁵ However, I will not attempt to disprove premise (1) here. Instead of arguing against the prevailing account of practical reason, I want to give a sketch of an account of the denial of premise (1) that is theoretically plausible. One of the main problems with ethical naturalism as it has been articulated thus far is that it has failed to provide a convincing theory of practical reason that is guided by natural norms. That is, it has failed to show how it is so much as possible for practical normativity to be grasped in terms of the grammar of natural normativity. To do that successfully, I argue, would be to show that moral knowledge is a kind of *practical* knowledge of the human life form—knowledge that is operative in practical thought, deliberation, and choice. We need such an account if we are to pursue the possibility of being ethical naturalists.

The structure of this essay is as follows. In the first section, I consider whether the two most prominent accounts of ethical naturalism on offer contain within them the resources to address the irrelevancy objection, and conclude that they do not. In the second section, I argue that this failure exposes a second, and potentially more difficult version of the original objection. In the third section, I articulate a dilemma for

⁴This is the position articulated by McDowell (1995) in "Two Sorts of Naturalism."

⁵I argue directly for the falsity of premise (1) in another paper. See Frey (unpublished manuscript).

the ethical naturalist, and argue that any future attempt to rehabilitate the view must show how to resolve this dilemma. In the fourth section, I argue that we can find a resolution in the account of practical reason and will be articulated by Thomas Aquinas. I claim that Aquinas's theory shows us how we can reconcile what on that face of it appear to be two opposing teleological forms—that of life and self-movement, on the one hand, and that of rational choice and principles, on the other. Finally, I conclude that the most promising way forward for ethical naturalism is to further articulate and defend something structurally similar to Aquinas's account.

1 Ethical Naturalism

In order to answer the irrelevancy objection, we need an account that shows how practically rational norms can fit within the grammar of natural normativity, and thus how moral goodness can be shown to be a kind of natural goodness. In this section, I will argue that ethical naturalists have failed to show how this is possible. I will not reach this conclusion by exhaustively canvassing the literature, but rather by focusing on the accounts of the two most prominent and influential theorists, Rosalind Hursthouse and Philippa Foot.

1.1 Hursthouse's Naturalism

Rosalind Hursthouse argues that virtues like charity, justice, and temperance are morally good character traits because they are necessary for the attainment of the four ends that define the life of a general, goodness fixing kind under which our own form of life can be subsumed: the “sophisticated social animal.” Thus, she argues that ethical evaluations of ourselves as rational social animals will look like our evaluation of the lives of other sophisticated social animals we discover in ethological field reports (Hursthouse 2004, 268). According to her account of the ends that govern this general category of animal life:

A good sophisticated social animal is one that is well fitted or endowed with respect to its (i) parts (ii) operations (iii) actions and (iv) desires and emotions. Whether it is thus well fitted or endowed is determined by whether these four aspects well serve (1) its individual survival through its natural life span, (2) the continuance of the species, (3) its characteristic freedom from pain and its characteristic enjoyments, and (4) the good functioning of its social group—in the ways characteristic of the species. (Hursthouse 2004, 268)

On her view, a character trait is good just in case it can be shown to serve the four ends appropriate to the flourishing of higher social animals in general. It follows that we can *justify* our moral belief in the goodness of the traditional virtues by looking to this naturalistic scheme in order to determine that they promote these four common ends.⁶

And that's exactly what Hursthouse sets out to do. Charity, on her account, turns out to be vindicated as a virtue because it helps human beings “live longer, avoid some suffering, [and] enjoy more” (Hursthouse 2004, 269). Justice is also a virtue on this evaluative scheme because it “enable[s] us to function as a social, co-operating group” (Hursthouse 2004, 270). Impersonal benevolence turns out not to be a virtue, not only because there is no evidence that it functions to promote any of these four ends, but there is some to suggest that it may prevent us from realizing them.

Unlike other sophisticated social animals, however, we act for reasons, and so we go about achieving these ends in a characteristically rational way. Our rationality makes for a “huge gap” between us and other animals, and effects a “sea change” in how we evaluate our lives as opposed to theirs. For other animals “cannot contemplate alternatives and decide to change things, or choose to try a new way as we can; they are biologically determined, we are not” (Hursthouse 1999, 169). But for all that, we do have a “characteristic way of going on” and that is “a

⁶Hursthouse believes that this investigation will proceed from within our well-formed ethical outlook. By this she seems to mean nothing more than that we can only call particular virtues into question one at a time, rather than throw out the whole lot in order to build them up from scratch from a morally neutral perspective.

rational way.” We act for reasons, or what we see as truly good, and so our characteristic enjoyments are grounded in our judgments of what we have reason to do. Finally, what we have reason to do is ultimately based on an account of how the action serves the four ends of the lives of sophisticated social animals.

One benefit of Hursthouse’s view is that it makes especially clear what the natural standards of moral judgment are. Our practical reasoning (and thereby our will, emotions, and action) is excellent when it functions to attain the four natural ends she identifies, and it is defective when it does not do this. The ends of right practical reasoning are “natural” in some reasonably familiar sense.

Nevertheless, it seems that whatever benefits can be gained from the clarity and objectivity of such an account do not outweigh its substantial costs. I will argue these costs are threefold: (1) it gives an account of human nature that is ultimately reductive, empirical, and theoretical rather than practical; (2) its account of nature is at the wrong level of generality to provide natural norms; and (3) it fails to provide an account of the intrinsic value of virtuous action.

First, consider how Hursthouse arrives at her list of ends—by generalizing from our observational knowledge of all known species of social animals. Her idea is that we know what the general ends that constitute human life are by extending our observational knowledge of social animals to see that things are basically the same for us. This means that, at the bottom, fully justified ethical knowledge is a species of observational, ethological knowledge, since the justification of our moral beliefs ultimately rests on an ethologically informed grammar of social animality. This is already a strange result, one that Hursthouse herself is ambivalent about accepting.

Second, there is a concern about the account of “nature” underwriting this particular brand of naturalism. The standards of practical rationality that Hursthouse identifies are not species-specific standards, because the ends that govern right practical reasoning are not human ends or goods but those shared in common by all sophisticated social animals. This is already a departure from the theory of natural normativity as it

was originally presented, and it is difficult to square with its basic principles.⁷ But the more pressing concern from our perspective is that once we have made this generalizing move, why should we not think that the relevant generality lies somewhere higher up the *scala naturae*? Certainly “sophisticated social animal” is not a category that Aristotle himself bothers with in his ethics, and Hursthouse gives us no reason to favor it over “rational animal” or “rational life.” At any rate, most moral theorists will reject the idea that we can secure our moral knowledge by investigating what is going on with wolves, beavers, or dolphins—and rightfully so. Adding on that fact that we achieve the same ends in “a rational way,” and that we know our ends from “inside our own ethical outlook” will do little to nothing to assuage these concerns.

There is another reason to resist the generalizing move to “sophisticated social animal,” which brings us to the third and final complaint. The promise of ethical naturalism is supposed to be that it can make sense of moral judgment in objective terms. But moral judgments are typically thought to address the question of intrinsic value—activities and actions whose goodness does not consist in the fact that they are instrumental to some other good, but whose value is contained “in itself.” Hursthouse’s picture is not like this. From a practical point of view, she argues that virtue is seen as intrinsically choiceworthy. But from a theoretical point of view, the point of view that justifies virtue as objectively good, its value is instrumental.

We can bring this third worry into sharper relief if we consider that Hursthouse’s stated goal in providing this theory is to provide “a rational justification for one’s ethical beliefs” (Hursthouse 2004, 275). But her justificatory scheme yields that the wrong kind of reason for believing an action is right or wrong—one that is alienated from the practical point of view.

To see the problem, let us consider a basic human activity or good, such as leisurely play. Human beings engage in this kind of play from

⁷The original suggestion comes from Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy” (1958), and was later developed by Geach, *The Virtues* (1977). The semantics of “good” utilized by the theory was first developed by Geach, “Good and Evil” (1956), and seems to suggest that the relevant goodness fixing kind would not be “social animal” but “human being.”

infancy on.⁸ By play, I do not mean highly competitive sports or the highly structured events when these take place, but just the way we often are in our leisure time, when we are not actively fixed on some kind of work to be done or task to be achieved. We are in these moments content merely to have fun and be creative, for no particular reason or with no particular purpose in mind. Play is just one of a whole range of activities that lose something of their joy and goodness when they are done for the sake of something else; other examples of such activities are singing, making music, dancing, conversation, and telling and hearing stories.

We know that play is very important for proper intellectual, social, moral, and even physical development in children, as well as for the overall health of adults.⁹ Scores of empirically based psychological studies point to this fact. However, it would destroy play if these were our reasons for playing. If you told a child that you wanted her to play in order to increase her social and imaginative cognitive capacities, you would no longer be asking that child to play; because if done for the sake of those further ends, the child would not be playing at all, but rather working to become smarter, more empathetic, insightful, adaptable, and so forth (How dreadful!). In providing this “rational justification” for belief in the value of play—either for oneself or for one’s

⁸Children, having a great deal of leisure time, are often engaged in play of this sort. In fact, this sort of play is as natural to children as seeking nourishment and protection from their parents. A child who does not know how or naturally seek to engage in imaginative play for no purpose (such as a child with an autism spectrum disorder), is a child who will need therapeutic intervention. This is not a mere difference, for play is essential to the child’s ability to interact socially, to develop language, to read and write, and so on. Such a child will have to be taught what other children naturally do, and such instruction cannot merely be given by the parent, but comes in the form of theory-driven techniques aimed at incremental results.

⁹For evidence that play is essential to relating to others, see (Jenkins and Astington 2000; Leslie 1987; Singer and Singer 1990, 2005). For evidence that play allows the expression of feelings, the modulation of affect, and the ability to integrate emotion with cognition, see (Jent et al. 2011; Russ and Astrida 2001; Slade and Wolf 1999). Finally, the research reviewed by Berk et al. (2006) and Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2009) suggest that pretend games are forerunners of the capacity for self-regulation, including reduced aggression, delay of gratification, civility, and empathy. For a succinct review of the relevant research, see Kaufmann, “The Need for Pretend Play in Child Development,” in *Psychology Today*, available online at www.psychologytoday.com/blog/beautiful-minds/201203/the-need-pretend-play-in-child-development.

children—play has effectively been denatured and destroyed. The only reason to play is because it is good—its meaning and value are inherent to the known experience of the activity itself, from inside the perspective of the acting person engaged in the activity. If play is an activity that exemplifies good human life—a kind of basic human good—then there can be no further ground of its goodness, and thus of its choice-worthiness, other than appeal to some aspect of its goodness as play, for instance, the fact that it is fun or joyful and makes one feel alive and free.

I would like to suggest that Hursthouse, by suggesting that the justification of virtue is provided by its instrumental role in serving the ends of the life of a good social animal, is doing the same thing to virtuous activity that an overbearing parent might do to the play of the child in the nursery—destroying what is good in itself by trying to make it for the sake of some good external to it. By trying to show that virtuous activity is good because it helps us to attain the ends common to all sophisticated social animals, Hursthouse provides the wrong kind of reason to be virtuous, and therefore the wrong kind of reason to have the belief that virtue is valuable for human beings.¹⁰

The problem is not simply that such reasons are inoperative in us (though surely they are), but also that such reasons ought not to be operative in us. Hursthouse is wrong, it seems to me, when she argues that her naturalism ought to yield “motivating reasons” in children who are learning to acquire but do not yet possess virtue, as well as in those who already have some semblance of virtue, but who might need extra justification in difficult situations. She writes:

¹⁰Hursthouse is not unaware of the tension between the reasons of virtue and the reasons of moral theory, and she repeatedly insists that the reasons to do these things from a practical point of view are the reasons that the person with the relevant character trait does them, rather than naturalistic reasons. But she also qualifies this by saying that when we raise children, or want to reform bad characters, or when we do moral philosophy, we can provide this sort of justification for our moral beliefs. The trouble is that it is completely unclear how the two accounts are supposed to hang together, because it is unclear why when we are concerned with the truth of these activities (i.e., that they are really good human activities) we should give an account that looks *radically incompatible* with what we would say from a practical point of view, where we attend to something that is not supposed to stand in need of *any such account*.

I think that there are, indeed, contexts in which naturalistic arguments play a role in producing motivating reasons, most notably in the moral education of children. When we are trying to inculcate the familiar virtues in them, indicating the important virtues in them, indicating the important role that charity, justice, honesty, etc., play in human life is, I suspect, an indispensable part of that training. I might too, reflect on the naturalistic arguments to beef up my own motivation if I thought it was getting a bit slack. (Hursthouse 2004, 275)

I think this is a deeply flawed view of moral upbringing, and of what sorts of considerations could help the less than perfectly virtuous. If I tried to curb my daughter's selfish tendencies by telling her that she ought to love others because if she does, she might "live longer, avoid some suffering, and enjoy more things" (Hursthouse 2004, 269), then I would obviously not be instilling charity in her. By providing those sorts of self-centered reasons I am effectively destroying the possibility of charity in her, which is to take the good of another as one's own without counting the cost or hoping for good consequences for oneself. For charity, which is love of neighbor as oneself, is a virtue that brings our practical attention and concern away from our own private good and toward that of others. Similarly, if I could only "beef up my own motivation" to be generous by telling myself that, if I am not generous I will "miss out" on characteristic joys of life, then I am not thereby becoming more, but rather, *less* generous to others. For again, true generosity of spirit takes the good of others to be practically salient, as the reason for doing the generous thing.

The three problems I have identified for Hursthouse are fundamentally related, because each stems from an inability to show how our theoretical reasons for our moral beliefs, which appeal to concepts of natural goodness and normativity, are supposed to be salient from a first personal, practical point of view. In short, Hursthouse's naturalism, in large part because of its quasi-reductive and empirical foundations, is too external to human practical self-consciousness—indeed it is wholly external to it. Although Hursthouse has secured the objectivity of moral judgment by way of appeal to natural normativity, she has done so at the very high cost of sacrificing its practical character. We cannot accept

this result. If human life is the central concept in ethics, then it must enter into our practical thought and reasoning in a non-alienated, first personal way.¹¹

1.2 Foot's Recognitional Naturalism

Like Hursthouse, Philippa Foot argues that the status of the virtues “should be determined by quite general facts about human beings” (NG 45). Unlike Hursthouse, however, Foot wants “human being,” rather than “sophisticated social animal” to be the central goodness fixing kind operative in ethical thought; and she further wants to meet what she calls “Hume’s practicality requirement” (NG 9) head-on, by showing how the recognition of human goods can serve directly to produce and prevent voluntary actions.

Foot follows Warren Quinn’s attempt to provide a “Neo-Aristotelian version of objectivism” about practical reason (Quinn 1994, 229). Like Quinn, Foot argues that practical thought and reason is distinguished from theoretical thought and reason in virtue of its distinctive subject matter: it is thought and reasoning *about* human goods, human life, and human action. Quinn argues that:

[...] practical rationality is not as different from theoretical rationality as the subjectivist supposes. Practical thought, like any other thought, requires a subject matter. And for human beings the subject matter that distinguishes thought as practical is, in the first instance, human ends and action insofar as they are good or bad in themselves [...] practical thought deploys a master set of non-instrumental evaluative notions: that of a good or bad human act, a good or bad human life, a good or bad human agent, and a good or bad human action. Practical reason is, on this view, the faculty that applies these fundamental evaluative concepts. (Quinn 1994, 233)

¹¹A similar complaint about this sort of view can be traced back to David Wiggins (1988), “Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life.”

According to Quinn, what provides us with reasons for acting is the cognitive content of our evaluative judgments rather than the content of our subjective desires. The primary work of practical reason, on this view, is the “correct evaluation of ends” (Quinn 1994, 234) or “correctness of thought about human good and evil” (Quinn 1994, 253). This kind of thought, which Quinn calls “ethical” as opposed to “calculative,” is concerned with what actions or good make up the best kind of life. On this account, the primary excellence of practical thought is the same as theoretical thought: to arrive at true propositions. Ethical thought is related to calculative thought in that the latter is the application of the former; for once one judges that something is good, one thereby gives oneself a reason to pursue it, and once one judges that something is bad, one thereby gives oneself a reason to avoid it.¹² Foot accepts this account, and simply adds that the truthmakers of these judgments of good and bad are determined by facts about human life and human needs—what she calls “Aristotelian categoricals” (MD 173).

The basic account of practical reason that Foot and Quinn are working with is a variant of what Berys Gaut calls the recognitional model (161–2). Gaut defines this conception of practical reason as a capacity to recognize the goodness of certain actions independently of their being objects of choice, and through that very recognition actually bringing it about that such actions are performed.¹³ There is no difference, on this account, between recognizing a practical reason and having a goal, because practical reason is a capacity to be motivated by the recognition of what is truly good (NG 23).

When we put this characterization of what it is to have a reason for action together with the sort of facts about human nature that are relevant to Foot’s account, we arrive at the following picture of moral or practical judgment within the schema of natural goodness and

¹²Quinn also argues that we need an account of the will which would make it clear that it is “the part of human reason whose function it is to choose for the best,” though he leaves this “part” of reason basically un-theorized. He seems to think it will naturally fall out of an account of practical reason. See Quinn (1994, 240).

¹³For other variants of recognitionalism, see Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*; Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*; and Dworkin, “Objectivity and Truth: You’d Better Believe It.”

normativity. The virtuous person is one who makes true judgments about what is choiceworthy for human beings (the one who perceives what is truly good), and these judgments are grounded in her recognition of the true facts about human needs and goods. Such judgments are practical insofar as they are judgments about human goods, and as such are intrinsically motivating (NG 18).

Let us call Foot's theory of practical reason recognitional naturalism, as it weds recognitional realism about practical reasons with a naturalistic account of the human good. According to it, practical reason is a recognitional capacity whose proper exercise makes correct, intrinsically motivating judgments regarding the goods constitutive of human life.

2 A Second Argument from Irrelevancy

While Foot's account does not fall prey to some of the pitfalls we found in Hursthouse's, we may still worry that the "practicality requirement" she sets for herself has not been met in a plausible way. To see this, consider a second version of the irrelevancy objection.

1. Moral judgments must be practical judgments, essentially such as to produce or prevent voluntary action.
2. Judgments of natural goodness do not have the function of producing or preventing voluntary actions.
3. So, judgments of natural goodness are not moral judgments or practical judgments.
4. Only moral or practical judgments are relevant to moral theory.
5. Therefore, judgments of natural goodness are irrelevant to moral theory.

Foot accepts the first two premises of the argument. According to her own theory of natural normativity, natural historical judgments register third personal, theoretical facts about the life form which falls under the subject term. Given this, Foot's problem is that she must deny the third claim (or what follows from the first two premises), but it is difficult to see how she can do this in a plausible way. Foot's recognitional

realism suggests that the difference in our evaluation of the goodness of an oak tree's roots and our evaluation of dispositions of the human will is simply a matter of the propositional content one considers. On her view, practical thought and judgment is thought and judgment about our own good—judgment that is intrinsically motivating in virtue of its special content.

I do not think that a mere change in subject matter is sufficient to secure the practical or action-oriented character of practical thought and reason. First, suggesting that we can make a theoretical judgment practical by supplying the proper subject matter strikes me as no more promising than suggesting we can explain how we know our own thoughts by taking our perceptual capacity and directing it inward, so that we can see ourselves in essentially the same way we see other objects in the world.¹⁴ The correct response to this sort of view is to point out that the mode by which I know my own mind is formally quite different from the mode by which I perceive objects distinct from myself in the world.

Second, it makes no sense to divide a power of thought (and thus judgment, inference, and reasoning) by virtue of some putatively special content. If this method of division were philosophically sound, then there would be no principled objection to speaking about “a mince pie syllogism,” which supposedly displayed the special form of reasoning that occurs when our thoughts turn to mince pies (Anscombe 1979, 58).

Third, it is implausible to think that recognizing the truth of certain facts about human goods is the same as having a goal to realize them, or that such truths are intrinsically motivating. This might be true for a theory that takes the explanation of action to come by way of appeal to subjective attitudes whose causal powers—the attitude's “direction of fit,” for instance—can explain how an event under the description that matches the propositional content comes to be.¹⁵ But Foot does not want to go in for this kind of explanation, especially not a neo-Humean version that would appeal to the “direction of fit” of non-cognitive states.

¹⁴The *locus classicus* of this critique of theories of self-knowledge is Shoemaker (1996), *The First Person Perspective and Other Essays*.

¹⁵For especially clear expositions of the direction of fit view, see Smith (1987), “The Humean Theory of Motivation,” and Velleman (1992), “The Guise of the Good.”

It seems false that judgments about human goods are intrinsically motivating. After all, Alpha Centaurians could surely make true judgments about what is good and needful in human life and not thereby be motivated to act. But even if we restrict the subject of such judgments to human beings, it still seems wrong to insist that “ethical thought” is intrinsically motivating. Suppose that I firmly believe that adultery is wrong, because it is bad for humans to break their vows. This will not necessarily motivate me to remain faithful to my spouse. I may be weak-willed, or my heart may simply have grown cold to him over the years, and I may have grown to care about my own pleasure more than about keeping my promises. I can cheat on my spouse while still believing that doing so is wrong—against God’s commands, say, or in violation of my promise.

Perhaps the problem is even clearer in a less morally loaded example. Suppose that I know it is good for human beings to consume antioxidants, because doing so is conducive to human health. Suppose further that I judge it is good for me to consume antioxidants, because it would be good for my health. Suppose I even judge that this gives me a reason to consume antioxidants whenever I can. Nothing about action follows from this line of thought—I have merely had three true thoughts. We do not need to say that I lack prudence, or am thoroughly vicious or weak-willed to explain why no action follows from my putting these thoughts together. The explanation may just be that I am not thinking with a view to action at all. Thus, taking a proposition about human goods, my good, or reasons to be true is not the same as having a reason to act. We can contemplate practical matters in a purely speculative mode.

Suppose, however, that I am thinking with a view to acting in some way. In this case, how would we formulate the practical reasoning in question? Surely not like this:

Humans need/ought to ingest antioxidants to maintain their health
(or: it is good for humans to maintain their health)

I am a human being

So I need/ought to ingest antioxidants (or: it is good for me to ingest antioxidants)

Notice that the conclusion of this syllogism is not an action but another proposition about what is needed or what ought to be done.

This seems to be the incorrect result, since the conclusion of a proper practical syllogism is not a true proposition but an action or performance (or, at the very least, an intention to perform the action). To see the importance of the difference, suppose this line of reasoning were to be taken up by someone who doesn't give one whit about his health. Suppose that this person wants to "live free and die young." It is not that this person denies that health is good for a man. He simply denies that this fact is practically salient for him.

It may help clarify the problem to remember that, according to the Aristotelian tradition that Foot is drawing upon, reasoning that is essentially and self-consciously aimed at preserving truth is theoretical, whereas reason that is essentially and self-consciously aimed at preserving the good is practical.¹⁶ If that is correct, it seems there is nothing we could add to the above syllogism to make it practical, because the reasoning cannot be made practical by virtue of its premises, not even premises that specify human needs and goods. In order for an appeal to a human good to make an appearance in practical thought, it must enter into the account of this very kind of thought—it must enter into the explanation of its first personal, self-conscious practical teleology.¹⁷

The trouble the ethical naturalist faces at this point is straightforward. The natural home of third personal facts about what is naturally good for the species seems to be located in theoretical reasoning about what is truly good for a life form, rather than practical thought about how to live. The account of practical reason that Foot offers us appears to be theoretical in its form and therefore practical in name only.

2.1 Second Nature Naturalism

We might think that the best way to solve this problem is to appeal to practical reason's perfected condition, which is the possession of practical wisdom. On this view, we have knowledge of human form once we

¹⁶See also Anscombe (2005), "Practical Inference." Anscombe calls this the "great Aristotelian parallel."

¹⁷For a nice discussion of the intrinsic teleology of practical reason, see Mueller, "How Theoretical Is Practical Reason?" See also Vogler (2002), *Reasonably Vicious*, Chapter 2.

come to be practically wise persons, since the practically wise know how to live in general and can apply this knowledge correctly in the complicated circumstances of human life.¹⁸ Since we cannot have practical wisdom without moral virtue, we cannot separate knowledge of the human life form from having well-trained appetites. On such a view, knowledge of human form only comes on the scene once one has come to possess a well-formed “second nature.”¹⁹ Let us call this view *second nature naturalism*, and oppose it to the *first nature naturalism* put forward by Foot.

It is more difficult to fit this more sophisticated variant of naturalism in the original framework of natural normativity. For if we can only know human life from the perspective of the acquired virtues, then an alien anthropologist who came to study human life would not be able to make true judgments about the human life form, as presumably it will, by definition, lack the virtues necessary to possess this knowledge.

This is a strange result because on a theory of natural normativity, although the possession of good of the life form is internal to that form of life, knowledge of it isn't. One can know the good of a sunflower, or a wolf, just by knowing what it is. One does not have to possess the dispositions or tendencies of that life to gain this knowledge. Therefore, we should expect an alien anthropologist should be able to make true judgments about what is naturally good for human beings.²⁰ If knowledge of human life is just knowledge only the virtuous possess, however, then it is difficult to know how this is possible.

¹⁸See Lott (2012), “Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form,” for a recent attempt to characterize ethical naturalism in this way. I understand Lott to be developing an idea he finds in McDowell (1995), “Two Sorts of Naturalism,” in a way that is not incompatible with ethical naturalism (i.e., on which the distinction between “first” and “second” nature becomes less significant, because “second” nature norms are natural norms).

¹⁹For the full development of the idea of “second nature,” see McDowell, *Mind and World*.

²⁰It is the potential to know human life from a third personal point of view that distinguishes ethical naturalism from constructivism. The constructivist argues that true normative judgments represent a normative reality, but denies that the reality represented is in anyway independent of the normative judgment itself. I take it that if ethical naturalism is supposed to be a meaningful alternative to constructivism, it must deny that the normative reality it is concerned with is a reality that is entirely constructed from acts of practical judgment and nothing more. For more on this structural feature of the constructivist project, see LeBar (2008), “Aristotelian Constructivism,” and Street (2009), “What Is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?”

Notice that this is not just a problem for rational aliens. If only the virtuous know human nature through virtue, then the non-virtuous also do not have knowledge of human form. Perhaps one could come to discover one's own form, should one happen upon a virtuous community and be suitably instructed; or perhaps there is simply no hope for those who are not raised in the right way to begin with, as they are completely outside the sphere of practical wisdom. It seems as though Aristotle thought many humans were like this: slaves, women, and "Barbarians."²¹

Although *second nature naturalism* helps us to see how knowledge of human form is intrinsically motivating, this gain is not greater than its substantial losses. Remember that the stated purpose of ethical naturalism is to show how "the status of certain dispositions as virtues should be determined by quite general facts about human beings" (NG 45). But if the virtuous alone have epistemic access to these facts, then it becomes difficult to see how any appeal to these facts is going to do much theoretical work. For, on the one hand, if you are already virtuous, then from your own perspective there is nothing to be determined about what is good or bad in human life, since you are already in possession of this knowledge. The best you can do as a member of this epistemic aristocracy is communicate your wisdom to others. On the other hand, if you find yourself among those who have been raised to be less than virtuous, and so have no epistemic access to these facts, the best you can do is trust and obey the virtuous—i.e., cultivate a practical faith in your superiors.

On this version of ethical naturalism, the appeal to human nature is utterly superfluous, since the only people who in principle have access to the facts of human nature that could possibly justify a certain way of life over alternatives, are the very ones who are already justified in living as they do.

²¹It's also pretty unclear how this person is responsible for his bad behavior. I find this view strange in that it makes it seem as though being good is, to a large extent, being lucky that one was raised in "the right way." For instance, if you were raised poorly, perhaps within a political community that was not governed by just laws, then you seem forever doomed to remain ignorant of your own nature. And it's hard to argue that that sort of ignorance would not be exculpatory.

2.2 A Dilemma for Ethical Naturalists

In thinking through the claims of ethical naturalism, we have come to see that, so far at least, we do not know how natural norms can be practical, or how practical norms can fit within the grammar of natural normativity. We can put our problem in the form of a dilemma for the ethical naturalist. If she takes the first horn and stresses that ethical naturalism provides objective, natural norms of the species as the ground of our moral beliefs and judgments, then she fails to show how the judgments can be practical. If she takes the second horn and stresses that ethical naturalism yields a picture of knowledge of human life that is practical because it comes through the possession of the virtues, then she can neither explain how the knowledge fits in the framework of natural normativity, nor how the appeal to nature is doing any meaningful justificatory work.

The problem our dilemma poses is how we can reconcile what on the surface appears to be quite different sorts of teleology: natural and practical. Natural teleology is a form of explanation that is objective—it describes the way things are independent of anyone's thoughts or desires. In this sense, natural good is an object of theoretical knowledge, because the facts are prior to the judgment of them.²² This implies that the facts are independent of the judgment that registers that good, and that whatever the subject of the judgment wants or desires is irrelevant to the truth of the judgment of what is good.

But it is this feature of theoretical knowledge's objects, that their truth making features are independent of the thoughts and desires of the subject that registers them, that is so difficult to map onto the teleology of practical deliberation and reflection about action. In practical deliberation, one is concerned in the main not with how things are independent of one's thoughts, wants and needs, but with how one might realize or achieve what one thinks, wants or needs.²³ Traditionally conceived, practical thought and reason is

²²This fits with Anscombe's (1979) famous account of theoretical knowledge in *Intention*, 57.

²³Here we are talking about rational desire, but desire nonetheless.

thought and reason essentially aimed at action, not merely thought about action, and thus it is not finished until an action is completed and some good is realized. This is why Aristotle and Aquinas both argue that practical thought could not operate unless something were already wanted by some person—that is, unless someone was already self-consciously directed toward the realization of some end or good.²⁴

Here we can notice a change in our use of “good” that Foot does not adequately account for in relation to the theory of natural goodness and defect, and that is the change that we mark when we go from thinking of good as an object of the intellect to thinking of good as an object of will—as an end, a thing to be realized through some chosen means. Foot switches from talking about the first sense of good to the second without showing how they could possibly be related to one another. But precisely what we need is an account of how our ends as objects of practical deliberation can be grasped as objects of natural goodness or defect.

In order to resolve the dilemma she faces, the ethical naturalist must be able to show how these two seemingly opposed forms of explanation—the teleology of life and the teleology of rational action—and how these two seemingly different senses of good—the good of a thing’s nature and the good of a practically rational goal—can be unified within one and the same account. That is, we need an account of natural normativity that will show us how the relation between a general judgment articulating some fact about a life form and a judgment concerning a particular bearer of that form in a particular situation can take the form of a practical inference whose conclusion is an action that exemplifies that very same form of life.²⁵

²⁴This fact is shown very convincingly by Mueller (1979), “How Theoretical Is Practical Reason?” See also Aquinas, ST I–II, q. 8, a. 1, c.

²⁵I am indebted to Matthias Haase for helping me to formulate the problem in this way.

3 Aquinas on Practical Reason and Will

In the remainder of this essay, I am going to argue that we should take the advice Foot offers in our epigraph seriously and looks to Thomas Aquinas as a source of insight into the problem of how to reconcile natural and practical teleology. In particular, I will argue that his account of the will as a rational appetite that is naturally ordered to the universal good or human happiness, and his theory of practical reasoning as guided by basic human goods as its “first principles,” point us toward an acceptable resolution of the dilemma we have articulated. On Aquinas’s theory, the first principles are real, fundamental human ends and goods that we grasp in the practical sense as to be pursued (and their opposites as things to be avoided), and the will naturally desires them. Therefore it is a part of the true account of our *first nature* that we are intrinsically and self-consciously oriented to what is good for the species in general.

3.1 Appetite: Natural, Perceptual, and Rational

Aquinas calls living things “self-movers” because they determine themselves to their own acts (ST q. 18, a. 1). He argues that in order to make sense of the concept of self-motion, we must have some conception of a unified subject that directs its various capacities toward a single, unifying end: the fullest realization of its own form of life. It is characteristic of a substance that moves itself that all of its vital movements are ordered as parts or phases of a single activity whose end is the realization of the subject’s form. For example, when a sunflower grows toward the sunlight, when it sinks its roots deep in the soil, when it engages in the process of photosynthesis, and so on, all these activities occur for the sake of sunflower life coming into and remaining in being.

Aquinas calls this tendency or striving toward the mature state of life the plant’s natural appetite.²⁶ This appetite is not a desire, nor is it a kind of inner manager that oversees the thing’s daily operations. Rather,

²⁶For a discussion of natural appetite, see DV q. 22, a. 4, and ST q. 80, a. 1.

appetite is simply a principle of explanation of the self-movement and change we see in living things.²⁷

Now animals, unlike plants and bacteria, do have feelings and desires, and thus Aquinas is happy to say they have appetitive powers. Indeed, the hallmark of animality is the possession of perceptual powers generally, which can be sub-divided into two distinct kinds, cognitive and appetitive. Thus an animal is more than just an integrated system of powers that operates for the sake of its own existence. An animal has external and internal senses, and so it perceives a world distinct from itself and reacts to what it perceives through its senses by moving itself through its world, in order to pursue some things and avoid others. To have perceptual powers is to possess a conscious form of life.

Aquinas recognizes that an animal is not neutral with respect to what it apprehends, but reacts in accordance with what it perceives in a way that is good for the whole animal. The sheep perceives the wolf as dangerous, and non-accidentally so. An animal perceives particulars and is either inclined to seek or avoid them insofar as they are good, not for any particular power, but for the whole animal.²⁸ It is because an animal goes after what it perceives as good for itself that Aquinas says it has a perceptual appetite. Though an animal perceives and interacts with its world in a conscious manner, and thus moves itself in a higher sense than a plant, it is still not up to the animal to decide how to act, because it is not up to the animal whether it perceives any particular thing in a positive or negative light. Whether an animal perceives any particular as good or bad is largely a matter of instinct (or a second nature that has been instilled in it by some “master”).

²⁷For a contemporary case that we need to appeal to such an internal principle of explanation in order to understand the movements of living substances, see Michael Thompson's (2008) *Life and Action*, Chapter 1.

²⁸Aquinas entertains the idea that we need not attribute an appetitive power to animals, since each individual power can be said to be a tendency to its own end that comes to be for the sake of the whole. Aquinas responds that while it is true that each power, being of a certain form or nature, has an inclination to its own object, there is still the need for an appetite following upon apprehension by which the animal tends towards objects not just as suitable to a particular power, but as suitable to the animal simply or as a whole. See ST I, q. 80, a. 1, ad 3.

According to Aquinas, a mere animal cannot make meaningful decisions, because the animal is not able to develop the reflective self-consciousness that is necessary for other alternative ways of going on to become practically salient to it. In order to develop that kind of consciousness one would need powers of conceptual cognition and inference, which a mere animal lacks. To have conceptual powers of cognition and appetite is to have a self-conscious or rational form of life.²⁹

Rational animals, like any self-mover, possess a natural inclination toward the realization of its good as a whole, and like lower animals this power is actualized through its apprehension of things in the world. But Aquinas argues that a rational animal relates to the world through the application of universal concepts, and thus is inclined to pursue or avoid things under an intellectual, universal apprehension of this good. Thus, Aquinas says that the will is inclined toward its objects under the formality of the “universal good,” or what is for him the same thing, “happiness” (ST I–II, q. 1, a. 7).³⁰

This means that a rational animal, though it possesses instincts like any other animal, is not determined to act by its instincts. For example, although the perception of something as dangerous will incline a rational creature to avoid it, this perception does not determine it to flee. Since a rational animal possesses concepts, she can perceive and desire things under many different descriptions, and so she can conceive of meaningful alternatives in answer to the question how to proceed in any particular situation. Therefore, a rational animal, unlike a mere animal, can stand in the face of certain death if she judges that a greater good than her own preservation is at stake. Because a rational animal is

²⁹It may be that Aquinas has too simplistic an account of animal life. I do not want to dwell on this question here, as it is outside the purpose or scope of this essay. For our purposes, it will be enough to say that even if animals do have alternatives available to them, and so do make decision of some kind, it is not in the same way that we do. That is, they do not have “perfect knowledge” of their ends and the means in relation to them as Aquinas defines this.

³⁰This is the parallel to the intellect regarding its object under the formality of the universal truth, rather than particular, sensible truth.

not determined by her instincts, she needs to form and deploy a general conception of how it befits her to live on the whole in order to be able to act for a reason in any particular circumstance in life.

Because of her possession of general concepts and general knowledge of how to live, a rational animal can put a certain distance between herself and any of her particular judgments, perceptions, and desires. Part of what it means to be self-conscious, I take it, is that one can reflect upon one's own operations, and assess whether the act is good or bad. So the decisions and inclinations of a rational animal can themselves become objects of rational reflection, and this implies that her capacities are self-determined in a deeper sense than one finds in the life of mere animals.

Consequently, the principle of inclination in a rational animal—her rational appetite or will—requires a judgment of practical reason. An object of will, because the will is a rational power of desire, must be supplied by an act of practical reason (a practical judgment that some end is to be pursued through some determinate means).

Thus Aquinas argues that a rational animal must determine itself to move, in accordance with its conceptual understanding of what ought to be pursued, and it cannot do this without relating its general conception of what is good to the particular situation it faces. And so a “Why?” question regarding the actions of a rational animal can be directly addressed to it, and an answer can be expected that will appeal, not to some brute disposition or pre-determined inclination, but to the agent's own understanding of his or her reasons for thinking, desiring, or acting as she does. Thus Aquinas says that a rational animal determines its own inclinations, and is free (DV q. 22, a. 4, ad 1).³¹

This search for a ground for acting in one way as opposed to another is not confined to the space of the particular circumstances. The determination of a reason is grounded in the person's consciousness of its other ends (remote and proximate), and how these ends are ordered to one another. In fact, for Aquinas, our reasons come from our ends, what we are after helps to determine what we ought to do, here and now, and rationalizes

³¹See also ST I–II, q. 1, a. 2.

our pursuit of one alternative over another. Therefore, a rational choice is always made in light of one's other ends, even the choice of means to a particular end.³² Without reference to this conception of the "universal good" or "happiness," the notion of a practically rational ground loses its intelligibility and force in the explanation of human action.³³

So the appetitive and cognitive powers of a rational animal are conceptual, and therefore self-conscious and self-determined powers. This raises the question, however, how such a power can be governed by judgments of what is naturally normative for human beings. Although it may be true that the will is naturally oriented toward the universal good or happiness, such that a rational animal needs a general conception of its own good or happiness to act, if a rational animal seeks its happiness in a critical and reflective way, then is it not the sort of animal that can call the norms of its nature into question and construct its own good out of principles that come from reason itself rather than nature? Is it not thereby autonomous and free to judge what its happiness or good consists in, regardless of what is naturally normative for its species?³⁴ In order to be able to block the argument from irrelevancy at this juncture, we would need an account of how the principles of practical reason are related to human nature or human goods. Or, to put the problem in another way, we need to address the puzzle of how practical reasoning can both depend upon our ends and also reflectively determine our ends.

3.2 First Principles of Practical Reason

We have seen that Aquinas believes that all living things act for the sake of a single, unifying end: the exemplification of its life form, or nature.

³²For an argument to this effect, see Anscombe (2005), "Practical Inference," 145.

³³Some contemporary action theorists, such as Kieran Setiya, are willing to give up on the notion of practical intelligibility altogether. See Setiya (2007), *Reasons Without Rationalism*, 63–65. I think this is a mistake, because without an account of a uniquely practical form of intelligibility and explanation, the argument for speaking of a specifically practical form of reason loses its force and meaning.

³⁴This, of course, is Kant's complaint at the beginning of the *Groundwork* (A: 395). The complaint is echoed in McDowell's (1995) "Two Sorts of Naturalism."

Human beings are living things, and so the same is true for us, all of our properly human actions come to be for the sake of living a good human life. Our final end, which Aquinas gives many names—“universal good,” “rational good,” and “happiness”—is not chosen by us, we are naturally and necessarily inclined to it as creatures with a power of will. Therefore, as creatures with a power of will, we must come to possess a general conception of the good human life and realize it through our own activity, and this is the principle work of practical reason. If we did not come into possession of such a general conception, then we could not act for reasons at all. So, we must attribute to every reasonably mature human person some general, practical conception of human life or how to live, no matter how inarticulate, confused, unsystematic, or unreflective.

Aquinas thinks that in coming to be a mature human being—i.e., one raised in a community of other human beings, and thereby coming into the possession of concepts and a language through initiation into human social practices—one necessarily comes to formulate some such conception, and thus comes to act voluntarily, or in the manner characteristic of a human being. And so, on his view, the characteristic activity of human life, acting for reasons, presupposes some general practical knowledge of the human life form.

However, one does not just come to have any material conception of a good life, as human nature itself provides some specific principles for its proper construction. The fact that human beings the world over value certain goods in common—goods like play, family life, political society, knowledge, and friendship—is no accident. What explains the similarities is that human beings share a nature in common, and thus share practical principles in common, principles that can supply us with reasons for acting to acquire and preserve specifically human goods. These shared principles are what Aquinas calls the first principles of practical reason, or the precepts of the natural law.³⁵

³⁵I follow Kevin Flannery, S.J. in thinking of principles as the wider concept, referring to the starting points of an Aristotelian science, and precepts as picking out the principles of practical reason and natural law. I will refer to both as first principles in this discussion, without always being careful to mark this distinction. For a careful discussion of the relation between principle and precepts, see Flannery (2001), *Acts Amid Precepts: The Aristotelian Logical Structure of Thomas Aquinas's Moral Theory*, Chapter 2.

The concept of “first principle” seems to have fallen out of favor altogether in contemporary discussions of practical reason, even among Aristotelians.³⁶ It is not a concept I am at liberty in this essay to defend. For our purposes, I limit myself to the task of showing that the concept of a first principle is necessary to the notion of practical intelligibility that must underlie any theory of practical reason that could possibly ground an account of ethical naturalism. Whether such a theory can be adequately fleshed out and defended against familiar objections is outside the scope of this essay.

We will be led astray if we think of these first principles as imperatives, commands, or rules. Aquinas, following Aristotle once again, simply thinks of first principles of reason as its “starting points,” or *archai*. For practical reason, the starting points are the ends that constitute a good human life, or happiness. So, the starting points of practical reason—its teleological ordination—are the ends that all human beings naturally desire to attain, ends such as life itself, family, friendship, practical reasonableness and virtue, and so on. Aquinas thinks that our practical intellect is naturally apt to know these ends as ends—as objects to be pursued through particular actions.³⁷ And the will, as the power that desires what reasons judges to be good to pursue, naturally desires these ends as constituents of the universal good or happiness.

Aquinas argues that we must presuppose such starting points or first principles because the intrinsic teleology of practical reason presupposes that some ends are wanted, since the primary or principle job of practical reason is to find the means to realizing or maintaining ends that

³⁶For an interesting discussion of the reasons why, as well as an articulation of one path towards a possible recovery, see MacIntyre (1990), *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues*.

³⁷I should note that I am not saying that we are naturally apt to know them because we are inclined to them. If we must insist on a logical priority, then cognition is always prior (logically) to desire. Temporally, however, there is no priority. In saying this, I reject Maritain’s highly influential reading of Aquinas. For further discussion, see Brock (2011), “Natural Law, the Understanding of Principles, and Universal Good.”

are in some sense at a distance. Practical reason is reasoning toward the realization of a goal, and Aquinas thinks it is obvious that our most general goals are commonly shared, and explained by the fact that we are human beings with certain capacities and needs. These shared principles of practical reason serve as the fixed parameters of a general conception of the good human life, a conception that makes practical judgment or choice about particular acts possible.

Since first principles lay out the conditions of rational intelligibility itself (theoretical or practical), they cannot themselves be proven. If we can demonstrate their truth, it is only in so far as they cannot seriously be doubted, and furthermore, in so far as we can see them as operative in the reasoning of human beings. Take, for instance, the first principle of theoretical reason, the Principle of Non-Contradiction.

(PNC) – It is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong to the same thing, at the same time, and in the same respect.³⁸

For Aquinas, this is primarily a claim about the intelligibility of reality, and secondarily a claim about our thought insofar as it is directed upon reality.³⁹ For example, in order to doubt the truth of PNC, one would have to be able to conceive of a particular instance in which the same attribute might, at one and the same time, both belong and not belong to the same subject, in exactly the same respect (*Metaph.* IV. 3 1005b19–20). And one cannot conceive of this being the case. The idea is that one cannot truthfully judge or assert that Socrates is both sitting and not sitting at the same moment, for the simple reason that Socrates himself cannot be that way. The intelligibility of thought presupposes the intelligibility of reality, of what is. The fact that we can know things about the world presupposes that the world itself is such as to be known, that it contains a discernable order. The principle of non-contradiction defines theoretical intelligibility in this sense: we do not have any hold on the nature of theoretical judgment and knowledge without it.

³⁸The formulation comes from Aristotle. See *Met.* IV. 6 1001b13–14.

³⁹My discussion of these principles is heavily indebted to the work of Kevin L. Flannery, S.J., and to several discussions with him. See Flannery (2001), *Acts Amid Precepts*, Chapter 6.

Because it is a basic condition for the intelligibility of judgments about the world, no one needs to be told to follow the principle of non-contradiction. Consequently, it is not something one learns, like the alphabet or multiplication tables, nor is it a proposition we know through the senses, testimony, or any canon of evidence. Our knowledge of it is *per se nota*—immediate and spontaneous upon encountering its articulation.

The same sort of analysis must be given of the first principle of practical reason, which states that

(FPPR) – Good is to be done and pursued and evil is to be avoided (ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2, c).⁴⁰

Just as theoretical thought is not intelligible without the PNC, so too practical thought and action is not intelligible without the FPPR. Just as the PNC lays out the intelligibility of being, the FPPR lays out the intelligibility of goodness, which Aquinas understands as the object of appetite, or what is to be done and pursued. Just as one cannot judge that contradictory states of affairs equally hold at the same time in the same respect, so also one cannot desire to pursue what one considers, at the same time and in the same respect, to be both good and bad. That is, it is impossible that something can both be an object of will and not be an object of will at one and the same time, while considered in the same respect, because one cannot apprehend a goal as something that should be pursued and avoided at one and the same time and in the same respect.⁴¹ This has to do with the nature of action, of what can intelligibly be pursued.⁴² The logic of practical reason is such that practical contradictories are excluded.

⁴⁰*Bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum.*

⁴¹Of course, in one moment I might see it as good in some way, at another moment as bad in some other way, but only insofar as I attend to different aspects of the prospective action at different times.

⁴²This is compatible with the fact that I can have contradictory desires. I just cannot hold in my consciousness contradictory rational desires (i.e., acts of will).

The first principle of practical reason gives a determinate sense to the concept of practical intelligibility, a sense that is necessary if reasons are universalizable, or shared in common by others with the same capacity to reason.⁴³ Something is good if it is such as to be desired and pursued. This renders the concept of a reason for action intelligible, because something is a practical reason if it speaks in favor of pursuing an action, if it serves the realization of some good, or is desirable. It also gives us a sense of the intelligibility of the concept of practical reasoning and practical inference. Practical reasoning serves to bring about and preserve the good through the use of one's own powers, and to avoid what is harmful to any aspect of this good. FPPR contains within it the idea that practical reasoning is goodness preserving, rather than truth preserving.⁴⁴ On such an account a practical inference is an inference that preserves the good.

The FPPR is formal as stated, but it cannot remain formal. It is reasonable to suggest that any rational animal would share this formal notion of practical intelligibility as that which is to be pursued through its own powers. But the power of practical reason in operation always directs the agent toward the good of its own form of life, and so any application of the principle would depend on the ends that constitute "the good" for the life form in question. And it is clear that Aquinas thinks the FPPR directs us toward knowledge of our own happiness, our final and most universal or perfect good, and that the will, as a rational appetite, is naturally inclined to desire what reason apprehends as universally good. But Aquinas also speaks of "precepts" of the natural law, which are the determinate ways of spelling out the FPPR in order to direct us toward our complete good or happiness.⁴⁵

⁴³It is sometimes complained that philosophers with deeply Aristotelian sympathies often argue by appeal to a notion of intelligibility that is itself not exactly transparent. For a nice articulation of the worry, see Setiya (2007), *Reasons Without Rationalism*. I take this sort of complaint to be legitimate. However, the notion of intelligibility is well worked out in Aristotle and those (like Aquinas) who follow him, and it is far from indefensible.

⁴⁴This is an idea that Anscombe suggests but does not herself defend. See Anscombe (2005), "Practical Inference."

⁴⁵Aquinas, ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2, ad 1, is also clear that the various precepts of the natural law, "insofar as they are referred to a single first precept, have the intelligibility of a single natural law." This single precept is of course the FPPR. For further discussion, especially the distinction between referral and reduction, see Flannery (2001), *Acts Amid Precepts*.

These are the basic human goods or ends that it is the job of practical reason to realize and preserve through voluntary human action.

The non-formality of FPPR distinguishes it from PNC. But this is what we should expect if we divide the power of reason in the traditional way, according to the difference in its ends or aims. Because the end of theoretical reason is to grasp the truth of things, it makes sense that its principles are formal, since what is sought is knowledge of an order of things that transcends any particular perspective upon them. But this is not true of practical reasoning. The work of practical reason is not to track the order of an independent, objective reality, but rather to create a practical order and realize it in some matter. The objects of practical reason are not things that already exist, but ends or goods to be brought into being. And an agent's ends are tied to its being, so that the principles of practical reason are not formal but materially substantial goods that constitute a determinate form of living thing.

Let me briefly say something about the manner in which Aquinas thinks we apprehend human good—that is, in a practical mode. It is necessary to be clear about this in order to respond to the second argument from irrelevancy, which purports to show that judgments of natural normativity are not practical and not relevant to ethics. But the precepts of the natural law as Aquinas understands them spell out what is naturally normative for human beings, and as first principles they are known in a practical mode.

Aquinas says that our practical intellect is naturally apt to know the ends that constitute the first principles of practical reason and human happiness, and to know these ends as ends, or as good. Indeed, he argues that practical knowledge of first principles is more connatural to us than theoretical principles, since the active life is more natural to man than the life of study. On Aquinas' view, it is not by accident that every human community has practices or institutions whose aim is to preserve the individual in his being, family, political society, knowledge,

friendship, and the virtues. We come to recognize these goods not through observation or inference, but just in virtue of coming to be human beings—that is, by coming to live and participate in the dimensions of human life in which that good has its home. We know these basic goods from inside human life, through our practical participation in shared practices of living, rather than in an external or alienated way. Thus, the grasp of these activities *qua* good does not require a special technique, theory, or even the cultivation of the virtues.

Aquinas calls this sort of knowledge of human nature and human goodness *connatural*, noting that we are inclined to it by our very nature. He does not mean by this that the knowledge is innate, but that we are by nature such as to come to possess it, such that we will come to possess it so long as we learn a human language and with it acquire human concepts within a recognizable human community. It is knowledge that we gain through the acquisition of the concepts and forms of life that make up basic human practices. This is knowledge of human nature is practical knowledge of the human life form, a basic form of self-knowledge.⁴⁶ And we all possess it to a certain degree insofar as we act for reasons at all. Such knowledge of and desire for human goods may be thought of as the seeds or sprouts of the perfected knowledge of and desire for the good human life that the virtuous possess.

Considerations such as these suggests that the knowledge we have of our own nature—though abstract, confused, imperfect, and incomplete—is practical self-knowledge of human form. Insofar as the basic human goods or first principles of practical reason are not themselves objects of rational choice but facts about our nature and its characteristic operation, facts which are necessary in order to understand the operation of a power of practical reason at all, they fit within the general framework of natural norms and goods; but insofar as these goods are objects of a genuinely practical knowledge that structures our practical self-consciousness of human life, they are practical norms.

⁴⁶Aquinas's view is fully in keeping with the sort of first personal practical knowledge that Michael Thompson (2004) advocates in his paper "Apprehending Human Form."

4 How to Be an Ethical Naturalist

Obviously, there is much more to be said about Aquinas on the will and practical reason. I have only said enough here to show how we might possibly resolve the dilemma that ethical naturalists face. The problem we had identified for ethical naturalism was that we did not understand how practical and natural teleology could be reconciled. What we needed was an account of how a general judgment articulating some fact about the human life form and a judgment concerning a particular bearer of that form in a particular situation, could take the form of a practical inference whose conclusion is an action that exemplifies that very same form of life. I have suggested that Aquinas's theory of practical reason shows us how this could be so much as possible. Aquinas's concept of the precepts of the natural law, which are first principles or starting points of practical reasoning, pick out real human goods as objects of a kind of general practical knowledge of what ought to be pursued in human life. This general practical knowledge of the human life form plays a role in creating a general conception of how to live, which is the condition of the possibility of any particular practical judgment to act in one determinate way in a particular choice situation. In short, this general conception of how to live gives us reasons to act in one way rather than another. When a human person acts for a reason, she brings the particular situation under this general practical knowledge of human form, and acts for the sake of ends that she sees as good. In acting, a human person is realizing her practical knowledge of how to live, which is her knowledge of human form. In acting, we can say that she is realizing this form in the particular situation of her life; she is moving herself in accordance with her knowledge of how she ought to be moving herself.

On this view, an alien anthropologist would not know human ends as ends or think of them with a view to realizing them, but nevertheless could come to know them by being acquainted with the characteristic activities of human beings, by observing functioning human communities. The alien anthropologist would thereby come to possess third

personal, observational knowledge of human life. Here we can speak of two kinds of knowledge, but only one thing known.

In Aquinas, then, we find a theory of practical reason according to which we do not need to show how facts about human beings can enter its basic, teleological structure. Rather, facts about human beings—spontaneous, non-observational knowledge of their most basic goods—define the starting points and limit of the structure of practical reason itself. On the account provided here, we reason from our general conception of this life, which is an incomplete practical knowledge of our own nature, down to particular actions that are ordered to its attainment in some matter. Practical reason and will are the powers through which we realize our perfected condition or happiness, our complete good.

Of course, I have not argued for the truth of Aquinas's theory. I have only articulated a possible theory of practical reason and will that might show how it is so much as possible to be an ethical naturalist—a theory we have so far been sorely lacking.

Acknowledgements Thanks to Rosalind Hursthouse for her insightful commentary on this paper at a workshop hosted by the Center for the Study of Mind and Nature at the University of Oslo, as well as audiences at Boston College, CSMN-Oslo, Johns Hopkins University, Mt. Saint Mary's University, and The University of Auckland for their feedback on earlier versions. This chapter also benefited from feedback at a working group meeting of the "Virtue, Happiness, and Meaning of Life" project, which is generously underwritten by The John Templeton Foundation (grant #56194).

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Practically Self-Conscious Life

Matthias Haase

1 The Program of Ethical Naturalism

According to what one might describe as the neo-Aristotelian brand of ethical naturalism, *life* is the central concept of meta-ethics. As Philippa Foot conceives the approach, it is a two-step program for the treatment of our fundamental normative terms such as “good,” “ought,” “must,” and “cannot,” as they figure in ethical discourse. The project is to “describe [the] particular type of evaluation” exhibited by our talk of goodness and defect with respect to living things and then to “argue that moral evaluation of human action is of this logical type” (NG 3). The first step introduces the general notion of natural goodness through reflection on the relation between a living individual and the life-form or biological species of which it is an exemplar. The second step characterizes ethical goodness as a kind of natural goodness. In the resulting picture, the sense in which a human being “ought” to perform only good or moral actions belongs to the sense in which

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a creature “needs” to do what makes it flourish as the kind of living being it is.

The general notion of natural goodness and vital necessity is supposed to be defined by appeal to the special form of generality exhibited by our ordinary descriptions of a given life-form: “Aristotelian categoricals” or “natural historical judgments,” as Foot calls them following Michael Thompson. Shifting this logical structure of our thought about the living into the self-conscious register of practical thinking is then supposed to account for the idea of a kind of life in which the question “How should I live?” has a place and is answered by acting according to a conception of what befits the kind of living being one is. Both steps have come under attack in the literature. It has been doubted that the reflection on the relation between a life-form and its exemplars can provide any intelligible notion of normativity. And it has been denied that specifically ethical normativity can be explained in the proposed fashion. In this paper, I am concerned with the second step: the transition from *life* to *practically self-conscious life*.

A central difficulty for the proposed approach is to explain how that which in our study of the botanical and merely zoological is a kind of theoretical reasoning and cognition can become practical inference and knowledge once we turn to our life. A philosopher might grant the proposed account of our use of “ought” and “good” with respect to the vegetative and the merely sentient dimensions of life and still wonder what any of that has to do with ethics. The use of “good” that interests us in ethics is the one whose proper understanding is acquired in learning to act well. Its primary deployment is thus in a judgment through which one determines oneself to act. The action guiding character of such judgments is, intuitively, part of the grammar of “ethically good.” Consequently, it would seem that it can’t be simply the same form or “logical type” of evaluation as the one exhibited by our judgments of natural goodness and defect with respect to plants and other animals. For, in the latter case it is always a further question what to do about it. So why not in the former?

One might think that the answer is obvious. After all, it is *our* life. Clearly, we take a practical interest in its matters. But this response reverses the proposed order of understanding. If we could take the relevant notion of the practical for granted, then the account ethical naturalism

claims to provide wouldn't be needed in the first place. What is at stake in the meta-ethical debate in which Foot intervenes is the question whether we can speak of genuine cognition in the domain of the ethical.

Foot is very clear about this at the beginning of the book. As she presents her project, it is supposed to provide an account of the relevant notion of objectivity (NG 24). And it is not that she fails to notice that this requires accounting for the practical character of the correlated cognition. On the contrary. She not only accepts what she calls the "Hume's practicality requirement" for an account of ethical goodness; she also claims it to be a virtue of her program that it can provide a cognitivist and strictly "un-Humean" solution to the alleged difficulty about how moral judgment can be "action guiding" (NG 9). What, according to her diagnosis, leads to the difficulty is the assumption that human practical rationality can be understood independently of ethics. The difficulty is supposed to dissolve once one realizes that "acting morally is part of practical rationality" (NG 9). There is no prior or independent notion of human practical reason such that one can ask whether it is rational to do what virtue requires. Rather, "goodness" has to be seen as "setting a necessary condition of practical rationality" (NG 63).

However, these programmatic remarks don't explain how exactly we are to arrive at such a substantive or morally charged notion of practical rationality starting from the idea of natural goodness in the realm of the botanical and merely zoological. It has often been noted that Foot doesn't say quite enough on this point.¹ And different proposals have been made for how the apparent lacuna in the system is to be filled in. But it is not clear whether a full execution of the envisaged program has been achieved. In what follows, I leave open whether it can ultimately be carried out. I will limit myself to the question what form or shape a fully developed neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism would have to take.

The difficulty that the approach faces can be brought out by considering a passage in G.E.M. Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy" that figures as one of the contemporary sources for Foot's program. To illustrate the contrast with what she calls the "law-conception of ethics,"

¹See, for instance, Anselm Müller (2004), "Acting Well."

Anscombe suggests that according to the Aristotelian view one could say that “‘man’ with a complete set of virtues is the ‘norm,’ as ‘man’ with, e.g., a complete set of teeth is a norm.” At the same time, she stresses that in the former case the “species *man*” is regarded “not just biologically,” but rather “from the point of view of the activity of thought and choice in regard to the various departments of life” (Anscombe 1981, 38). In the light of these formulations, it can look like the naturalist program is threatened by a dilemma. If one were to assume that the sense in which a human being “ought” to have a complete set of virtues is the same as the sense in which a human being “ought” to have a complete set of teeth, then one would consider human nature “just biologically.” In consequence, it would be hard to see how the account could capture the perspective of thought and choice. If, on the other hand, one insists that the relevant sense of “ought” is not the same, but is rather defined by the perspective of thought and choice, then it threatens to look like the standard or norm is not provided by the species concept *human being*, but rather by the concepts *thought* and *choice*—or, perhaps, the “*reasons*” one hits upon when adopting the point of view of the acts so entitled.

In the following, I argue that Foot fails to appreciate the depth of this difficulty. This leads to an irresolvable tension in her account. To properly execute the program, it would have to be shown that the relevant notion of practical reason can be developed out of the reflection on the concept of life. This would require a specific take on what is traditionally called the ladder of animate being or *scala naturae animatae*. Or so I shall argue. Before I do, let me sketch in rough outlines the main elements of Foot’s approach to ethics.

2 Natural Goodness and the Logic of Life

Foot motivates her program through the claim that it enables us to steer between the two alternatives that have long dominated analytic meta-ethics and that she takes to be equally unsatisfying. On the one hand, there is a realism that simply posits norms, reasons, or values as items existing independently of us in some special realm. On the other,

there are the different ways of giving up on the very idea that the ethical is a matter of genuine cognition of objective facts. The difficulties that each side faces are familiar. In the first case, the question arises how to connect the cognition of those items in that special realm beyond nature in the appropriate way to our action in the material world. In the latter case, the very idea that we are bound in action by genuine necessity threatens to become unavailable. Both pitfalls can be avoided, Foot contends, once one realizes that the ethical or moral “ought” springs from something that is real and part of the natural world—namely: the human life-form. On this view, the fundamental norms to which we are subject in intentional action are not independent of us. Yet they are objects of genuine cognition. They are internal to what we are as exemplars of the human life-form, just as the standards in the light of which the vegetative activity of, say, a quaking aspen is judged as healthy or defective are internal to its life-form.

This is a specific rendering of an approach to meta-ethics that has recently come to be called constitutivism. According to this view, the binding character of norms can be explained by showing that they are constitutive of the individual who is subject to them. But whereas the positions that are recently discussed under this title tend to imply that the norms have to be internal to the general or abstract concept of a rational agent, ethical naturalism appeals to a specification of us in terms of the concrete or material species concept of a human being. On this view, the concept of this biological species inhabiting earth is the highest point we can reach in reflection on the sources of normativity. Accordingly, ethical judgments are, as Michael Thompson puts it, “life-form relative” (Thompson 2004, 60). A rational Martian would be subject to different standards.

Foot doesn’t discuss competing varieties of constitutivism. But her reasons for its naturalist rendering is implicit in the way she introduces her project. She starts from Peter Geach’s observation that “good,” just as “big,” figures attributively. It attaches to a sortal term. Just as it doesn’t make sense to call something “big” without supplying a standard of normal size, “good” has to be combined with a sortal concept that provides the standard of evaluation—for example: “This is a good knife.” Judith Jarvis Thomson has recently called such sortals “goodness-fixing kinds” (Thomson 2008, 21).

One might think that Geach's observation exhaust what is to be said about the logical grammar of "good." Thomson does. She writes:

[...] it cannot be too strongly stressed that 'good' does not mean something different in moral and non-moral linguistic contexts. The adjective 'good' is not ambiguous. It means the same in 'good government' as it does in 'good umbrella'. (Just as the word 'big' means the same in 'big camel' and 'big mouse'.) It means the same in 'morally good plan' as it does in 'strategically good plan'. 'Morally good plan' means something different from 'strategically good plan', of course, but that is not because 'good' means something different in those two expressions; the difference is entirely due to the difference in what modifies 'good' in them. (Thomson 2008, 37)

On this view, the term "good," as it figures in ethical discourse exhibits the same logical grammar as when it is used in our technical discourse about umbrellas or knives. That is to say, "good" is univocal. Foot disagrees. She thinks that "there are further distinctions of logical grammar to be made before we shall have identified the category to which moral evaluation belongs" (NG 3). The problem is not just that we might miss the special character of ethical necessity. Without a reflection on what features a sortal term needs to exhibit if it is to express a genuine "goodness fixing kind," no theory of normativity has been provided. And, according to Foot, it turns out that on closer inspection that for *this* purpose technical examples are ultimately useless. For, here the relevant standard has been, as it were, laid into the object *by us* in the process of its production. The idea of a standard that is internal to a kind of thing independently of contingent interests only becomes intelligible by reflection on the special logical grammar that "good" exhibits when it is used with respect to living things. Foot writes:

Judgements of goodness and badness can have, it seems, a special 'grammar' when the subject belongs to a living thing, whether plant, animal or human being. [...] I think that this special category is easily overlooked; perhaps because we make so many evaluations of other kinds, as when we assess [...] houses and bridges [...] But the goodness predicated in these latter cases [...] is what I should like to call secondary goodness.

[A]rtefacts are often named and evaluated by the need or interest that they chiefly serve. By contrast, ‘natural’ goodness, as I define it, which is attributable to living things themselves and to their parts, characteristics and operations, is intrinsic or ‘autonomous’ goodness in that it depends directly on the relation of an individual to the ‘life-form’ of its species. (NG 26–7)

To put it in traditional terms, the purposiveness of artifacts is *external* in that it is dependent on the relation to the purposes of a subject of another kind (i.e., the maker and the user). The purposiveness of living beings, by contrast, is *internal* in that it is independent of the interests of subjects of another kind and *only* involves the relation of the individual to its form or kind. According to Foot, this natural or vital normativity has to be understood before one can turn to specifically moral evaluation. Any sense we can give in practical philosophy to the concept of necessity must, as it were, *come from below*: from the reflection on life—that is, from reflection on how the persistence of a substance in the natural world can be its own act.²

In her treatment of the general notion of natural goodness or vital normativity, Foot relies on Michael Thompson’s doctrine that *life* is a logical concept (Thompson 2008, 25–82).³ Suppose while going for a walk you come across some green stuff stuck to a rock. Somehow the question arises whether this stuff is an organism. This brings a bunch of further questions with it. If it is an organism what are its parts? Do the brown bits at the bottom belong to it or are they just stuck there by accident? In answering them you will refer this specimen to a general conception of what kind of thing it is. Maybe someone informs you that the stuff in front of you is called “Boston Ivy” and that those little brown bits are its roots and the green bits its leaves. If you keep listening to your field guide you might learn what role the things called “leaves” and “roots” play in this kind of being. The story will appeal to

²To approach human action *from above*, as the Kantian would have it—that is, from a conception of what the will and practical reason *must* be—threatens to ultimately leave open whether we can find anything in the material world that could be known as its realization.

³In the following cited as LA.

the specimen in front of you only as an illustration: “You can see it here, in this one, for instance.” Most of it is likely to be presented in a mode of speech familiar from nature documentaries: “Boston Ivy is a climber. It has little brown roots with holdfasts through which it attaches to rock or wood. In spring, it grows new reddish leaves. They turn green in summer, before reverting to a reddish color in fall...”

These are what Thompson calls “natural historical descriptions.” And he argues that they have distinctive logical features. They don’t describe what particular specimens of a species *S* *have* or *are doing now* or what they *had* or *did yesterday*. The verb phrase appears rather in a peculiar timeless present: “The *S* has/does *P*.” Where temporal specifications enter, they don’t denote a particular time interval, but rather a phase in a cycle that itself is represented timelessly (“in spring”, “in fall”). Furthermore, they don’t describe what this or that *S* does, but rather what *S*s do in general, where the generality is of a special kind. The statements contain no quantifier before the head noun; the predicate is directly attached to a noun-phrase appearing in the bare plural (“*S*s do...””) or with the definite article (“The *S* does...”) and sometimes, as in our sample story, in the bare singular (“*S* does...”). In short, the subject-term is generic, as linguists would put it. Thompson argues that these judgments cannot be analyzed distributively in terms of what all or most individual *S*’s do. For, the story you are told about Boston Ivy is not falsified, if in fact most existing specimen of the kind don’t grow new leaves in the spring, but rather wilt away in the dry heat that occurs lately due to climate change. Moreover, the generality cannot be statistical either, because thought about what *S*’s *have* or *do in general* enters into the understanding of what this particular *S* *has* or *is doing here and now*. As it can’t be treated in a quantificational framework, Thompson calls this “non-Fregean generality.”⁴

It is an intrinsic feature of such statements that they allow for exceptions without requiring a *ceteris paribus* clause that restricts their generality. In the case of natural historical judgments, these exceptions

⁴Note that the class of statement exhibiting “non-Fregean generality” is wider than the class of natural historical judgments. See LA 78. Arguably, “The alpine glacier stores fresh water in the winter and releases it in the summer” is an example. After all, this statement is not falsified either if due to climate change there is no storing anymore, but only releasing.

have a peculiar status. On closer inspection, it might turn out that there is some weird black slimy stuff at the ends of the roots of the plant in front of you and that this doesn't fit with what you just learned about *Boston Ivy*. The discovery doesn't falsify the natural historical story; it rather shows that there is something terribly wrong with the plant in front of you. The park was flooded and now the whole thing is wilting away and starting to decompose. In judging that there is indeed something wrong with this individual you refer it to the very same thing you already implicitly appealed to when judging that it is alive—namely: your more or less developed conception of the life-form of which it is an exemplar. As Thompson puts it, we have to “go no farther for critique than we went for interpretation” (LA 81). The source of normativity is, as it were, in the copula that unites the object-term with a substance-concept in the descriptive judgment “This is *Boston Ivy*.” In this way, the “normative” becomes intelligible as a dimension of a specific kind of relation between the general and the particular—namely: the relation between the life-form and its individual exemplars. That is, the normative judgment can be derived from two *descriptive* judgments: the natural historical description of the species and the vital description of a given exemplar. Very roughly: from “The *S* is *P*” and “This *S* is *not P*” we can infer: there is something *wrong* in connection with this *S*.

The question is what logical feature of natural historical judgments makes them apt to figure in this schema for the derivation of normative claims about individuals. After all, not all sentences exhibiting “non-Fregean generality” can appear in this role. What is supposed to explain it is the way in which the natural historical judgments about a species form a peculiar kind of “unity” or “system”. Not every generic statement about a species *S* is a natural historical judgment. It has to describe a feature or activity that *plays a role* or *serves a function* in the life-form. For this reason, natural historical judgments can be connected with each other through the “in order to” nexus: “The Boston Ivy,” your field guide might say, “draws water from the roots *in order to* grow leaves”. Accordingly, natural historical judgments belong to what one might call the category of “teleologically articulable non-Fregean generality” (LA 79).

But, as Thompson notes, this is still too broad. The propositions articulating a craft may also be said to form a teleological system in that the steps in the production process can be explained by appeal to *what happens next*. (“The iron is put into the fire *in order to* make it malleable”). Eventually, however, the chain of questions “Why?” will point *beyond* this craft. A knife is for cutting. But why things are *to be cut* is not explained by the art of making, but rather by the practices of using knives: cooking, barbering or, perhaps, warfare. The inquiry into these crafts will ultimately lead to the same result: eventually the question “Why?” will point beyond them. It is different in the case of natural historical judgments. Here, *every* question “Why?,” “How?,” and “What for?” that may be raised about a natural historical fact can be answered by citing another natural historical fact about the respective life-form. What is formally distinctive of natural historical judgments is the fact that they form a closed cycle. That is why what is described in this way is a genuine goodness fixing kind.

3 Ethical Goodness and the Apprehension Requirement

Against the background of this conception of evaluation in the domain of the living, Foot argues that “moral evaluation of human action is of this logical type” (NG 3). Just as in the evaluation of individual plants and subrational animals, ethical evaluation is an operation of mind in which an act or feature of an individual is judged as good or bad by referring her to the life-form or species of which she is an exemplar. Let this be the first proposition of ethical naturalism:

- (1) Ethical goodness is a kind of natural goodness.

The way Foot understands it, this is not supposed to be taken as a reductive biologism about ethics. We are told that it would be “ill-conceived” to think that “the natural-history account of human beings could be explained in terms of merely animal life” (NG 41). Animate being takes a special turn when the power of practical reason belongs to what is characteristic of the respective kind, life-form or species:

[...] it is important not to underestimate the degree to which human communication and reasoning change the scene. [...] Animals are [...] different from us in that to do what they should do – what is needed and what is in their capacity – they do not have to understand what is going on; whereas a human being can and should understand that, and why, there is reason for, say, keeping a promise or behaving badly. This may seem a tall order, but this human understanding is not anything hard to come by. We all know enough to say. ‘How could we get on without justice?’ (NG 16)

By contrast to the mere animals or brutes, as the tradition called them, we “act *on* reasons” (NG 53).

Foot introduces the point by appeal to Aquinas’ formula that whereas the mere animal pursues an end it sees, we apprehend our “ends as ends” and the “means as means” (NG 54). To begin with, this just introduces the idea of instrumental reasoning. But the whole point of *Natural Goodness* is that practical rationality can’t be reduced to instrumental considerations. What the theory of natural normativity is supposed to provide is a conception of acting well that is independent of subjective desire or interest. And the relevant noninstrumental reasons are supposed to become available to the agent through her understanding of the kind living being she is. Whereas non-defective animals merely act in accord with the standards internal to their life-form, a good person acts in accordance with her understanding of the norms internal to her life-form.

It is an intricate issue how articulate such understanding has to be. Perhaps Foot’s way of putting the point in the passage quoted above is too strong. It is a reflective achievement to be in the position to say: “We couldn’t get on without justice.” And, intuitively, a person may be just, but quite inarticulate. A passage toward the end of the book suggests a less demanding view:

Human life, unlike the life of animals, is lived according to norms that are known and taken as patterns by those whose norms they are. [...] The norms to be followed must largely be formulated in terms of the prohibition of *actions* such as murder and theft. In human life it is an Aristotelian necessity (something on which our way of life depends) that

if, for instance, a stranger should come on us when we are sleeping he will not think it all right to kill us or appropriate the tools that we need for the next days work. (NG 114)

It is not that natural historical judgments like “Humans recognize rights” figure as the reason for action. The reason not to take the tools or the life is simply that it is *hers* or *his* so that to take it would be theft or murder. And the person may not have the words “theft” and “murder” in her vocabulary; it is sufficient that a thought of the form “I can’t take this; it’s hers” is available to her. What being a just person requires is the recognition or apprehension of such patterns of rationalization: conducting oneself in the light of them and taking a stance toward others who fail to do so: “You can’t do that; it’s hers.” All that the correlated ability to articulate this understanding might come to is the ability to use such “stopping modals,” as Anscombe called them, and to give an example of what *one can’t* or what *one must* do in situations *like this*. In recognizing this as a reason for action that would hold for anyone of us in such a situation and that does not require further explanation to be binding, the agent apprehends the role that the necessity expressed by “can’t” and “must” plays in our life.

This is enough to introduce the following condition of adequacy for an account of ethical goodness. Let’s call it the *Apprehension Requirement*: When “good” figures in “good human action” it implies that the subject acts on an understanding or knowledge of what is good to do. In this way, “human good is *sui generis*,” as Foot puts it (NG 51). Let this be the second proposition of ethical naturalism:

- (2) Ethical goodness is *sui generis* in that it is practically self-conscious.

Theses (1) and (2) define neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism as I introduced it at the outset. The question is how they can be held in one mind. On the other hand, it seems that if the concrete biological species *homo sapiens* is to figure as the standard, then there must be *some sense* in which “will and practical reason are,” as Michael Thompson puts it, “just two more faculties a living being may bear, on a level with the powers of sight and hearing and memory.” On the one hand, Thompson stresses that “in the works of the will and practical reason we have to do with movement in quite different categories, in *some sense*,

from those of mere sensibility” (LA 29). Of course, if the program is to be executed, one somehow needs to get rid of the qualifiers.⁵ In which “sense” precisely? What exactly is the relation between the genus *natural goodness* and its species *ethical goodness* such that the special character of the latter can be accommodated within the naturalist framework?

4 A Tension in Foot’s Official Account

There are different ways in which an ethical naturalist may approach the task of answering this question. Foot’s official articulation of the program puts a restriction on the resources available for this endeavor. This leads to a tension in her presentation of the transition from *life* to *practically self-conscious life*. As we have seen, Foot denies that “good” is univocal. It exhibits a “special ‘grammar’” when it is said of a “living thing, whether a plant, animal or human being” (NG 26). But with respect to the domain of the living, Foot endorses univocity: We don’t have to note a “special ‘grammar’” with respect to evaluation of a person. When it is said of the living, “good” always means the same: “[...] there is no change in the meaning of ‘good’ between the word as it appears in ‘good roots’ and as it appears in ‘good dispositions of the human will’” (NG 39).

Of course, it is not that the same features or acts count as good or defective. What is supposed to remain the same is the form or “logical type” of evaluation. As it always consists in referring the respective living individual to the life-form or species of which it is a bearer, moving up the ladder of animate being, Foot contends, does not introduce the need for a “new theory of evaluation” (NG 41). This holds for the step from the *subrational* or *merely sentient* life of animals to the kind of life we live, just as much as for the step from the *merely vegetative* life of plants to the *sentient* life of animals:

[...] the structure of the derivation is the same whether we derive an evaluation of the roots of a particular tree or the action of a particular human being. The meaning of the words ‘good’ and ‘bad’ is not different when

⁵I discuss Thompson’s own proposal for how to do this in Section 7.

used of features of plants on the one hand and humans on the other hand, but is rather the same as applied in judgments of natural goodness and defect, in the case of all living things. (NG 47)

The normative terms “good” and “ought” as they figure in *ethical* discourse about *our* lives exhibit exactly same logical grammar as when they are used in our empirical *biological* discourse about other living being. This, then, is the third proposition of the variety of ethical naturalism that Foot puts forward:

(3) “Naturally good” is univocal.

On the face of it, there is a tension between thesis (2) and thesis (3). How can ethical goodness be *sui generis*, if it is a kind of natural goodness and “naturally good” is univocal? If one reads thesis (3) as the denial that the action guiding character of “ethically good” belongs to its grammar, then it would be in direct contradiction with Foot’s claim that virtuous action is an acting on an understanding of the good. But that is not what she means. The claim is supposed to be about the “structure of derivation” of good, not the recognition of the good.

Still, it follows from thesis (3) that the articulation of the way in which human life is set apart from subrational life cannot belong to what might be called the “formal” part of the theory of natural normativity. Accordingly, any special character of ethical goodness can only be a matter of the special content of the respective natural historical judgments.⁶ That is how it sounds in the following passage:

Human good is *sui generis*. Nevertheless, I maintain that a common conceptual structure remains. For there is a ‘natural-historical story’ about how human beings achieve this good as there is about how plants and

⁶Many passages support such a reading. The idea of a “logical difference” between ethical and non-ethical evaluations figures in *Natural Goodness* only in the characterizations of views argued against (see NG 77). Of course, human life, we are told, is much more complex and diverse. And this leads to a “great increase in the number of respects in which evaluation is possible.” But “as philosophers” we should not get distracted by such variety when we are concerned in the “conceptual structure of evaluation” (NG 59).

animals achieve theirs. There are truths such as ‘Humans make clothes and build houses’ that are to be compared with ‘Birds grow feathers and build nests’; but also propositions such as ‘Humans establish rules of conduct and recognize rights’. (NG 51)

The suggestion seems to be that the Apprehension Requirement is introduced via the content of some propositions about the human life-form. Just as beavers build dams, human beings recognize rights and act on an understanding of the respective necessity. On closer inspection, however, it seems that this is not quite what Foot has in mind. The natural historical judgments about different kinds of mere vegetative life—say, the quaking aspen and the slime mold—also differ in content, and quite radically so, and likewise with the contrast between the botanical and the zoological. But Foot thinks that the anthropological difference has a different status:

What conceptually determines goodness in a feature or operation is the relation, for the species, of that feature or operation to survival and reproduction, because it is that in that that good lies in the botanical and zoological worlds. At that point questions of ‘How?’ and ‘Why?’ and ‘What for?’ come to an end. But clearly this is not true when we come to human beings. [In this case] the teleological story goes beyond a reference to survival itself. (NG 42–3)

The talk of the “teleology of a species” can mean two different things. For plants and mere animals, all activities serve the self-maintenance of the individual and the reproduction of the species. The human good is of a special kind in that it can’t be captured by describing a cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction. Accordingly, the fourth proposition of Foot’s brand of ethical naturalism is this:

- (4) Ethical goodness is *sui generis* in that it points beyond the cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction.

Thesis (4) seems to articulate how Foot proposes to understand thesis (2). The problem is that the resulting picture is hard to square with Foot’s own definition of natural goodness. The term “naturally good”

was initially introduced by contrasting it with the logical grammar of technical goodness. In “good house” or “good umbrella”, the term “good” also figures attributively: the standard is contained in the sortal concept to which it is attached. But here the teleological story points, as it were, beyond the respective kind. The questions “How?,” “Why?,” and “What for?” don’t come to an end in the description of this kind. To understand this form of normativity one has to give a further explanation of what ends the practices of making and using such artifacts serve in *our* life. In this way, the purposiveness of artifacts is external or dependent: it points to the purposes of another. Natural goodness, by contrast, was said to be “autonomous”: living beings don’t need makers and maintainers, because they make and maintain themselves. Foot writes:

[...] the Aristotelian categoricals give the ‘how’ of what happens in the life-cycle of that species. And all the truth about what this or that characteristic does, what its purpose or point is, and in suitable cases its function, must be related to this life-cycle. The way an individual should be is determined by what is needed for development, self-maintenance and reproduction [...]. This is why the noise made by the rustling of leaves is irrelevant in this context while the development of roots is not. And this is why Aristotelian categoricals are able to describe norms rather than statistical normalities. (NG 32–3)

The passage suggests that natural goodness is determined by the unity of a life-cycle where all acts and features of the kind serve the perpetual reconstitution of its exemplars. This seems to be a remark on the grammar of “natural goodness.” Foot focuses on the contrast to statistical generalizations. In consequence, it can seem sufficient to appeal to the fact that natural historical judgments can be said to “relate to the teleology of the [respective kind].” But that is also true of technical propositions. The difference to the latter resides in the fact that the natural historical propositions about a kind form a *closed teleological system*: the way in which they can be connected to each other by the “*in order to*” nexus is such that *every* question “How?,” “Why?,” and “What for?” can be answered by citing another natural historical judgment about this life-form or species.

But this way of understanding natural teleology seems to be in contradiction with how it has to be conceived in the context of thesis (4). There it looked like the natural teleological sense of the “in order to” nexus is explained in terms of the idea that the *all* activities characteristic of the respective species *taken together* are directed at a super-ordinate or ultimate “end” or *telos*. Given this assumption, it seems conceivable that this ultimate end or *telos* is different depending on whether the respective life-form is subrational or practically self-conscious: in the former case the ultimate *telos* is self-maintenance and reproduction, in the latter it is something more sublime. But according to the present consideration this picture rests on category mistake. It gets the natural teleology of subrational life wrong. For, the concepts of self-maintenance and reproduction don’t enter the account as super-ordinate or ultimate ends that all the activities and features of a species taken together serve. Rather, they specify how activities and features of a kind of thing have to be related to each other such that the questions “Why?,” “How?,” and “What for?” in the special natural teleological sense can be giving application: all the activities and features are there for each other such that they form a life-cycle and the answers to the question “Why?,” “How?,” and “What for?” a closed system. This is what explains that living beings are through their own activity. Accordingly, *self-maintenance* and *reproduction* are formal concepts belonging to the articulation of the grammar of “naturally good.” That, then, would be the fifth proposition of ethical naturalism:

- (5) Natural goodness of an act or feature of an individual is determined by the role that this kind of act or feature occupies in the cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction characteristic of the life-form of which it is a bearer.

The conjunction of theses (4) and (5) entails the denial of thesis (1). If natural goodness is determined by the role that this kind feature plays in the cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction and ethical goodness points beyond that cycle, then it follows that ethical goodness is *not* a kind of natural goodness. For, the very feature that explains that natural goodness is “autonomous” seems to be denied for ethical goodness.

5 The Threatening Dilemma

If ethical naturalism is to be a coherent program at least one of these propositions has to be rejected or somehow reinterpreted. Obviously, thesis (1) can't be negated without giving up the doctrine that *life* is the central concept for ethics. Here, I won't consider reductive forms of naturalism. Accordingly, thesis (2) is not up for discussion either. That leaves theses (3)–(5). I want to suggest that the univocity thesis is the villain of the piece. My argument is that the alternative between rejecting thesis (4) and rejecting thesis (5) presents a dilemma as long as thesis (3) remains in place. Let's consider these two avenues of escape in turn. Each of them goes together with a certain view of the way in which the idea of *practically self-conscious life* is related to the general of notion of *life*.

On the face of it, it looks like thesis (4) is not required to do justice to the considerations that Foot presents in support of it. Her main point seems to be that in human life it is not all about *mere* survival. Obviously, a good human life requires more than that: not just water and bread, and air to breath, but also justice, art, and contemplation. And in certain terrible situations, it can be good—befitting to a human being *qua* human being—to do something even though one foresees that one's own death is a consequence: standing up for justice, say. In fact, it may be that the only possible action that would secure one's survival is something that doesn't befit a human being to do. For instance: killing the innocent. In that case, one mustn't do it. We could even construct a scenario of the latter kind where what is at stake is the survival of the whole species. Even that end is not to be secured at *any* cost. Arguably, this has no parallel in the life of mere animals governed by survival instinct. But one can grant all this without claiming that the human good points “beyond” the cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction.

Above the level of merely vegetative beings, what the respective natural historical account describes as being “maintained” and “reproduced” is never mere physical survival, but rather a specific manner or way of living. In the case of wolves, for instance, that involves hunting in a pack. In our case, it includes a certain way of relating to each other that traditionally comes under the title of justice. The human good differs in this

respect from the good of merely vegetative life. But why should it follow that the “natural-historical story’ about how human beings achieve this good” does not describe what one might characterize as a “life-cycle”? After all, there is a specific kind of “trait transmission” connected with thought and language as well as with virtues like courage, justice, and temperance—namely: “initiation into a practice,” as one might call it.

So perhaps one can do without thesis (4). Once it is rejected it seems that thesis (5) can hold for the human good as well, despite its being *sui generis*. No doubt, the respective “life-cycle”—*what* is maintained and reproduced as well as *how* it is maintained and reproduced—looks very different depending on the kind of living being we are considering. But why shouldn’t the philosopher abstract from these differences when giving the general theory of natural normativity? In a passage of an early paper, Jennifer Whiting considers whether this kind of view can be ascribed to Aristotle. She writes:

Aristotle must apply to humans, methods which are similar to (or the same as) those used to determine that, e.g., photosynthesizing is constitutive of a plant’s health. These methods will presumably include the observation of behavior and the attempt to explain such behavior within his general teleological framework, [...] *If* Aristotle can use these general methods to establish that the exercise of some capacities is essentially human, then he can claim that the exercise of these capacities is essentially related to human welfare or *eudaimonia* in much the same way that exercising the capacity for photosynthesis is related to a plant’s health. These capacities may turn out to be rational, linguistic, social or otherwise. But whatever they are, Aristotle can view the method of establishing what is good for rational beings as no less objective than that of establishing what is good for plants and nonrational animals. (Whiting 1988, 40)⁷

The envisioned account seems to be in accord with the thesis that “naturally good” is univocal. There is a “general teleological framework” for thinking about living beings and generic “methods” for identifying a

⁷I should say that Whiting’s own considered view is much more complex. But for my present purposes, I am just interested in the thought suggested by the passage.

natural teleological function. No matter which specific vital powers and activities come into view, whether photosynthesis or concept governed action, the general framework can be brought to bear. For the purposes of a general theory of natural normativity, we can abstract from all the differences captured in the judgments that come under this category of natural teleological thought. Let's call this the Abstractive Model of the tree of life.

The problem with the Abstractive Model is this. If the general teleological framework for thinking about living beings is the *same* no matter which vital powers come into view, then it would seem that the "method" of establishing what is good for a human being must indeed be the same as "those used to determine that, e.g., photosynthesizing is constitutive of a plant's health." The latter is clearly an empirical investigation that rests on observation. It would follow that the same holds for our knowledge of what befits a human being. In the resulting picture, the teleology of human life-form may be said to be understood or known by its bearers. But it is known in the wrong way.

It is precisely such a view that Kant has in mind when he insists that the concept *human* is an empirical concept that has no place in moral philosophy. The standards under which our actions fall seem to be grounded in facts about humans that come to our practical thought, as it were, "from the outside", as John McDowell puts it (McDowell 1995, 134). Whatever natural historical fact might be apprehended in *this* way, it will, ultimately, figure as something that is given to the power of practical reason as the matter to work with. And if that is so, then the power of practical reason will always put me in the position to "step back" and ask: "Why should I do what humans do?" McDowell famously illustrates this point with the scenario of a wolf that somehow came to be endowed with reason and consequently wonders whether the wolf-way of living is binding for him. The thought experiment is rather puzzling and invites a number of objections.⁸ But the intended point is, of course, a thesis about us and the distinctive character of the thought and choice. Hegel expresses it in the following way. As a power of reason, the will includes

⁸See, for instance, Michael Thompson, "Forms of Nature" (2013).

the power of negation. By contrast to the brutes, rational animals can say “no” to life. Practical reflection, therefore, cannot find its ground in the *given* necessities of life.

Obviously, the conclusions that Kant and Hegel draw from this point have no place in the framework of ethical naturalism. On their views, practical reason is *not* a natural power. But to deny the point itself would mean to affirm that practical reason is literally “just another” vital power “on a level with the powers of sight and hearing.” Just as these, it would be defined by the function it serves in the whole to which it belongs. But if there is to be a genuinely practical and noninstrumental deployment of practical reason, then it cannot receive its ends from elsewhere. Rosalind Hursthouse seems to be after the positive side of this point when she insists that “obvious physical [and perhaps psychological] constraints” aside, “there is no knowing what we *can* do from what we *do* do, because we can assess what we do do and at least try to change it” (Hursthouse 1999, 221).⁹ For this reason, she maintains that ethical naturalism would be “doomed to failure *if* it [did] depend on identifying what is characteristic of human beings as a species” in the manner as we identify what is characteristic of “other species” (OVE 222).

Of course, Foot would insist that in the assessment Hursthouse envisions, “what we do” must *not* be conceived as standing for what a natural historical judgment about the human life-form would express. When it figures as the object of assessment and reform, “what we do” stands for mere custom that one might argue has to be changed because it is a customary wrong. And the assessment will be in the light of one’s conception of what befits a human being. But this doesn’t undermine Hursthouse’s thesis. For, where the appeal to what is characteristic of human beings plays this discursive role, our identification of the relevant characteristics can’t take the same shape as our identification of the features of other species. One might try denying that it follows from the Abstractive Model that the “methods” for establishing the human good are the same as the ones that govern our botanical and zoological investigations. But it is hard to see how such a story should go.

⁹In the following cited as OVE.

Under the assumption that it abstracts from what is distinctive of us as practical rational animals, the respective theory of natural normativity can't be, to use Anscombe's phrase, "from the point of view of the activity of thought and choice." In consequence, it can't meet the Apprehension Requirement contained in thesis (2).

If Foot's program is to be viable, then it must be conceived in another way. But how? Hursthouse suggests that Foot's program can be reconciled with McDowell's point. And she thinks this can be done by holding on to thesis (4) and denying thesis (5) even for natural goodness in the realm of the zoological. On her view, it is only with respect to plants that one can say natural goodness is fully determined by the cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction. With each step up the ladder of animate being, *further* "ends" and "aspects of evaluation" enter the scene. On the level of merely vegetative organisms it is "parts" and "operations/reactions" that are evaluated with respect to the *two* ends: "individual survival" and "continuance of the species." When we move to animal life "we continue," as Hursthouse insists, "evaluating the same two aspects in relation to the same two ends" (OVE 198). But there is at least one additional aspect—namely, "action"—that is evaluated in the light of a distinct "third" end: "characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic pleasure or enjoyment" (OVE 199). Before turning to the kinds of creatures we are, Hursthouse introduces the concept of a "social animal" and a correlated fourth end: "good functioning of the social group" (OVE 201). When we finally reach the kind of living being that a human being is we continue, as Hursthouse insists, to evaluate individuals as good or bad exemplars of their species in respect of their physical, psychical, and social constitution in the same way as we did on the lower levels of animate being. But there is a further normative dimension: "rationality makes for one obvious addition to" the list of ends and aspects of evaluation (OVE 207).

Let's call this the Additive Model of the tree of life. By contrast to the Abstractive Model, it doesn't assume that all forms of vital activity can be captured by appeal to an abstract notion of a cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction. The proposal is, rather, to define the concept of a living being by appeal to the powers of nutrition and reproduction in order to then ascend the ladder of animate being by *adding* further

vital capacities like sentience, sociality, and rationality to this basic stock. In this way, the “parts of soul” appear as something like building blocks that can be put on top of each other with the “nutritive soul” figuring as the foundation stone, or perhaps like the layers of a wedding cake with reason as the plastic figure of the bridal couple cresting the top.

As Hursthouse understands it, the Additive Model is compatible with the thesis that “naturally good” is univocal. The word “good”, she stresses, is not used “in a totally new ‘moral’ or ‘evaluative’ way” when we turn to ethics (OVE 226). For, just as on the lower rungs of the ladder of animate being, the relevant standard of evaluation is internal to the vital power that is distinctive of the living beings we are. At the same time, the thesis that rationality is a distinct “end” is supposed to do justice to McDowell’s point that the standards to which we are subject in action can’t come to practical thought “from the outside.” Hursthouse writes:

Our single characteristic ‘way of going on’ is in a rational way, i.e. in any ways we can rightly see as something we have reason to do. [...] Ethical evaluation cannot be a branch of biology or ethology because neither we, nor our concepts of ‘a good human being’ and ‘living well as human being’, are completely constrained by nature. (OVE 228)

In this formulation, it seems clear that the standard in question is articulated from the perspective of thought and choice. It is less obvious why this should be a form of ethical naturalism. All the normative work seems to be done by the idea of the power of rationality—or more precisely, the “reasons” one grasps by exercising it—and not by the species concept *human being*.

What underlies the proposed procedure of making a list of “ends” and corresponding “aspects of evaluation” that receives further entries as we ascend the ladder of animate being is the assumption that we can simply avail ourselves of the notion of an “end” intrinsic to a vital power and then deploy this notion in the description of each further capacity that higher kinds of living beings bear in addition to the ones they share with the lower kinds. Given this assumption, it seems innocuous to talk of “norms” to which a living individual is subject in virtue of the fact that a certain power belongs to the repertoire characteristic of its life-form. But,

on the face of it, one might as well say that the living individual stands under a certain norm because its life-form stands under that norm. The life-form appears in this picture as “mediator” of normativity rather than as its ground or source. The whole theory of normativity seems to be already contained in the idea of an end or norm being internal to a specific kind power—or, in the case of the power of reason, to the objects grasped in its exercise. In consequence, the role of the life-form or species threatens to reduce to that of a conveyor belt that ensures that the norm reaches the individual. But to assume that the “ethically good” reaches beyond the human cycle self-maintenance and reproduction is to point beyond the only grasp we have on the idea of a system of natural historical judgments. In consequence, there is no “natural-teleological story” left that could come to an end elsewhere; the questions “Why?,” “How?,” and “What for?” just cease to have a natural teleological sense. As long as one holds on to thesis (4), one cannot make sense of thesis (1).

Any realist about ethical norms, reasons, or values would grant that much: a living individual is only bound by them, insofar as she has the capacity to grasp or cognize such things. But if one could take the notion of a reason for action for granted, then there would be no need for the account that ethical naturalism claims to provide. The ambition was to elucidate the very idea of an ethical norm or a reason for action by appeal to the relation between a living individual and its life-form. In fact, such ambition can be motivated by a problem that arises within the Additive Model. The proposal to conceive the transition to practically self-conscious life in terms of “adding” a further “end” and “aspect of evaluation” to a given stock seems to suggest that our capacity to cognize reasons is a power that we have in addition to the powers of sentience and nutrition that are the *same* in us as they are in mere animals. But given this assumption, it seems apt to ask why it is anything but a mere accident that the way in which the human cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction is organized is such that we *can* ever act according to the “reasons” we cognize. If rationality is a power added, McDowell’s rational wolf would be conceivable. Now, imagine that our rational wolf becomes convinced by arguments for vegetarianism. We can arrange that tragically his digestive organs are such that he can only stomach meat. So, living according to his new conviction is not an option for him. If the reasons are “out

there” independently of us and our capacity to grasp them is something that is merely added to a subrational cycle or self-maintenance and reproduction, then it seems that nothing can explain why it is anything but a stroke of luck that we don’t constantly find ourselves in such unfortunate conditions.

Of course, a realism that just posits “reasons for action” as nonnatural items in a special realm is not the view Hursthouse has in mind. To the contrary. The consideration is supposed to support the doctrine that “we evaluate ourselves as a natural kind, a species which is part of the natural biological order of things” (OVE 226). But she is well aware that her list of those “five ends” of human life “may look like rather a rag-bag,” since it “emerged from considerations of plants and animals and then had the merely physical hived off and actions from reason added on” (OVE 207). In order to arrive at the idea of a practical deployment of reason realized in movement and change in the material world, this power has to be somehow “united” with what would otherwise look an independently driven organic vehicle to which it is somehow attached. What is supposed to explain the relevant “unity” is the idea of virtue which is not merely a disposition with respect to “action from reason”, but also encompasses “emotion and desire” (OVE 208). In the final picture, however, it looks like the connection is supposed to be made via the claim that the activity of reason is constrained by the ends that were said to define the notion of a social animal: “I cannot just proceed from some premise about what is reasonable [...] to do to some conclusion [...] that a good human being is one who acts that way. I have to consider whether [it] would foster or be inimical to those four ends” (OVE 224).

But it seems that this is the wrong way around. Remember that the claim was that when we move from plants to animals “we continue evaluating the *same* two aspects in relation to the *same* two ends”—that is, “parts” and “operations” with respect to “individual survival” and “continuance of its species.” It is just that there is an additional aspect—“action”—that is evaluated in the light of a distinct “third end”—namely: “freedom from pain.” So too, when we move from merely social animals to rational animals: those “aspects” and “ends” of evaluation characteristic of the former remain the same. In this framework, saying

of the added power of practical reason that its exercise has to “foster the four ends appropriate to a social animal” is tantamount to saying that it *serves* our subrational nature. The reason may be in the driver seat, but the direction is determined from the back seat. Hursthouse stresses that in her account, by contrast to Hume’s, virtue does not serve its individual bearer exclusively, but rather the social whole of which the individual is a member. But this is only due to her idea of a social form of subrational animality. It doesn’t change the underlying conception of the relation between practical reason and the passions. All it introduces is what one might call “animal communism.” Still, practical reason remains the slave of sub-rational vital forces.

In the light of the options considered so far, ethical naturalism seems to be faced with a dilemma. Either one holds that “practically rational” enters into the machinery of natural normativity as just another characteristic on a level with “winged,” “hoofed,” or “sighted” that acquire their status as standards for the evaluation of individuals through their “functional” role in the respective life-cycle. Or one adopts a picture in which it looks like the “real” work of the normative is done by what is *inserted* into the machinery. In the former case, there is ultimately no space for the idea of genuinely practical deployment of reason. In the latter, one gives up on the doctrine that exercise of this power is to be judged as sound or defective by referring it to the bearer’s life-form.

6 “Life” Is Said in Many Ways

How can the dilemma be avoided in the framework of Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism? The only remaining option is to reject the assumption that “naturally good” is univocal. The apparent tension between theses (1) and (2) could be resolved, if one could find a way to replace thesis (3) by a proposition along the following lines:

(3*) Ethical goodness is a form of natural goodness *sui generis*.

With respect to Geach’s observation about the attributive role of “good,” Foot insisted that “further distinctions of logical grammar” have to be

articulated in order to isolate “the category to which moral evaluation belongs” (NG 3). But the same may be true of the “logical type of evaluation” that figures in her book under the title of “judgments of natural goodness and defect”: it could turn out to be a category that contains formal or logical distinctions within it, which have to be articulated if one is to make contact with the topic of ethics. If this is right, then the theory of normativity presented in *Natural Goodness* is incomplete. It identifies the general category to which moral evaluation belongs, but fails to isolate the specific category it *is*: a formal or logical sub-specification of natural goodness.

This is how Thompson sees it. Comparing the judgments articulating the practice of promising with the natural historical judgments about subrational creatures, he writes:

One turn of the categorial framework gives us the concept of a life-form or a living nature; the other gives us the concept of ‘form of life’ or a ‘second nature’. Of course the concepts of *good* and *bad* and of *account* will shift together with the associated conception of ‘form’ or ‘nature’ and the associated type of generality and general judgment; in *this* deployment, they are specifically practical. (LA 208)

On this view, the practical character of ethical goodness is neither to be understood by appeal to a special content of some natural historical judgments about human beings nor by positing a special “end” internal to the power of reason. Rather, the very idea of a practical deployment of reason and the action guiding use “good” that belongs to it is supposed to be introduced by isolating a specific “type of generality” or “general judgment.”¹⁰ Accordingly, the mistake common to the versions of ethical naturalism considered so far is the assumption

¹⁰The passage is about the concept of a social practice, a “form of life” in Wittgenstein’s sense. But Thompson’s has a specific or restricted notion of practice in mind: the one that is relevant to moral philosophy. And he holds that “practices” in this restricted or specifically practical sense are the very elements through which our knowledge of the ethically salient of human life-form is “mediated.” See Thompson (2004), “Apprehending Human Form,” 72. Consequently, what the passage describes is, in effect, a formal sub-determination within the category of natural historical judgments.

that the relation between general and particular—life-form and living individual—remains the same when one ascends the ladder of animate being. The formal character of this relations changes and with it that “structure of derivation” underwriting judgments of natural goodness and badness. In order to understand how ethical thought fits into the theory of natural normativity one has to identify the relevant sub-determination within the category of natural historical judgments.

The source of the diagnosis and the envisioned alternative form neo-Aristotelianism is, of course, Aristotle himself. The Abstractive Model rests of the assumption that it is possible to do what Aristotle in *De Anima* rejects as “foolish”—namely: “to seek [...] a common definition which will be a definition peculiar to no actually existing thing” (*De Anima* 414b25).¹¹ On his view, it is impossible to define “life” or “soul” without considering the three different “kinds of soul”: nutritive, perceptive, and thinking. There is no intelligible notion of life over and above these ways of being alive. To understand the concept of life one has to consider their order of succession (DA 414b33). And Aristotle would maintain that the Additive Model is just another version of the same mistake in that it assumes that one can avail oneself of the idea of *telos* internal to a vital power and then apply it to the different powers in order to identify the ends and aspects of evaluation they introduce. In order to see this, it is important to notice that Aristotle describes the order of dependence between the different powers characterizing the kinds of soul in two ways.

First, there is a *vertical* dependence relation. The kinds of soul form an order of succession where each higher one contains the lower one within it (DA 414b28). A kind of creature that has the powers of perception must also have the powers of nutrition and reproduction. And a finite rational being must also have sentient powers. Since all kinds of finite living beings must have the powers of nutrition we can say that life in its most “primitive” or “bare” form is just the power of nutrition. The genus *life* thus divides into the two species: the *mere life* of plants and the *perceptive* or *sentient life* of animals. The latter divides,

¹¹In the following cited as DA.

in turn, into the subspecies *mere animals* and *rational animals*. That is what the Additive Model focuses on when producing the list of powers to be added. But Aristotle also insists on a second, a *horizontal* dependency relation between some entries on his list of vital powers. A kind of living being that has the power of perception also has the power to feel pleasure and pain and the power of desire (DA 414a32–414b15). These powers cannot be combined separately with the powers of nutrition and reproduction; they come in a pack, as it were. Nothing in the formal structure of the Additive Model explains why this should be so.

The question doesn't arise in Hursthouse's discussion, because she only focuses on the conative side of life. But her procedure of adding vital powers and correlated ends appears to allow for the possibility of sentient life without pleasure and desire. There would just be the additional power of perception and the correlated end to acutely register sensible differences. A tree with perceptive faculties, as it were. Some philosophers think this is conceivable. Aristotle denies it. And this is precisely the reason why he regards it as impossible to define the different kinds of life in terms of a list of vital powers that living things can have. There must be a further concept—the notion of “soul”—that makes it possible to determine *which* constellations of powers constitute a kind of living being. In consequence, the proper order of explanation is quite different from the one the Additive Model suggests. The latter assumes that we understand the kind of life characteristic of animals by adding further vital powers. The reverse is closer to the truth: it is through the idea of sentient soul and its distinct principle of unity that the powers characteristic of animal – perception, pleasure and desire – become intelligible as powers of a living being. There is no way to understand any of these powers without its vital relation to the others. It is only through their proper constellation or unity that they become intelligible as *vital* powers. Reflection on this horizontal dependence relation between perception, desire, and pleasure sheds light on how the vertical dependence of sentience on the powers of nutrition and reproduction is to be understood.

On reflection, it seems clear that sentient faculties can't be extra features external to the cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction. Not only would they be useless, like perception in a tree; nothing could

explain why they are maintained and reproduced through the vital activity of their bearers. Somehow, they must play a role in the life-cycle. But as long as one assumes that the powers of nutrition and reproduction remains the same when sentience is 'added', it would follow that the function of the latter is to keep a merely vegetative organism going. Intuitively, however, it is the other way around: the vegetative processes—e.g., the pumping of the blood etc.—are there to enable the animal to do the things characteristic of an animal: to perceive, desire etc.

The problem is analogous to the dilemma discussed in the last section. The present context suggests a strategy for a solution. The two horns of the dilemma may be avoided by claiming that the transition from plants to animals is a *transformation of the shape that the cycle self-maintenance and reproduction takes*. It is not that on top of maintaining and reproducing themselves, animals also do these further things: perceiving, desiring and feeling pleasure. Rather, sentience characterizes the manner in which they self-maintain and reproduce. Animals maintain themselves by eating objects they perceive and desire. And paradigmatically they reproduce through copulation governed by sexual desire. So, it is not that there is a further capacity added to the power of nutrition. Rather the capacity of self-maintenance as a whole is elevated to a higher level by unfolding its inner structure. Let's focus for a moment just on the power of nutrition or self-maintenance. In a plant, the activity of nutrition has three intrinsically related aspects. Taking in one kind of matter and separating itself from another kind of matter the plant does three things in one act. It distinguishes two kinds of matter; it treats one of them as suitable; and it pursues it—for instance, by growing toward water. In animals, these three aspects become three interrelated, but *distinct* capacities: perception, pleasure, and desire. Through this unfolding of the power of nutrition into three interrelated capacities, the object of this power changes and with it the kind of generality exhibited by the respective natural historical judgments. Very roughly speaking, it can be described in the following way.

The exercise of the power of nutrition is, Aristotle says, the act of taking in *matter* and giving it one's *form*. Its object, the nutritive, is what can be so "informed" and is, in this sense, potentially part of the living being. Where life is *mere* nutrition, its food can thus only be determined

as a certain kind of matter. One can put this as a remark on the logical grammar of the respective vital descriptions. In a natural historical description of a merely vegetative life-form, the nutritive is properly represented by mass nouns and specifications of quantity. Boston Ivy, for instance, feeds off certain amounts of *water*, *carbon dioxide*, and *light*. Its acts of feeding are represented by statements that unite the life-form concept with a verb phrase that takes a quantified mass noun as its grammatical object—to put it in an abstract schema: “The $S \phi$ -s ratio r of m .”

Where the natural historical description of a life-form exhibits the above schema, the transition from the general to the particular is, as it were, *direct* or *immediate*. On the side of the verb phrase the move from a generic description of what creatures of this kind *do* to a description of *what this one here is doing* now only involves a shift of the predicate into the progressive: “This S is ϕ -ing ratio r of m ”—for instance: “This one here *is drawing* this-and-this much water through its roots.” As the objects of the vital activity are generic there is no further content in the verb phrase that is not already contained in the description of the kind. The acts of the merely vegetative organism are, in this sense, generic activities. Determinations of time and space don’t enter into the vital description of the ongoing process, except as the instantiation of what is already fully specified in the correlated natural historical judgment: Boston Ivy grows in partial shade to full sun in a well-drained, loamy soil. In spring when the temperatures rise, it grows new reddish leaves. And that is what this specimen here is doing, now that spring has come. It is doing what healthy specimens of this kind do in this season, given that the temperatures are right and there is sufficient water, carbon dioxide, and light.

The circumstances in which this is happening enter into the vital description only insofar as they are instantiations of the general enabling conditions specified in the natural historical description of this creature’s *habitat*. What is due to the special location in which this specimen occurs (e.g., the contours of the surface it grows on, the local distribution of light, etc.) determines the unique outlook the generic activity acquires in the present case. But, strictly speaking, these details don’t belong to the content of the vital description. As far as its *vital* character is concerned, the singularities of the *here* and *now* are

accidental to the process. Reflection on the form of the object thus provides a characterization of the form of the act: as the merely nutritive is generically specified as quantities of matter, the explanation of the activity of mere nutrition looks, as it were, straight through the individual and directly to its kind.

It is different where the act of nutrition is mediated by perception, pleasure, and desire. In this case, the determinations of the *here* and *now* enter into the content of vital description of what the living individual is doing on an occasion. As the concrete activity is thus particularized, the relation between the natural historical description of the kind and the vital description of an ongoing act of one of its exemplar takes on a different shape. Whereas the nutritive process of a merely vegetative organism is represented by a verb phrase that takes a quantified mass noun as its object, the range of verb phrases contained in the vital descriptions of what a particular European Wildcat is doing typically include representations of acting on or in reaction to individual objects that the description picks out demonstratively: “This *S* is hunting *this* mouse”—in the abstract schema: “This *S* is ϕ -ing this *o*.” If there is a correlated natural historical description that connects the life-form term “*S*” generically with the activity verb “ ϕ ,” which doesn’t always need to be the case, it will, obviously, not include the demonstrative phrase “this *o*.” The natural historical judgment is properly expressed by using a *sortal-variable*: “The *S* ϕ -s an *o*.” The verb phrase has, as Matthew Boyle put it, an *open place* that in the correlated vital description will be filled with an expression referring to a particular (Boyle 2012, 412).¹² In the shift from the generic to the progressive, the verb phrase thus acquires more determinate content that depends on the exemplar’s locking onto *this o* rather than that one. The relation between the general and the particular is thus “mediated” by something that is particular to this exemplar. Rather than being an immediate instantiation of a generic activity type, the cat’s movement is an

¹²Of course, this is just an illustration. No doubt, there are primitive forms of animal life where the nutritive will be represented in mass nouns. Still, the exercise of the nutritive power is particularized in that it is mediated by perception of what is here and now. To properly articulate this point more would have to be said than I do here.

actualization of a schema for individual acts: by locking onto and going after this mouse the cat gives the activity called “hunting a mouse” the unique shape it has in the present case. This transformation of the logical relation between the life-form and its bearers is what gives the questions “Why?,” “How?,” and “What for?” that special sense that has only application to the specifically animal activity.

For the present purposes, the crucial point is the consequence this way of describing the contrast between plants and animals has for the question how to the logical relation between the genus-concept *organism* and its two subordinate species concepts *mere organism* and *sentient organism* is to be conceived. According to the model just sketched, it is not, as the Abstractive Model assumes, the relation between an abstract concept and its subordinated concepts where each species is differentiated by a distinct property so that the subordinated concepts are only related to each other insofar as they are subordinated under the genus. Nor are we dealing, as the Additive Model suggests, with a genus-concept that figures as the name for an ordered series of concepts where each successor includes a further predicate while that to which it was attached retains the same meaning. Rather, attaching the differentiating term “sentient” to the genus term “organism” or “living being” *transforms* the meaning of the latter. What being alive or a self-maintaining individual comes to takes a different shape. That is to say, it is not that animals have different capacities and do different things; the terms “having”, “doing” and, above all, “being an individual” shifts into a different category. And since the concept of *mere* life is nothing but the idea of the cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction, the latter is that which is transformed in this way. Accordingly, the idea of an animal is the idea of a form of self-maintenance and reproduction *sui generis*. The term “sentient” or “animal” refers to a formally distinct principle of the unity of a life-cycle. Let’s call this the Transformative Model of the animal difference.¹³

¹³For a more detailed articulation of the transformative model see Boyle (2012), “Essentially Rational Animals”; Wolfram Gobsch, “Kants Stufenleiter der Vorstellungsarten,” *MS*; and my (2013), “Life and Mind.”

If the transition from merely sentient or animal life to practically self-conscious life can be treated in an analogous manner, then the dilemma arising from the question how practical reason is related to the cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction would dissolve. Will and practical reason would not appear as just two more faculties, on a par with sight and hearing. Rather than serving a function in the life-cycle, they would determine the specific kind or form of 'unity' that a life-cycle has on this stratum of animate being. That is the strategy Thompson proposes. There appears to be a puzzle about how it can be true that the standard of evaluation in 'good disposition of the will', just as the standard for 'good vision' when said of a cat, is provided by the respective biological species concept, even though acts of the will and practical reason belong to "quite different categories" than the acts of mere sensibility. The perceived tension must be resolvable, Thompson suggests. For, "sensibility seems to differ just as radically from the sub-psychical, merely vegetative aspects of life." (LA, 29) Once one notices that there is already a categorial shift within subrational nature and the correlated kinds of natural goodness, the air of paradox surrounding the thesis that ethical goodness is a kind of natural goodness *sui generis* is supposed to dissolve. That is to say, the model for understanding the character of the transition to practically self-conscious life is supposed to be provided by reflection on the transition from mere or merely vegetative life to sentient life.

Before turning in the next section to the details of Thompson's proposal for the treatment of the idea of practically self-conscious life let's consider the conditions of adequacy that this kind of account has to meet. Note that the Transformative Model can be taken in two ways. One is, as it were, philosophically more ambitious than the other. Consider again the transition from mere to sentient life. The transformative thesis is that the presence of the sentient powers changes what it means to be a living individual, a self-maintainer, and reproducer. The less ambitious or modest version of the Transformative Model approaches this thesis, as it were, from above—that is to say, from our intuitive understanding of sentient powers like perception and desire. That is how I proceeded in my illustration of the way in which sentience transforms the shape that the power of nutrition takes. The more

ambitious version of the Transformative Model would insist that this can only count as a preliminary statement of the view. For, it presupposes that we already understand the sense in which perception is a vital power. The whole point of Aristotle's thesis of the horizontal dependency relations between perception, pleasure, and desire was that we have no philosophical understanding of any of these powers without articulating their unity. And that 'unity' is the specific shape that the cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction takes in a life in which they have a place. It follows that any grasp we can have of that special sense that the question 'Why?' takes on when it is applied to specifically animal movement must come, as it were, from below. It must be developed out of the reflection on self-maintenance and reproduction. In a fully developed transformative account of the animal difference, the very idea of sentience and the concepts of the specific vital powers it involves—such as perception, pleasure, and desire—would have to be defined in terms of the distinct shape of the cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction. Ethical naturalism, I want to suggest, depends on the viability of this more ambitious rendering of the Transformative Model. That this is so can be seen by considering the difficulties Thompson's proposal faces.

7 Practical Knowledge of the Human Form of Life

Whether thesis (3*) is available depends, of course, on how exactly one understands thesis (1) and thesis (2). The potential trouble comes to the surface when one takes a closer look at how Thompson envisions the introduction of the special subcategory of natural historical judgments. It is supposed to be defined by reflection on the special knowledge we have of the human life-form. The consideration proceeds in two steps.

The first is an argument against the assumption that all of our knowledge of the human life-form rests on observation. That *some* natural historical facts about the human form are known by us non-observationally can already be seen, Thompson suggests, when one considers the act of thinking. It is a self-conscious act such that the who thinks that *p* is in position to say 'I think that *p*.' The ascription of such act to a person entails that

this person knows that she herself or she* thinks that *p*. Now, as we have seen in Section 2, it is an implication of Thompson's treatment of about the logical grammar of "vital feature" or "vital activity" that the ascription of such acts to an individual is implicitly mediated by one's conception of the role they play in its life-form. But thinking, Thompson maintains, is a vital activity. Consequently, the ascription to an individual of acts of thought is also implicitly mediated by a conception of the place the power of thought has in its life-form. It follows that in knowing that I think that *p*, I have some knowledge of the life-form I bear – namely: that the power of thinking is one of its features. So, "self-consciousness is always implicitly form-consciousness" (Thompson 2004, 68). For me, the concept of the human life-form is not an empirical concept of a *given* biological species; it is the "first life-form concept."

This argument is supposed to prepare a second step that articulates the idea of the ethical. The insight that my life-form can be the object of reflexive knowledge removes the main impediment for a development of ethical naturalism: namely, the assumption that our knowledge of the human life-form is generally empirical. Once that assumption is gone, there seems to be space for idea of a further kind of knowledge of my form—one that is practical and thus action guiding. Thompson writes:

[...] what is to be said against the idea that we might have another kind of practical knowledge—ethical knowledge, if you like—of certain norms that attach to us as bearers of a particular life form characterized by practical reason? As my thinking representation of what I am doing intentionally is an aspect of what this representation itself is about, so this latter cognition will be an aspect of the life characteristic of the developed human subject and will characteristically mediate her practical operations. Such cognition goes to constitute the form of life in question as one in which the things cognized are true. (Thompson 2004, 72)

If this thought can be made available within the naturalist framework, then there is no problem about how the idea that acts of will and practical reason belong to different categories than those of mere sensibility can be compatible with the thesis that here too the standard of goodness and badness is provided by the life-form of which the subject is an

exemplar. Just as in the transition from the mere to the sentient organism, the logical concept of life is supposed to undergo a categorical shift where the question “How should I live?” has a place in the respective way of being alive. Natural goodness was defined by the relation between a living individual and its life-form. When practical reason enters the scene, the formal character of this relation between the general and the particular, the life-form and its exemplars, changes. Such life is lived according to that knowledge of how to live that Aristotle calls “practical wisdom.” It unfolds, as it were, through an apprehension of its form. The manifestation or realization of the general in the particular thus involves that peculiar *turning onto itself* marked by the reflexive contained in Aquinas’ talk of taking the *end as end*. That is what is supposed to give the “Aristotelian necessity” the special character of *ethical necessity* and specify this kind of *natural* goodness as *ethical* goodness.

The question is, of course, whether this thought can be available within the naturalist framework. If moral evaluation is to be of the same “logical type” as evaluation in the domain of the botanical and the zoological, the life-form relativity that characterizes natural goodness has to carry over into the domain of the ethical. In order to make space for this thought, Thompson avails himself of Marx’ talk of “species being” or “*Gattungswesen*.” As Thompson uses the term, it signifies not the human life-form, *homo sapiens*, but rather the general category of practically self-conscious life. Other concrete life-forms like *homo sapiens* could exhibit or realize it: “*Gattungswesen* expresses a formal characteristic of certain possible *Gattungen* or life-forms or the sorts of ‘unity’ that might get expressed in a bit of natural history.”¹⁴ Each of them comes with its own standards. Allowing for this possibility, Thompson maintains, is compatible with the idea that we have practical knowledge of our life-form.

According to Thompson’s own standards, his remarks on the matter are to be read as programmatic. They are not supposed to present the final account; they mark the framework for such an approach. My question is how a fully developed execution would have to look like. We get

¹⁴Thompson (2013).

a clearer picture by considering the difficulties it has to overcome. Both of the two steps just mentioned have to face an objection. In each case, it turns out that responding to it requires what I described at the end of the last section as the ambitious rendering of the Transformative Model. In the arguments just sketched Thompson approaches the issue, as it were, from above: from our intuitive grasp of the concepts of thought and self-consciousness. But this can only be a preliminary statement of the view. For, it presupposes that we already understand the sense in which thinking, knowing, and reasoning are 'vital' activities. But that is precisely where the bone of contention lies. Without further elucidation, the argument that is supposed to introduce the idea of non-observational knowledge of the human life-form will look like a *petitio principii*. A philosopher might grant that thinking is a 'vital' activity, but deny that the sense of 'living' relevant here is the one that is intrinsically connected with the idea of a cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction such that in knowing what I think I have knowledge of a feature of the material or biological species of which I am a bearer. After all, Aristotle himself assigns a special status to the power of thought. Whereas he takes it to be inconceivable for there to be a creature that has sentient powers without having the powers of nutrition and reproduction, he doesn't make the analogous claim about the power of thought. No doubt, the gods are "alive." But their only vital activity is "contemplation." One might conclude that the power of reason is not a natural power even when it occurs in a specific kind of animal. That was Kant's conclusion. To rule it out, more would have to be said than Thompson does. In a fully developed ethical naturalism, the concepts thinking, reasoning, knowledge, and self-consciousness can't enter, as it were, from the side as something we already understand. They have to be developed out of reflection on the specific shape that the cycle of self-maintenance and reproduction takes on this stratum of animate being.

This holds in particular for the idea of specifically practical knowledge that carries all the weight in Thompson's proposal. There is a potential ambiguity when one applies the notion of practical knowledge to the idea of a life-form. Thompson takes the notion from Anscombe's *Intention* where it is introduced by appeal to Aquinas' formula that such knowledge is the "cause of what it understands." In the context

of *Intention*, Anscombe defines the object of practical knowledge as the subject's own intentional action on a particular occasion. That is what is caused and understood by the knowledge. So, when I have this kind of knowledge, what I know is *what I am doing intentionally*. But how are we to read the formula when it is deployed to explain the idea of practically self-conscious life? There are two options for what might figure as the object of this knowledge. To begin with, of course, the conduct of the knowing subject: acting or living well. Accordingly, what is caused and understood is articulated in a statement with habitual rather than progressive aspect: when I have this kind of practical knowledge, what I know is *what I do*. However, there is another possibility. If the cognition is articulated by a special kind of natural historical judgment, then it would seem that its object—what is caused and understood—must be, in a sense, the human life-form itself. In the passage quoted above, Thompson appears to express both claims. For, he says that the cognition “mediates” the “practical operations” of its subject—that is, her action and conduct. But he also says that such “cognition goes to constitute the form of life in question as one in which the things cognized are true.” And it looks like he has to say this, if the account is to meet McDowell's requirement that morality can't be grounded in facts about human nature that comes to practical reason, as it were, from the outside. In a *Gattungswesen*, the unity of the activities characteristic of the life-form must be caused and understood by the practical knowledge of its exemplars.

Of course, human practical knowledge, if there is such a thing, is surely not creation. We didn't “make” this biological species of unfeathered bipeds. The scope of the claim must be restricted to the practical aspects of life—the unity of vital activities that are in the realm of choice and habituation. Still, it is not easy to see how the claim can be squared with the thesis that is supposed to secure that ethical goodness belongs to the category of natural goodness. For the latter claim seems to introduce contingency into the very object of the purported practical cognition. This comes out in a rhetorical question through which Thompson initially presents the doctrine of ethical naturalism:

[...] if something in the way of justice, for example, is perchance a part of the life characteristic of the specifically human kind [...] then won't its presence in a person's thinking be among the marks of sound practical reason that are associated with our kind – associated, that is, with *what we are*, taken in a certain life-related sense? (LA 30)

On this view, the thesis that justice is a matter of natural goodness and not of a norm internal to the abstract idea of a rational or autonomous agent implies that it's being a feature of the human life-form is as *accidental* or *contingent* as the fact that humans have two legs. Just as one may imagine rational animals with six legs, it is supposed to not be ruled out that there could be forms of practically self-conscious life in which justice has no place. Since it is part of our life, it figures a standard of soundness for our deliberation and action. But it could have been otherwise. Human life could have taken a quite different shape so that justice would not have been part of practical wisdom.

As Thompson conceives it, the general category of *Gattungswesen* leaves open whether such things as justice will be part of every concrete life-form that realizes it. Though false with respect to the human life-form, Hobbes' or Nietzsche's views could be true of practically self-conscious Martians. Foot would agree (NG 114). Both, Foot and Thompson, take this to be an implication of the life-form relativity of natural goodness. Accordingly, it is part of ethical naturalism, as they conceive it, that there is a gulf between meta-ethics and ethics. As Thompson puts it with the view to Foot, there is a strict division between the "formal" and the "substantive" part of the ethical theory presented in *Natural Goodness*. The former determines the grammar of 'ethically good', the latter makes substantives claim about the human life-form. Foot's thesis that justice is a norm for us cannot be derived from reflection on the general category of practically self-conscious life. It is an articulation of the knowledge she has as a bearer of the specifically human *Gattungswesen*. In Foot's *Natural Goodness* this gulf between meta-ethics and ethics can seem unproblematic, since the practical character of this knowledge is obscured. But once ethical knowledge is defined as knowledge that is the cause of what understands, the assumed strict division between the "formal" and "substantive" level of

ethical naturalism becomes problematic. If it is really “perchance” that justice is part of the life-form we bear, how can the natural historical unity characterized by justice be the object of our knowledge that is the cause of what it understands? It seems to me that one cannot think both, that x is a contingent feature of our kind and that x is the product of the sublime form of cognition that constitutes the reality of its object. One might try to resolve the tension by restricting the scope of practical knowledge to the realization of x in individual conduct. But then we seem to be back at our dilemma: If one assumes that the ‘unity’ whose cognition guides one’s conduct is contingent, then it seems that the ultimate ends are, in that sense, given to practical reason from nature. If, on the other hand, one insists that ‘unity’ is constituted by practical cognition, then it looks like one denies the very feature that was supposed secure, that ethical goodness is a kind of natural goodness.

A solution might come from Marx’s own conception of a “species being” or *Gattungswesen*. It differs in an important respect from Thompson’s conception. According to the later, this category leaves open whether such things as justice will be part of every concrete life-forms that realize it. The young Marx, by contrast, thought that one can determine the form of self-maintenance and reproduction characteristic of the very idea of practically self-conscious life. Just as Aristotle holds that *mere life* must include the two powers of nutrition and reproduction and *sentient life* the triad of perception, pleasure, and desire, the young Marx maintains that *practically self-conscious life* constitutively excludes that the wills of its multiple exemplars are inevitably in contradiction with each other. In this account, Hobbesianism is ruled out by reflection on the general category of a *Gattungswesen*. Ethical goodness may still be described as life-form relative, but the substantive ‘unity’ exhibited by a life-form that belongs to this category is not contingent. In consequence, its bearer’s knowledge of that unity can be wholly practical. Here, I want to leave open whether Marx’s project is viable. My aim was only to argue that this is the shape that a fully developed neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism would have to take. If this is right, then the program is much more ambitious than commonly assumed.

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Traditional Naturalism

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In *Natural Goodness*, Philippa Foot (2001) repeatedly connects facts about human *needs* with facts about human goodness, or virtue. As a result, both proponents and critics of her view tend to treat this connection as the core naturalist thesis upon which her theory principally rests, with proponents asserting and critics denying that human needs can indeed ground a substantive account of the virtues and of right action. John McDowell, for example, in his preemptive criticism of Foot's naturalism, takes needs-based naturalism as his target. And John Hacker-Wright, in a series of papers aimed at clarifying and vindicating Foot's approach, also takes as his starting point the connection between virtues and needs (Cf. Foot 2001; McDowell 1995; Hacker-Wright 2009, 2012, 2013).

In addition to her talk of what humans *need*, however, Foot also attributes a robustly objective, Aristotelian conception of practical rationality to human beings, according to which “there is no criterion for practical rationality that is not *derived from* that of goodness of the will” (11) and “no one can act with full practical rationality in pursuit

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of a bad end” (14). Foot’s conception of practical reason is at least as important to her view as is her talk of needs: she presents it as central both to her conception of human goodness and to her argument in support of an objective account of morality and moral evaluation (10–14, 53, 57–65). The question therefore arises: what is the real theoretical foundation of Foot’s argument for the objectivity of morality? Are the standards for practical wisdom and thus for virtue set by the fact that humans are *by nature* practically rational, according to some specific conception of practical rationality? Or is it rather that humans are *by nature* constituted so as to need certain virtues in order to attain certain objective human goods, and thus we are rationally obliged to pursue those virtues? And if both theses contribute to the case for morality’s objectivity, how are they related?

I believe that Foot herself was not entirely clear on the answer to these questions in *Natural Goodness*. Consequently, although I will briefly present the textual basis for attributing each thesis to Foot, in what follows my aim will not be primarily interpretive. Instead I will focus directly on the question: *which is the better view?* Is the objectivity of morality best grounded in an objective theory of practical reason and practical wisdom, or is it rather to be explained by a necessary connection between human needs and the virtues? I opt for the former view, proposing a form of Aristotelian ethical naturalism which I refer to as “traditional naturalism” because it is based on what Gavin Lawrence (1995) calls a “traditional conception” of practical rationality. Traditional naturalism is very much in the spirit of Foot’s view. But Foot’s account of natural goodness and defect depends on a conception of natural normativity that she adopts (with some qualifications) from Michael Thompson (1995), and I argue that this conception itself somewhat misunderstands the normative implications of species-facts for individual members of the species. For this reason, Foot’s needs-based naturalism does suffer from what John McDowell calls a “structural problem” (1995, 155). Accordingly, I propose an amended account of the logic of natural normativity—and hence of the conception of natural goodness and defect—which is at the heart of Foot’s account. This change allows traditional naturalism to explain the objectivity of ethical norms and practical wisdom *without* appealing to a needs-based notion of natural

goodness and defect. At the same time, however, it makes traditional naturalism far more circumspect than needs-based naturalism in its substantive characterization of “the practicable good” (Aristotle 2002, 100). That is, unlike Foot’s view, traditional naturalism does not claim that certain particular dispositions of the human will are virtues.¹ Whether this is a problem, of course, depends upon whether it was appropriate to hope for ethical naturalism to deliver this result.

1 Practical Reason and Needs in *Natural Goodness*

Let us begin with a brief overview of Lawrence’s “traditional conception” of practical reason. The view consists of four theses. In his words, they are:

(T1) *The Formal Object, and Point, of Practical Rationality.* The central, or defining, question of practical reason is: “what should I do?” Its formal answer I take to be: “do what is best” or “act well”. To put this another way. The formal and final object of practical reasoning is the practicable good: it is this that makes practical reasoning what it is, and reveals what its point is.

(T2) *The Objectivity of Good.* One cannot call just anything good or bad, worth pursuing or not, and make sense. “Thin” predicates just as much as “thick” ones are rule-governed. And what is the good that the agent should achieve, or the bad he should avoid, is determined by the facts of human nature and the world we live in, and the situations in which the individual is placed.

¹Here traditional naturalism is inspired by Lawrence’s views on human nature and human virtue in a further respect. In “The Function of the Function Argument” Lawrence (2001) argues that the function argument is not intended to provide a substantive specification of human excellence and the human good, but is rather “relatively formal, with a minimum of contentious commitment. Yet it is not so formal as to be taking the project nowhere: it draws out and articulates certain—admittedly very general—facts about human life, yet ones that are crucial in establishing a general frame, or skeleton of an answer” (445). This is how I understand the contribution of traditional naturalism. I take it to provide the general frame of an answer to the question of the objectivity, and basis in natural fact, of practical wisdom; as opposed to yielding a substantive specification of practical wisdom.

(T3) *The Extension of Good*. What the facts determine as good and bad include what ends are good and bad for the agent to pursue or avoid, as well as what means, and thus ends too can be rationally assessed. (130–1)

(T1)–(T3) are the heart of the traditional conception of practical reason. They tell us, in a nutshell, that practical reason is *for* figuring out, as a matter of fact, what it is best to do and how it is best to go about doing it. In addition, Lawrence gives us (T4), which elaborates on the objectivity of the good that is spelled out in (T2). (T4) is, I believe, best thought of as a sort of bridge between, on the one hand, the purely structural or formal elements of the traditional conception (as expressed by the first three theses), and, on the other hand, a more substantive specification of the practicable good and thus of the standards for practical wisdom.

(T4) *The criteria for the determination of good and bad action*. What ends and means are good or bad depends on what sorts of ends and means are good generally—that is, on human goods and bads—and on the particular features of the situation and the agent, diachronic as well as synchronic. (132–3)

In *Natural Goodness*, Foot does not endorse a traditional conception under that description. But her commitment to (T2)–(T4) is unambiguous: regarding (T2), the fundamental burden of her argument in *Natural Goodness* is to establish “an objective theory of moral evaluation” (Foot, 53) based on “the facts of human nature and the world we live in” (Lawrence, 130). Regarding (T3), she says explicitly that “no one can act with full practical rationality in pursuit of a bad end” (14) and she says that the human ability to “go for *what [we] see as good*” (56) is what our practical rationality consists in. And regarding (T4), it is clear that Foot sees human goods and bads as the difference maker: “the grounding of a moral argument is ultimately in facts about human life ... [I]t is obvious that there are objective, factual evaluations of such things as human sight, hearing, memory, and concentration, based on

the life form of our own species. Why, then, does it seem so monstrous a suggestion that the evaluation of the human will should be determined by facts about the nature of human beings and the life of our own species?" (Foot, 24).

I believe that Foot is also committed to the all-important (T1); the view that the practicable good is the final and formal object of practical reason. But here, things are somewhat less clear. Foot does say, as previously mentioned, that "there is no criterion for practical rationality that is not *derived from* that of goodness of the will" (11). (Presumably what goodness of the will consists in will be determined by the content of (T4), which gives the substantive specification of the practicable good.) And she explicitly rejects desire- and self-interest-based theories of practical reason. And yet in discussing practical rationality (Chapter Four), she also says that we ought to see *goodness* as "setting a necessary condition of practical rationality and therefore as at least a part-determinant of the thing itself" (63), and this is a claim that falls well short of treating the good as *the* final and formal object of practical reason.

It may be that, in spite of herself, Foot still clings to some residual elements of a desire- or self interest-based theory of practical reason, and therefore sees an act's goodness as "on a par with" such considerations (11). But the idea that good is a "part-determinant" of practical rationality can also be reconciled with Foot's earlier, more categorical statement, and thus with (T1), by supposing that in the later passage Foot means to refer to a narrower sense of specifically *moral* goodness, whereas in the first passage she refers to the practicable good in general. If so, then moral goodness is one part of the practicable good, and it is not unreasonable to attribute a traditional conception of practical reason to Foot, even though her commitment to (T1) is not as clear-cut as one might like.

If Foot does indeed subscribe to (something like) a traditional conception of practical reason, then she needs an argument in support of (T2), the objectivity of the practicable good. This brings us to her views on human needs. Foot is usually understood to be arguing that a connection between human needs and human virtue is what makes morality objective. In a crucial passage she says,

If we ask whether [Peter] Geach was right to say that human beings need virtues as bees need stings, the answer is surely that he was. Men and women need to be industrious and tenacious of purpose not only so as to be able to house, clothe, and feed themselves, but also to pursue human ends having to do with love and friendship. They need the ability to form family ties, friendships, and special relations with neighbors. They also need codes of conduct. And how could they have all these things without virtues such as loyalty, fairness, kindness, and in certain circumstances obedience? Why then should there be surprise at the suggestion that the status of certain dispositions as virtues should be determined by quite general facts about human beings? (44–5)

Here Foot certainly seems to be suggesting that moral standards are objective because they arise from ordinary empirical facts about what humans *need* in order for their lives to go well. The kind of necessity that Foot relies on here is “Aristotelian” in a sense described by Elizabeth Anscombe: it is “that which is necessary because and insofar as good hangs on it” (Foot, 15).² Thus humans ought to be loyal (need to be loyal; have to be loyal) because basic human goods like friendship and security are not, in practice, attainable without loyalty.

There are a few things to note about this basic view. First, the goods mentioned (e.g., friendship and security) are meant to be objective, not subjective goods; these are things humans really do *need* as a matter of empirical fact in order to be happy and to flourish, whether or not we recognize or desire the good in those things. Their objectivity is supposed to be established by facts about the human form of life. Thus the Aristotelian notion of necessity serves to establish both the good of (e.g.) friendship, and its inviolable connection with the virtue of loyalty. Second, the notion of necessity at work here covers both constitutive and instrumental relationships between virtue and the human good. Thus mutual loyalty may be a *means* to security, but it arguably partially *constitutes* the good of true friendship. Third, the “ought” here

²See Anscombe (1969). Cf. McDowell (1995) and see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Δ.5 1015a23–25 (Barnes 1984) for the remark in question.

is an “ought” of practical rationality; the idea is to show that the wise course of action for a human being is to be loyal and act accordingly. The wise or fully rational person thus understands two things that a less than fully rational person does not: (a) the objective good for human beings of things like friendship and security and (b) the practically necessary connection between (e.g.) loyalty and these goods.

If this argument holds up, then it demonstrates the rationality of morality by establishing a necessary connection (1) between virtue and objective human goods and (2) between objective human goods and flourishing, or true happiness. And it does so *whether or not one holds a traditional conception of practical reason*. Radically reductive desire-based models of practical “reason”—such as Bernard Williams’ “sub-Humean model” (1981) or Lawrence’s “no theory” (1995)—are incompatible with the notion that an objective good constrains rational choice. But even someone who believes that self-interest determines practical rationality could accept the above argument. In accepting it, they would be accepting that they must be virtuous in order to realize their own interests. They would accept, that is, both (a) that friendship and security are in their interests and (b) that the only way to obtain these things is to be loyal. Construed this way, the passage above makes an argument for the rationality of morality that is largely independent of one’s conception of practical reason.

2 McDowell’s Objection to Needs-Based Naturalism and a Reply

Now let us turn to consider Foot’s account of natural normativity, beginning with John McDowell’s “structural” objection to needs-based naturalism. McDowell’s objection is compromised as such by its own structural problem, but it nonetheless illuminates the logic of natural normativity and the place of rationality in human nature. The objection is based on what McDowell calls the “logical impotence” of species-characterizations such as “humans need loyalty in order to have basic human goods like friendship and security” (155).

McDowell explains his objection with the help of a thought experiment about a group of wolves who acquire reason:

Suppose some wolves acquire reason. ... What the wolves acquire is the power of speech, the power of giving expression to conceptual capacities that are rationally interlinked in ways reflected by what it makes sense to give as a reason for what. (151)

McDowell is interested in a parallel between the claim that “human beings need the virtues if their life is to go well” and the claim that “wolves need a certain sort of cooperativeness if their life is to go well” (151). Let us grant that rational wolves, like nonrational wolves, really do *need* cooperativeness if their lives are to go well. Still, unlike a nonrational wolf, a wolf with rational capacities is “able to let its mind roam over possibilities of behavior other than what comes naturally to wolves. ... [I]t can step back from the natural impulse [to cooperate] and direct critical scrutiny at it” (152–3). And the rational wolves’ capacity to “step back” disrupts the needs-based naturalist argument given above, in two places.

First, a reflective wolf might sometimes perceive that he really does *not* need to be cooperative, here and now, to secure a good that is typically unobtainable without cooperation, for the species. He might, for example, sometimes be able to “idle through the hunt but still grab his share of the prey” (153). Second, even when an individual rational wolf *does* happen to need what his species typically needs, he only needs it in order to obtain something that is a good *for the species* (e.g., eating prey). And upon reflection some rational wolves might spurn the very goal of having a good lupine life. They might opt instead for vegetarianism, the leisure that comes with the confines of a petting zoo, or the existential authenticity of suicide, taking themselves to be choosing wisely in so doing. If so, they will be unmoved by the fact that they cannot get what is good *for wolves* by pursuing the unnatural course of action they have chosen, since they take what is not natural to constitute the practicable good.

The analogy to human beings is this. From the fact that, as a species, wolves need to hunt cooperatively in order for their lives to go

well, it doesn't follow that a given individual wolf has that typical lupine need, or that he values the life of lupine wellbeing. In the same way, for humans there may well be a *species-level* relationship of necessity between, say, loyalty and stable relationships with others. But it doesn't follow that a given individual is constrained by that typical human necessity, or that she has reason to value the stable relationships that are undisputedly part of a good *human* life. In short, needs-based naturalism assumes that what is true of the species will also always be true of all individual members of the species. And this is notoriously (*and naturally*) not the case. From the fact that humans have 32 teeth it doesn't follow that I have 32 teeth, from the fact that humans reproduce sexually it doesn't follow that I have or will or can reproduce sexually; from the fact that humans need loyalty in order to have security it doesn't follow that I need to be loyal in order to be secure.

None of this would matter, of course, if the individuals in question couldn't understand these facts and their practical significance. But as rational animals, we can understand these things. As McDowell says, "With the onset of reason ... the nature of the species abdicates from a previously unquestionable authority over the life of the individual animal" (154). And the problem, he concludes, is structural: "as soon as we conceive nature in a way that makes it begin to seem sensible to look there for a grounding for the rationality of virtuous behavior, the supposed grounding is in trouble from the logical impotence of 'Aristotelian categoricals'. Reason enable a deliberating agent to step back from *anything* that might be a candidate to ground its putative requirements", including facts about the good of one's species (155).

It matters for Aristotelian naturalism's conception of natural normativity that what is true of the human kind is not thereby always true of individual human beings. And of course, rationality allows us to appreciate, and act in the light of, such eventualities. In these respects, McDowell's objection focuses our attention in the right place: namely, on the logic of natural normativity and the role of human rationality in a naturalist ethics. Nonetheless, his objection to needs-based naturalism itself suffers from a structural problem. McDowell imagines a group of wolves who *acquire* reason, in a way that is superimposed upon their nature. But it is indisputably human nature *to be rational*. Our rational

capacities—broadly construed to include various sorts of conceptual and agential capacities—are an integral, organic part of what we are and how we live. And if it is human nature to be rational, then human nature and human reason are inseparable and cannot be pitted against one another, any more than human nature and human warm-bloodedness can be separated. It therefore makes no sense to say that reason is acquired, introduced, or superimposed upon human nature, and it makes no sense to talk of human nature “abdicating” its authority over the life of the species in the face of reason. The predicament of the reasoning wolf is thus dis-analogous to the human condition with respect to the very thing under discussion: namely, how our rationality relates to what it is in our nature to do.

Let us reconsider the thought experiment in light of this point. If the case of the rational wolves is to have any bearing by analogy on what is the case for human beings, then we must imagine rational wolves whose rationality is organic, not artificial or alienated from the wolves’ nature. And once rationality is part of our conception of the rational wolves’ nature, then the answer to the question of what it is natural for rational wolves to do cannot be merely that they ought to invariably cooperate in the hunt *as if they were doing so instinctually*. To do so would be most *unnatural* for them, though it would be perfectly natural for nonrational wolves. Instead, the answer to the question of what it is natural for the rational wolves to do must be something like, “do whatever makes sense for a reason-possessing wolf to do in this deliberative context”. But with this correction to our conception of his nature, when McDowell’s wolf steps back, adopts a critical stance, and wonders why he should do what comes naturally to wolves, the question should strike us very differently. The question amounts to something like, “Why should I pursue what deliberation tells me is the best course of action?” And the answer to *that* question is something like, “Because that’s the course of action that you have, to the best of your ability and hopefully correctly, identified as best”.

McDowell suggests that reason “enables a deliberating agent to step back from *anything* that might be a candidate to ground its putative requirements” (155). But reason does not allow a deliberating agent to step back from reason itself, or from *reasons* themselves, without

violating the norms of reason. Reason does not allow a deliberating agent to be indifferent to justification, while still laying claim to rationality. So the fact that the wolves in McDowell's thought experiment are rational does not show that claims about rational-lupine nature do not bear on what individual rational wolves ought (rationally) to do. Rather, the fact that the wolves are rational is a particularly relevant fact *about* their nature, which affects the content of any reasonable account of what such wolves must do in order to be acting well. And the same is true of human beings.

3 The Logic of Natural Normativity

McDowell's decidedly un-naturalist conception of rationality prevents his analogy from establishing the intended conclusion. At the same time, it focuses attention on the fact that ethical naturalism, if it deserves the name, must construe reason itself as a natural phenomenon that happens to be a characteristic capacity of our species. Traditional naturalism does just this.

To appreciate the significance of human practical rationality in traditional naturalism, we need first to clarify the ways in which facts about our species do (and do not) have normative implications for individuals. Let us begin, then, by revisiting the supposed "logical impotence" of Aristotelian categorical statements. It is true, as Anscombe and others have observed, that you can't treat characterizations of kinds as if they were universal generalizations (Anscombe 1958; Thompson 1995; McDowell 1995; Foot 2001). But to call this a logical *impotence* is a bit like saying that the statement "Some birds lay eggs" is logically impotent because you cannot conclude from it that if X is a bird, X lays eggs. Existential and universal quantifications have their own distinctive logical properties, and the same is true of kind-characterizations. Aristotelian categoricals are not logically impotent; rather, their distinctive logical implications are *normative*. They are not, however, normative in quite the way that Foot, following Thompson, takes them to be.

Aristotelian categoricals like "Wolves hunt cooperatively" or "Humans are social animals" attribute characteristics to kinds of living

things—humans, wolves, etc. At the same time, in virtue of so doing, they express norms for individual members of the kind they name. As Foot puts it, “evaluation of a living thing in its own right ... is possible where there is intersection of two types of propositions: on the one hand, Aristotelian categoricals (life-form descriptions relating to the species), and on the other, propositions about particular individuals that are the subject of evaluation” (33). Thus, for example, if we know that Kapu is a wolf and that wolves hunt cooperatively, then we know that Kapu *ought* to hunt cooperatively (but that he does not necessarily do so). And if we know that Anna is human and that humans are bipedal, then we know that Anna *ought* to have two legs (but that she does not necessarily have two). And so on, for any characteristic that can justifiably be predicated of a kind, and any individual who can justifiably be counted as a member or instance of that kind.³

Now, it may seem that this is all we need to know in order to draw the conclusion that Foot draws: namely, that what we have here is a straightforward natural-fact-based theory of goodness and defect. For Foot, deviation from any functionally significant characteristic of one’s species is intrinsically a kind of natural defect, and characteristic-instantiation is excellence: “By the application of these norms to an individual member of the relevant species it [is] judged to be as it should be or, by contrast, to a lesser or greater degree defective” (34). On her view, then, if Kapu hunts cooperatively he is good *qua* wolf, and if he does not hunt cooperatively then “*ipso facto* ... there is something wrong” with him; he is “*ipso facto* defective” (35, 39). And if Anna has two legs she is good *qua* human; otherwise she is “defective” as such.

But these clean evaluative conclusions are too quick and too simple. To see why, the first step is to appreciate just how modest the normative implications of these kinds of inferences really are. We can start by noting that neither of the “oughts” in the examples above are *practically* normative. The implication is not that Kapu ought to hunt cooperatively

³Not all generic sentences about kinds have the kind of normative implications I am describing here. Thus I am using the word “characteristic” in a somewhat technical sense that deserves more explanation. See Gehrman (forthcoming). Kapu is the name of the wolf in the children’s novel *Julie of the Wolves*, by Jean Craighead George.

in order to be a virtuous (or rational) wolf, or that Anna ought to have two legs in order to be a virtuous (or rational) human. Rather, the normative implications of species-characterizations for individual members of that species are *very* strictly circumscribed by the content of the characterization itself. “Humans are bipedal” gives an anatomical norm, whereas “Wolves hunt cooperatively” gives a behavioral norm. Thus the correct conclusion to draw regarding Kapu the wolf is not the global evaluation “Kapu ought to hunt cooperatively in order to be virtuous or excellent” but the narrower “Kapu ought to hunt cooperatively in order to procure food in the collaborative fashion characteristic of his kind”. And regarding Anna the human, the correct conclusion to draw is not “Anna ought to have two legs in order to exemplify natural goodness” but rather “Anna ought to have two legs in order to have the number of lower limbs that is characteristic of her kind”.

The narrowness of these natural norms’ implications reveals the inherent pluralism and sheer abundance of natural norms. Absolutely every true characterization of a kind or type of thing simultaneously constitutes a very specific norm for individual instances of that kind. What type of norm it is will depend on the content of the characterization. This explains why a departure from what is characteristic cannot be simply equated with *defect* in an individual. For example, suppose that Kapu does not hunt cooperatively, or Anna does not have two legs. It may seem a short step from here to the conclusion that these individuals are behaviorally and anatomically “defective”. But in fact what is warranted at this point is not an evaluative *conclusion*, but rather a question. *Why* doesn’t Kapu hunt cooperatively? *How* does Anna’s lack of one or both legs relate to her overall flourishing? As Lawrence (2006) puts it, an individual’s departure from what is characteristic of her kind *calls for an explanation*. And pending an explanation, we know nothing more than that the individuals in question are uncharacteristic in one very narrow respect. We do not know whether and if so how their being uncharacteristic tells for or against their flourishing. We do not even know whether their being uncharacteristic in the relevant respects tells for or against their excellent instantiation of the species. For no individual can simultaneously instantiate all of its species’ traits, and it may be that precisely in virtue of being uncharacteristic in one respect,

an individual attains excellence in some other, more central regard. In short, until a complete and satisfying explanation is in hand, we cannot know how to evaluate an individual's departure from a given species-norm, and no judgment of goodness or defect is justified.⁴

What would it look like for deviation from a species-trait to constitute a case of species-excellence? Suppose, for instance, that Kapu is absorbed in the hunt when he suddenly senses that all is not well and ceases to perform his role, with the result that the prey escapes. As it turns out he was on the edge of a pit trap, and his hesitation saves his life and alerts the pack to the present of human predators. Now compare Kapu with McDowell's free-riding wolf. Both wolves are able to hunt cooperatively; both choose not to. But unlike McDowell's free-riding wolf, Kapu's behavior actually manifests lupine excellence according to many characteristics of his species: say, high intelligence, generally pro-social behavior and a deep, intuitive awareness of his surroundings.

The same point can be made in the context of the kinds of human examples that Scott Woodcock (2006) has raised in objecting to Foot's naturalism. Consider human two-leggedness. Humans have two legs, and Anna is a human, so by the above-proposed normative logic Anna *ought* to have two legs. But now suppose Anna does not have two legs. Foot would have us describe this as a kind of natural "defect", because of the functional or teleological role played by two-leggedness in a human life. But the inference is not valid: it assumes something about how things are with Anna that we have no right to assume before we have a full explanation of her situation. Instead, at this point we must look for a complete, contextualizing explanation of her departure from what is anatomically characteristic, before making any further evaluative judgments. And on investigation, we might feel justified in saying a range of things about Anna's excellence and flourishing, or lack thereof. For instance, we might say: "Yes, she lost that leg in the car accident last year and she's been really struggling to come to terms with it and to get

⁴Lawrence's talk of a call for explanation in the classroom, while teaching Ethics and Metaethics, influenced my views on this subject the most, and I quote the phrase here from notes taken in those courses. But see Lawrence (2006). See also Thompson (2008, 199ff.), with thanks to John Hacker-Wright for the latter reference.

around”. Or “Yes, she’s had that prosthetic since birth and it’s as much a part of her as her flesh and blood limbs are”. Or “Yes, she’s test driving the latest integrated prosthetics from a new medical device startup, and with the shock absorption they have she can expect to have far fewer back and neck problems than other people in her line of work”. These explanations correspond roughly to Anna’s situation being worse, neutral, and better with respect to some intuitive standard of overall human flourishing, as compared to if she had been characteristic of her species with respect to two-leggedness.

These examples show that to equate *being uncharacteristic* with *being defective* is to make an evaluative leap that short-circuits the most important part of the process of evaluating individuals against species-characteristics; namely, the open-minded search for an explanation of the individual’s departure from the norm in question. Living things are complex, and the relationship between their species trait-instantiation and their goodness is therefore complicated. Given the extremely circumscribed, specific normative implications of any one species-trait, and given the indefinitely many species-traits that can be predicated of a given species, it is not to be expected that trait-instantiation will always correspond simply and straightforwardly to natural goodness, and vice versa. Thus the key point to take away from the discussion so far is this: species-characterizations do constitute norms for individual members of the kind in question, but not in exactly the way that Foot (and Thompson) propose. Specifically, when an individual is not as-is-characteristic, we are not automatically entitled to call this a natural *defect*. Instead, we are entitled to pose a question and to begin searching for an explanation.

Thus far, we have been focusing on the question of how to evaluate an individual when they are *not* as-is-characteristic of their kind in some respect or another; a kind of evaluation we might call a “trait-external” evaluation. I have been trying to show that one must be extremely careful not to leap to overly strong, unfounded evaluative conclusions based on an individual’s deviation from what is characteristic, in advance of a full explanation of that deviation. But even sound and well-justified trait-external evaluations are anyway not the most significant and useful from the point of view of traditional naturalism. Instead, what matters

most are the evaluations that are, so to speak, *internal* to a given characteristic: the rich, qualitative judgments we can make about *how*, and *how well*, an individual instantiates a given trait, when they are in fact as-is-characteristic of their kind in the relevant respect.

Suppose now that Kapu the wolf *does* hunt cooperatively. Then we can ask how well he does so, and our assessment of his cooperative hunting may be indefinitely qualitatively detailed and particular. Our grasp of what constitutes excellence and success in lupine cooperative hunting will derive from our sense of what cooperative lupine hunting is, and it will, of course, be fallible. But it will be answerable to the facts about the phenomenon in question. In the same way, if Anna the human has two legs we can ask how well they function and how well she makes use of them. We can ask, that is, whether and in what ways they are good human legs. And in the same way, if a person uses practical reason to get around in the world, we can ask how wisely and effectively and accurately—how well—she does so. In short, whenever an individual *is* as she ought to be in some respect (whenever she instantiates some species-trait), it is possible and appropriate to ask *how well* she succeeds at being as she ought to be. And, like external characteristic-based evaluations, these evaluations will not be simple binary judgments of goodness and defect. They will be indefinitely qualitatively nuanced, and tailored to the particulars of the case.

4 Traditional Naturalism

Now let us put Lawrence's traditional conception of practical reason together with the characteristic-based normative inferences we discussed in the last section. Consider the following:

- (1) Humans are practically rational according to a traditional conception of practical reason.
- (2) I am human.
- (3) Therefore, I ought to be practically rational according to a traditional conception of practical reason.

In order to interpret this inference correctly, we must be very careful to apply the lessons learned from the above discussion of other sorts of natural norms. First, what sense of “ought” is at work in this conclusion? It is very tempting to think that this inference tells us that *qua* human I ought *practically* to be practically rational according to a traditional conception of practical reason:

- (4) If I am not practically rational according to a traditional conception of practical reason, then I am *ipso facto* practically irrational.

But in fact, (4) is not supported by (1)–(3) because the ought in (3) is not practical. What this inference says is only that I ought to be practically rational according to a traditional conception of practical reason, *in order to have the kind of agency that is characteristic of my kind*. In other words, it tells us that because I am human it ought to be possible to give an internal evaluation of how and how well I instantiate the species-trait of practical rationality. If I do not possess practical rationality or engage in its constitutive activities, the relevant internal evaluation cannot be made, and a different evaluation is called for: an “external” evaluation based on a full explanation of my being uncharacteristic of my kind in this respect. Thus from (1)–(3) we should conclude not (4), but (4’):

- (4’) If I am not practically rational according to a traditional conception of practical reason, then I do not possess, or am not exercising, the kind of agency that is characteristic of my kind.

Now, as with Anna and Kapu, in order to know whether and how my departure from what is characteristic relates to goodness or defect, we need to explain its occurrence in this case. What kinds of things might explain a human being’s *not* having or exercising practical rationality? Familiar explanations include: being in a coma, being severely brain damaged, being completely senile, being profoundly insane, and being a very young infant. Being plugged into a pleasure machine (Smart 1973) or being trapped in the Matrix (Wachowski Brothers 1999) would also suffice. So would being so aberrantly highly evolved that one’s form of agency is actually radically different from, but better against the general

standards of practical excellence than, normal human practical rationality. In each of these circumstances, the individual in question does not possess the practical capacity that is characteristic of her kind. And while this particular departure from what is characteristic certainly poses a serious impediment to flourishing in most cases, even here this is a substantive further conclusion that cannot be taken for granted, as the cases of the infant and the super-rational being reveal.

Because they are uncharacteristic with respect to practical rationality, the individuals just described are not subject to the relevant “internal” evaluation. That is, there is no question of these individuals possessing or lacking practical wisdom because they are just not engaging in the relevant activities at all. To put it another way: these individuals are simply *not subject to the norms of ethics*. It would be as inappropriate to evaluate the screams of an infant or the blank stare of a person with late-stage Alzheimer’s against the standards of practical excellence (ethics), as it would be to evaluate the nonexistent legs of a double amputee against the standards of strength and muscle tone which arise from the characteristics of human limbs. *That* sort of evaluation is an “internal” evaluation; it is appropriate when an individual *does* instantiate some species-trait, and not otherwise.

On the other hand—imagine a person who is as she ought to be with respect to the characteristically human form of agency. This person *can* appropriately be evaluated against the standards of goodness constituted by this species-characteristic. We can ask how practically rational she is, and in what respects, and where she excels and where she struggles, *given* that she is, in fact, a practically rational agent. When we do so, we are asking how well she succeeds at being a human agent. And, as with anything that is both *for* some purpose or end, and which consists in a certain characteristic activity, practical excellence consists in excellently fulfilling the end(s) of agency by engaging excellently in the activities of being an agent. So in internally evaluating her practical rationality, we will be asking how well she does these things.

Let us return momentarily to McDowell’s wolves. The upshot of that thought experiment was supposed to be that “reason enables a deliberating agent to step back from *anything* that might be a candidate to ground its putative requirements” (155). I retorted that reason does not

allow a deliberating agent to step back from reasons themselves while still laying claim to rationality. We can now see how traditional naturalism makes good on this thought while still explaining the objectivity of ethical requirements in terms of natural facts. For just as the rational wolves could choose life in a petting zoo or the authenticity of suicide, so a human being most certainly *could* choose not to live the practical life that is characteristic of humans. That is, it is perfectly possible for a human being to abdicate agency. (The human villain Cipher in *The Matrix* does this; as does anyone who commits suicide or plugs themselves into a pleasure machine.) But what a human cannot do is *use* human agency (practical rationality) to live a non-characteristically human life. That is just not possible, because to live a characteristically human life just is to live a life of (among other things) practically rational activity. It is, however, possible to cease to live a human life with one's final exercise of practical reason. Whether it is possible to act well in so doing is a separate question.

So ethical evaluation according to traditional naturalism turns out to be the trait-internal evaluation of human practical reasoners. That is why the really significant and useful evaluations for traditional naturalism are the internal ones. When it comes to the human characteristic of practically rational agency, the rich, qualitative judgments we can make about *how*, and *how well*, an individual instantiates this particular trait *are just* ethical evaluations; they are evaluations of an individual's world-answerable practical excellence or lack thereof. Thus, because it is rooted in a sound and suitably circumspect theory of natural normativity, traditional naturalism gives a clear and concrete explanation of the objectivity, origins, and scope of ethical norms: they are the norms internally constituted by the characteristically human way of striving to interact as well as possible with the world we inhabit.

Finally, what about needs? Traditional naturalism is compatible with the basic idea that human needs (and what *this human* needs) are among the facts that must be considered in deliberation. Human needs may even usually have a special practical importance, not because human needs intrinsically matter more than, say, lupine needs, but rather because of the fact that we who deliberate are human, humans are social, and each human agent's most intimate and local interactions

with the world are thus intra-species. Thus according to traditional naturalism, human needs can figure as part of a specification of (T4) (the criterion of good and bad action). Where traditional naturalism differs from needs-based naturalism is chiefly in its justification of the objectivity of good (T2), which makes no systematic appeal to a necessary connection between the virtues, substantively construed, and the human good.

5 In Defense of the Traditional Conception of Practical Reason

In “The Rationality of Morality”, Lawrence does not argue for the traditional conception of practical reason. He simply articulates it and explains its significance for Foot’s lifelong quest to establish the rationality of morality. In *Natural Goodness*, by the conclusion of Chapter Five Foot takes herself to have provided, if not an argument for a traditional conception of practical reason under that description, then certainly an argument in favor of the substance of such a conception. But I have argued that Foot’s needs-based defense of (T2) depends on a conception of natural normativity that mistakenly equates being *uncharacteristic* with being *defective*. So I would like to conclude the present discussion by offering an ecological argument in favor of attributing a traditional conception of practical rationality to human beings.

Let us begin with the following line of thought:

Each distinguishable kind of living thing has its own characteristic way of being in the world. For many kinds of living things, part of their distinctive way of being in the world is a characteristic way or ways of *striving*; that is, of intentionally or deliberately interacting with the world, with awareness, in whatever way seems most called for, most fitting, or best. This capacity for consciously striving to interact well with the world we can call agency (see Gehrman 2014). And, as with anything that is both *for* some purpose or end, and which consists in a certain characteristic activity or activities, excellence of agency (which we can call

“practical excellence”) consists in excellently fulfilling the end(s) of agency by engaging excellently in the activities of being an agent.

Now, we humans are one of the kinds of living things that possess agency. And so we can ask: what is the human form of agency? What way or ways do human beings have available to us for striving to interact well with the world? Well:

On this subject, most people agree that the human form of agency is called “practical rationality”, but people disagree radically about what practical reason is, and some (some Humeans and phenomenologists, for example) reject the term altogether on the grounds that it is hopelessly tainted with intellectual and cognitive connotations that have no place in a conception of agency.

The term practical reason is, of course, prejudicial at this stage, but I will nonetheless adopt it here to refer to the distinctively human form of practical agency. Simply in choosing this term, I have not, however, committed to any particular substantive account of the activities that constitute the exercise of practical “reason”. And for all that has been said so far, practical rationality might include any number of different ways of “intentionally or deliberately interacting with the world in whatever way seems most called for, most fitting, or best”, including perceptual, emotional, habitual, and intuitive, as well as intellectual or conventionally deliberative and calculative activities.

Meanwhile, with this terminological choice made, our line of reasoning can proceed as follows:

If we can arrive at a good, substantive characterization of practical rationality, then we will thereby have discovered what human practical excellence is an excellence *of*. And just as with practical excellence in general, human practical excellence will consist in excellently fulfilling the ends of human agency by engaging excellently in the activities of human agency. In this way we will have arrived at an account of what it takes to be an ethically excellent person, since ‘ethics’ is just the set of norms that apply to all things human and practical.

To those familiar with Book I of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, it will be obvious that the above is a pastiche of Aristotle's rhetoric from these passages, transposed or translated to concern agency, human agency, and practical excellence rather than function, human function, and human flourishing. It is also a way of making good on Foot's project of setting "the evaluation of human action in the wider contexts not only of the evaluation of other features of human life but also of evaluative judgements of the characteristics and operations of other living things" (Foot, 25). But what have I done in painting this intuitive picture of agency, other than to take the traditional conception of practical *reason* up to a more general, ecological register? Thus Lawrence's traditional conception of practical reason is motivated and lent plausibility by placing human practical rationality in the broader context of the genus of animal agency in general.

In this broader context, practical rationality's purpose in the lives of creatures who possess it is the same as that of any kind of agency: namely, to permit its possessors to interact as well and successfully as possible with the world they inhabit. This is an ecological generalization of (T1), the claim that the formal and final object of practical reason is *acting well*, or *doing what's best*. And regarding (T3), the assessment of ends as well as means: one can hardly claim to be fully sensitive and responsive to the facts of one's situation while simultaneously refusing to entertain the question of whether *what* one is setting out to do is appropriate given one's circumstances. It *might* turn out that prioritizing the sanctity of one's pinkie finger above all else is a perfectly good way to be responsive to the facts of one's situation. Traditional naturalism does not rule this possibility out. But the point is that one cannot simply fail to consider the worth of one's ends, or assume that ends are a matter of fiat or raw preference, while simultaneously plausibly claiming to be fully engaged in the interactive striving that is agency. Similarly, regarding the objectivity of the practicable good (T2), precisely because agency is *for* interacting with the rest of the world, it is therefore world-answerable. Practical excellence is not achieved by successfully shaping the world to match whatever is in the agent's mind, as it would be on a desire-based model of practical reason. Instead, in keeping with the general purpose of agency and the specific purpose of

human agency, human practical excellence is attained when one successfully shapes the world to match whatever is in one's mind, *provided* what is in one's mind (that is, one's intention) is appropriately informed by the way the world is and what it calls for.

Acknowledgements I would like to thank the University of Tennessee Humanities Center for Fellowship support which allowed me to make significant progress on this project. I would also like to thank Paul Nichols and John Hacker-Wright for their many insightful comments on earlier drafts. I would also like to thank Barbara Herman, Gavin Lawrence, and A.J. Julius for their feedback on the theory of natural normativity discussed here.

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“Why Should I?” Can Foot Convince the Sceptic?

Anselm W. Müller

Concerning “the sceptic who was supposed to have asked why he should do that which the good person must do”, Foot writes: “If we understand the words ‘that which a good person must do’ ‘transparently’ (extensionally) as referring to, for example, keeping promises or refraining from murder, then our answer must consist in showing him why in doing *these things* he would act badly [...]. But if his words are understood opaquely (intensionally) as referring to bad actions under that description, we must try to show him the conceptual connection between acting well and acting rationally”, viz. that morality is *part* of rationality. And “to ask for a reason for acting rationally is to ask for a reason where reasons must a priori have come to an end” (NG 64f.). Ought this kind of consideration to satisfy the sceptic?

Being a naturalist of sorts myself, I believe that Foot is right in maintaining that it is human nature that determines how we ought to live (Sect. 5.2). I also greatly admire the way in which *Natural Goodness* elaborates important aspects of such an understanding of morality. But the passage I have

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quoted suggests the view that—in the face of the question “Why should I do that?”—a correct understanding of the normative implications of human nature gives support to the practical recognition of moral requirements (NG 56f.). And this view, which I’ll call Naturalism, seems to go beyond naturalism *qua* claiming that moral norms are determined by human nature. Three theses are, more particularly, involved in Foot’s position:

1. The teleology of acting well accounts for its necessity.
2. One can know what goes into acting well by considering requirements of the human form of life.
3. A theoretical understanding of why one ought to act in a given way provides one with a reason so to act.

These theses are the targets of doubts that I wish to raise and substantiate in Sects. 2–4. In preparation for these, Sect. 1 is to remind the reader of relevant aspects of, and some problems in, Foot’s account of natural normativity. In the final Sect. 5, I want to summarize what my arguments on behalf of the moral sceptic achieve, and suggest a variant on Foot’s account that is immune to them.

1 Kinds of Requirement and Ways of Acknowledging Them

The essence of naturalism, and Foot’s basic insight, is this: Good and bad human conduct is the principal component of the life of a kind of *organism* (NG 36f.), morality *part* of the *rationality* that characterizes human nature as a whole (NG 11), and moral failing a *natural* defect (NG 37). Adopting and drawing on Michael Thompson’s account of life concepts, Foot argues that *knowledge of a life form gives knowledge of how its individual representatives ought to live* (NG 25–37, esp. 27; cf. Thompson 1995, esp. 268–79). If, for instance, we know the life form of *the Eurasian bullfinch*—represented in “Aristotelian categoricals” that “give the ‘how’ of what happens in the life cycle of that species” (NG 32; cf. NG 29–31)—we know *inter alia* that in the breeding season the female Eurasian bullfinch lays about five or six eggs, etc.

This means that any mature female of the species "ought to" do that: Such breeding behaviour is both characteristic of and has a function in bullfinch life; hence there is something wrong with an individual female that does not exhibit the pattern. Likewise, if we know the human life form, we know that humans ought, *inter alia*, to refrain from committing murder and from telling lies because these patterns of restraint are characteristic of and have a function in human life; and that, hence, there is something wrong with an individual person who does not exhibit these patterns (NG 43–7).

Of course, human nature involves characteristic forms of breathing and digesting as well. But "we have a way of speaking of goodness in human beings not corresponding to anything in the other cases. [...] to call someone a good human being is to evaluate him or her only in a certain respect [... viz.] as concerns his rational will" (NG 66). In any given case, this is evaluation "in terms of (a) the recognition of particular considerations as reasons for acting, and (b) the relevant action" that complies with such a reason (NG 13). Thus, if (a) you are aware that your *not believing that p* is a compelling reason for you *not to claim or agree or verbally imply that p*¹ and (b) you act on this reason, you practise the virtue of veracity and to this extent act well.

Because of the relevance of awareness, the *oughts* that we typically apply to human beings appear to differ from the ones we apply to plants and animals, where they merely indicate a natural norm, supplied by a form of life, that may or may not be matched by its individual representatives—*independently of any appreciation of the norm*.

¹Three comments on this example: 1) According to Foot, the prohibition on lying—unlike, e.g., that on torture—allows for exceptions (NG 77f.). 2) Your not believing that *p* is nevertheless a *compelling* reason not to say that *p* in the sense that it does not merely *invite* you not to say that *p*—as the needs of the local library might be said to "invite" you to make a donation. In the latter case, the goodness of what you have reason to do does not mean that it would be wrong for you not to donate. The goodness of avoiding an (unjustified) lie, by contrast, does go with the wrongness of saying what you don't believe to be the case. 3) Many patterns of acting well are, unlike both truthfulness and donating, a matter of disregarding rather than heeding a certain kind of reason. To act courageously, for instance, is: *not* to let oneself be prevented from pursuing an important aim by reasons of proportionately limited danger. These three differentiations need not further detain us here. For the purpose of our discussion we may assume contexts in which you ought to Φ in virtue of the kind of reason you have to Φ . Truthfulness and promise-keeping are going to be my standard stand-ins for a moral requirement.

Or, rather: more than one kind of “ought” seems to apply to us humans. For, on the one hand, if you tell lies you are defective just as a female Eurasian bullfinch is defective if she does not lay eggs—and as you yourself are also defective if your liver does not work properly or develops a cancerous growth. On the other hand, we feel there is also an “additional” sense in which you *ought not to lie*.

What is behind this feeling?—I hope to answer this question in stages. First, I distinguish between three types of requirement that can be signified by *ought* (Sect. 1.1). But I also suggest that, in order to give an account of moral judgement, we have to distinguish practical from theoretical recognition of moral requirements (Sect. 1.2). Moreover, either form of recognition will turn out to relate to two distinguishable kinds of practical requirement (Sect. 1.3). Both these distinctions are easily blurred if a third one is neglected: that between a reason that *explains* the goodness of a way of acting and a reason *in favour of acting* that way (Sect. 1.4). This distinction, by the way, will also be crucial to one form of epistemic scepticism (Sect. 3.2). To end the present section, I’ll articulate the Naturalistic understanding of morality as a form of rationality (Sect. 1.5).

1.1 Oughts—Teleological, Motivational, Situational

To facilitate discussion, I’ll adopt the following terminology as a way of keeping three ideas of *ought*, or *requirement*, apart:

1. *Teleological*: We have already identified requirements that result from an individual’s instantiating a form of life that it may realize more or less perfectly. I call such requirements *teleological* because, at least in general, what is characteristic of the life form, and ought to be instantiated by the individual, is *instrumental* to its survival or well-being or to that of a population. Thus, for human life, promise-keeping, veracity, and the other virtues are, in a general way, “necessary because and in so far as good hangs on” them. This is what Foot calls *Aristotelian necessity* (NG 15; cf. NG 16f., 25–51). Being a member of the human species, you *ought*, teleologically, to exhibit what is in that sense necessary, be it virtue, intelligence, healthy lungs, or whatever.

2. *Motivational*: In the case of humans, some *oughts* express a teleological requirement that is *also* a motivational one. By this I mean the requirement to implement a certain *motivational pattern*, ideally consolidated in a virtue of character. Such a pattern typically² connects a motivating reason with a kind of action that is required by the presence of that reason. Thus, the *ought* that attaches to *promise-keeping*, or *truthfulness*, or *hospitality* relates to a *motivational pattern* that connects "the recognition of particular considerations as reasons [with] the relevant action" (NG 13).³

In terms of my paradigm: For humans, not to lie is a teleological requirement that is motivational as well; in both senses, you *ought* to refrain from lying. The motivational *ought* here consists in this: You *ought* to treat the fact that you don't believe that *p* as a reason not to say that *p*.

3. *Situational*: The "relevant action" is of course also itself required *when* there are reasons that speak in favour of it in accordance with a motivational requirement. This requirement of the *action* I call *situational*. Thus, from the motivational requirement that you ought *to be truthful*—i.e., you ought to take the fact that you don't believe that *p* as a reason not to say that *p*—it follows that, *when* you don't believe that *p*, you ought by situational requirement *to refrain from asserting that p*.

1.2 Theoretical Versus Practical Recognition

Requirements (1–3) can be recognized in *theoretical* judgements.⁴ In accordance with Naturalism, any such judgement can in principle be verified by the study of human nature, contingent conditions of human lives, the agent's situation, and other facts. It can be expressed by statements of the form "X ought (by teleological /motivational /situational requirement) to ...".

²Cf. However NG 3 fn.1.

³Foot recognizes good reasons for doing things that are not "moral reasons" (cf. Sect. 1.5 (b)). My "motivational patterns" are not meant to include these because my topic is *moral* scepticism.

⁴The *topic* of a judgement that it is necessary, or right, or good to comply with a motivational or situational requirement is of course something that can be *done*. But unless it goes with a tendency to act accordingly, it is still a theoretical judgement—what Aquinas calls *speculativa consideratio* [...] *de re operabili* (2008, I q 14 a 16c).

Thus, facts concerning human interaction, mutual dependence, etc., give rise to the teleological and indeed motivational requirements of veracity. And from the motivational pattern of veracity together with *not-p*, you can derive and ascribe to yourself a situational requirement to refrain from asserting that *p*.

Now, your recognition of these requirements may be entirely theoretical. You *can* recognize a moral requirement, e.g., the requirement that you take your not being convinced that *p* as a reason to refrain from asserting that *p*—*in the same way* as you recognize that you ought to have 32 teeth (an example Foot takes from Anscombe, qtd. in NG 28). Here, in saying: “I ought to have 32 teeth”, you are not going to raise expectations that you will do anything about it. And you *can* acknowledge the existence of a moral requirement in the same theoretical way. But motivational as well as situational requirements *can* be recognized *practically, too*. And a verbal expression of recognition is in fact generally expected to signal practical recognition.

With regard to situational requirements, the *primary* way of manifesting practical recognition is *doing* the thing that is required—in the example: refraining from saying that *p*. But how do you practically recognize a motivational requirement? Well, here the recognition *consists*, roughly speaking, in a firm *disposition* to be motivated in a characteristic way—in the case of veracity: a disposition to refrain from saying that *p* unless you believe that *p*, *because* you do not believe that *p*. Such practical recognition will find *expression*, again, primarily in appropriate conduct, now over an extended stretch of time. But there are circumstances in which we may ascribe to you, on the strength of verbal or other indications, practical recognition of situational and motivational requirements, even though you do not act accordingly.⁵

I must not leave my reader with the impression that it is Foot herself who distinguishes between theoretical and practical recognition of moral requirements. I believe that what she calls the “practicality of morality” *requires* the distinction, and Naturalism is open to one kind of sceptical challenge precisely because it tries to get along without it (Sect. 4).

⁵Thus, when your failure to act is due to external obstruction, and causes you regret, or when it is due to temporary temptation and you show remorse (cf. fn. 24), your recognition is practical.

1.3 Situational Versus Motivational Requirements

There is another distinction that has to be acknowledged although it is no part of Foot's explicit account: the one I have already drawn between motivational and situational requirements. True, this distinction is suggested by her "describing virtues in terms of (a) the recognition of particular considerations as reasons for acting, and (b) the relevant action" (NG 13). But she pays no attention to the resulting ambiguity of expressions such as "how one ought to act".⁶

Consider the claim that "moral judgement about what I ought to do implies that I have reason so to act" (NG 21). Is this a statement about situational or about motivational requirements? Does it say that, if you ought to Φ , you must have a reason *to* Φ —e.g., a promise you have given to Φ , or a friend's situation that calls for your Φ -ing? Or, rather, that if you ought to implement a virtuous motivational pattern—e.g., to keep promises (=to treat your promise to Φ as a reason to Φ), or to stand by friends—you must have a reason *to* (*be disposed to*) *comply with that pattern*?

I don't think that Foot herself pays sufficient attention to this distinction (cf. Sects. 3.2, 5.2 (2)). It is, however, of the utmost importance. For the demand for *reasons* does not amount to the same thing in the two cases. If we understand the statement under consideration in the first way, I see no problem with the claim that *ought* requires a "reason so to act", that "a 'should' needs a ground" (56). But, then, no respectable sceptic would quarrel with a *situational* requirement—e.g., with the necessity to Φ , where a promise he has made is claimed to give him reason to Φ —if only he could be shown that it is rational to accept the underlying *motivational* requirement, viz. to treat a promise to Φ as a reason to Φ . For the motivational pattern of promise-keeping *consists in* being moved to Φ by a promise one has made to Φ .

⁶It is easy to confuse motivational and situational requirements because there are moral judgements, such as "Thou shalt not murder" that appear not to admit of the distinction. But this is an illusion. Thus, to refrain from murder is, roughly and classically: to refrain from killing X *because* X is an innocent human being.

Hence, if the sceptic asks to be given a reason to “do that which the good person must do” (NG 64; cf. NG 53, 56f.), it is plausible to read the demand for a reason as concerning *motivational* rather than situational requirements, and to understand the expression “that which the good person must do” as relating to the implementation of virtuous motivational patterns rather than to naked actions. As Foot says, “the problem is about the rationality of doing what virtue demands” (NG 53). And what the sceptic wants to be shown is good reasons for him to be truthful, to keep promises, to respond compassionately to others’ needs, etc.⁷

1.4 Reasons *Why* Versus Reasons *for*

On this reading, however, it is by no means obvious that “the good person” does have, and the sceptic ought to recognize, a “reason so to act”. For this now means: a reason *in favour of being motivated* as virtue requires, i.e.: a *reason* to act on such-and-such *reasons*. And where should such a reason come from? Natural normativity? Does the human life form supply it?

Well, if the Aristotelian necessity of promise-keeping is the *reason why* you should keep promises, this is a reason that *explains* the moral requirement. It is not *eo ipso* a *reason for* keeping promises, a consideration that “*justifies*” you in accepting and complying with the requirement.⁸

⁷Moreover, this understanding of the expression “that which the good person must do” is borne out by the rest of the passage (NG 64f.). It is also implied by the statement that “the [sceptical] problem is about the rationality of doing what virtue demands” (NG 53), and by the phrase “an individual who knows that he has reason to act morally” (NG 18). Such an individual is presumably one who rightly judges that he ought to keep promises, refrain from lies, etc.,—not one who merely, after having promised to Φ , judges that he ought to Φ . What, however, *is* the reason he has? The Aristotelian necessity of promise-keeping (cf. Sects. 3 and 4)?

⁸A relevant Aristotelian necessity can at best constitute a (justificatory) reason *theoretically to judge* that a promise to Φ gives you sufficient reason a) practically to judge that you ought to Φ , and b) to Φ . In the present context, the suggestion of *defense against criticism* is no part of the meaning of “justification”. A justifying reason is simply a consideration in favour of doing something of judging something to be the case. Does Foot confuse explanatory and justificatory reasons? Well, I find only negative evidence that she keeps them apart, as when she speaks of “the explanatory force of the proposition about the requirement of rationality”, not of its reason-giving force (NG 23; cf. NG 18).

Or is it? For, unlike the requirement of 32 teeth, the motivational *ought* is not merely teleological, a matter of natural normativity: It is also rational in the sense of demanding practical *recognition*. Indeed, the practical recognition of moral requirements, expressed in compliance, is already their *satisfaction*.⁹ And Foot seems to agree with one variety of sceptic in thinking that it cannot be rational to practically recognize and consciously implement particular patterns of virtuous conduct unless one has, or can be given, respective reasons to do so.

This, I think, is a mistake. From the necessity of *recognition in practical judgement*, it does not follow that we can be given and should act on a (justificatory, motivating) *reason in favour of* recognizing and complying with a given motivational requirement, any more than this follows from the (ostensible) fact that there has to be an *explanatory* reason why we need thus to comply. Reasons may "come to an end" (NG 65) already with the recognition of motivational requirements—the recognition of the promise to Φ as a reason to Φ , etc. (cf. Sect. 5.2).¹⁰

I am not denying that there *can* be a reason to treat the promise to Φ as a reason for Φ -ing. But note that that reason is then not a reason for Φ -ing but a reason for implementing the motivational pattern of: Φ -ing *because of a promise to Φ* . And there are at least difficulties in the idea of such a reason. For instance, you can in general *choose* to do

⁹Note that the effectual functionality of virtue seems to demand, as an Aristotelian necessity, that it be practised, in some sense, *for its own sake*. This is reflected in a standard of evaluation that gives preeminence to the implementation of motivational patterns over the actions thereby performed. From a moral point of view, we treat the value of complying with a situational requirement as dependent on the value of the motivational requirement that is thereby realized, rather than *vice versa*. In this, the motivational requirements inherent in human nature differ from what might be called the (merely) rational "requirements" created by conventional institutions which, unlike promising, are not themselves components of morality. Legal systems, etiquette, and the code of duelling supply examples (cf. NG 18). Thus, if you refrain from appropriating X's bicycle, you are to this extent keeping the law, even if you merely refrain for fear of being caught. But if this is your only motive, you are not complying with the *motivational* requirement not to steal, i.e., to refrain from appropriating X's bicycle *because it is X's*.

¹⁰You think you do have reasons for being truthful, honest, etc.? Well, name one! (as Lucy famously challenged Charlie Brown when he said "I have friends"). True, things don't go well for communities whose members lack honesty. This is at least part of the (explanatory) reason why honesty is a virtue, teleologically and motivationally required. But is it also *your (motivating) reason for practising it*? And is the rationality it is supposed to confer on your honesty preferable to the rationality conferred by, say, concern for your reputation?

what you have reason to do; but can you equally choose to implement a motivational pattern, and by implication *choose to be motivated* to Φ by having promised to Φ ?¹¹ Even apart, however, from such difficulties, we do not expect the good person to practise any of the virtues *from considerations* relating to Aristotelian necessities or any other facts on which he would make that practice of his depend.

In any case, Foot does seem to countenance the sceptic's demand for a reason in favour of accepting *motivational* requirements. So she cannot respond by offering him things like the promise to Φ as a reason to Φ . She has to give him a reason to recognize the reasons recognized in virtuous conduct. The question is whether this can be done (cf. Sect. 4.3).

1.5 Morality as Rationality

By distinguishing motivational and situational from merely teleological requirements, and practical from theoretical moral judgements, one does not call the comparison of human life with bullfinch life into question. On the contrary, one is using the comparison in order properly to locate the difference—to show that the same *kind* of teleology ties two vastly different life forms to vastly different types of requirement. The common category of life form highlights the fact that rationality has a *function* in our lives—that it is not an addition to an independently viable sort of existence. An account of the human animal—even of the ways in which we keep alive as organisms—has to bring in rationality, and in particular its motivational requirements, as an organizing component of human life and an indispensable source of its well-being.

To have convincingly articulated this “naturalness” of human rationality is one of the merit of Foot's work. And it is the background to one of her chief contributions to ethics, viz.: to have shown and insisted that morality is *part of*, rather than justified in terms of, that *rationality*. Moral reasons belong to the good reasons that humans must act on if their lives are to go well. This claim has three important aspects, or implications:

¹¹At least—if we follow Aristotle (and experience)—to become an honest man, a crook has to *practise as well* as to choose, since choice itself is largely determined by habits of character.

- a. Without the practice of the virtues, human life is impossible, and the less there is of it, the more miserable our existence. Virtue—e.g., the justice of keeping promises—is among the Aristotelian necessities “because and in so far as good hangs on it” (NG 15). Human good hangs on promise-keeping since “it is necessary in many circumstances that human beings should be able to bind each other’s wills” (NG 46). Another example: “In human life it is an Aristotelian necessity (something on which our way of life depends) that if, for instance, a stranger should come on us when we are sleeping he will not think it all right to kill us or appropriate the tools that we need for the next day’s work” (NG 114). This necessity is what distinguishes moral norms from “duelling rules or silly rules of etiquette” (NG 17).
- b. *Qua* rationality of conduct towards others, morality “is on a par with the rationality of self-preserving action, and of the careful and cognizant pursuit of other innocent ends; each being a part or aspect of practical rationality” (NG 11; cf. NG 18, 66f.). This means, in particular, that moral norms do not invalidate or overthrow the claims of “self-interested rationality”, understood as pursuit of the agent’s own preservation and well-being. Rather, to *act well* is to practise the “virtues of the will”, which together represent these two parts of rationality: morality and prudence (NG 13, 59f., 74, 79).
- c. If morality is on a par with the two other sources of motivation, this also means that its rationality is just as basic, and *not derived*. The practice of virtue is not rational merely on account of being sanctioned by requirements of either self-interest or individual inclination. Rather, it is one fundamental part of a more comprehensive practical rationality that is a necessary ingredient of the human form of life. Hence morality *cannot be justified* by any prior, independent, more fundamental standard of rationality—as the question “Why should I be moral?” (cf. NG 2, 65) suggests. This question wants to ask for a reason to act morally—a reason that makes it rational to act that way—when in fact morality itself is in the business of supplying ultimate practical reasons as authoritatively as any other possible standard of behaviour (cf. NG 65).

So Foot denies that there is any “gap between ground and moral judgement” or that “the grounds of a moral judgement do not reach all the

way to it” (NG 8f.). And she supports this claim by backing the norms of morality with considerations of Aristotelian necessity (NG 15–7). These she takes to supply us with sufficient reasons to comply with the requirements of virtue (cf. however Sects. 1.3–1.4 and 4).

If morality is an original constituent of rationality, this answers, or rather undermines, the sceptical demand for a *reason* to act as morality requires. But if the sceptic withdraws this demand (as I think he should) he can still question whether Foot has proved the three Naturalistic theses I mentioned at the beginning of the present section: Does the teleology of acting well, as specified in terms of human good and consequent *Aristotelian necessities*, by itself account for moral requirements (Sect. 2)? Can *knowledge* of how one ought to act be based on a grasp of the requirements of human life (Sect. 3)? Does such knowledge provide one with *reasons to act well* (Sect. 4)? Let us then pursue these questions.

2 Theoretical Scepticism

My theoretical sceptic is not concerned with the practicality of form-of-life considerations; he has doubts about the possibility of supporting any specific moral evaluations by such considerations. His question is: Can any correct description of the nature of human life and the resulting Aristotelian necessities provide us with adequate evidence for judgments of the form “Given R, you ought to Φ because of R”?

For a number of reasons, he doubts that this is possible, claiming that (a) not all moral requirements are rooted in Aristotelian necessities (Sect. 2.1), and (b) no overarching standard of rationality allows us to limit the claims of private inclinations (Sect. 2.2), or to exclude moral egoism (Sect. 2.3).

2.1 The Insufficiency of Aristotelian Necessity

Is ethical virtue really throughout a matter of Aristotelian necessity? As Foot says, she takes this notion over from Anscombe’s work (NG 15). But Anscombe herself came to argue that not all of virtue can be understood as serving our well-being. Or rather, since virtue *belongs* to the

human form of life so that all virtuous conduct is *part* of our well-being: that some of virtue's requirements can be said to "serve" a good human life *only* in the sense that satisfaction of *these* requirements is an *ingredient*—not an instrument—of human good.

Where a virtuous practice cannot count as virtuous *because* it serves an aspect of human well-being *other* than the practice itself, we cannot explain its goodness in terms of *Aristotelian necessity*. Otherwise, the *functionality* signified by this term could not supply us with grounds for, e.g., viewing generosity and reliability but not vindictiveness and arrogance as virtuous motivational patterns. Now, Anscombe holds that there are various instances of virtuous practice, including central ones like the avoidance of murder, whose goodness is *not* due to their instrumental goodness. In these cases, she argues, the point of acting well is "supra-utilitarian' and hence mystical" (2008, 187; cf. 2005, 68–73).¹² If this is right, Aristotelian necessity cannot be ascribed to *all* of acting well and is insufficient to account for the objectivity of morality.

Anscombe's examples might be contested. And a seemingly mystical motivational requirement might yet turn out to be quite functional—as could be claimed for, say, the immorality of incest. But serious discussion of the role of virtue in human life can certainly not ignore the possibility of mystical value. Indeed, one of Foot's own examples

¹²"You can argue [...] that general respect for the prohibition on murder makes life more commodious. [...] But] the wrong done in murder is done first and foremost to the victim, whose life is not inconvenienced [...]: the objection to murder is supra-utilitarian" (Anscombe 2008, 187; cf. Anscombe 2005, 260, 266). Again, functional considerations cannot explain that "a man's dead body [...] isn't something to be put out for the collectors of refuse to pick up" (2008, 187). And, reducing chastity to a form of temperance, they cannot account for a deep-rooted appreciation of virginity or celibacy and the wrongness of casual sex (2008, 187f.). An Aristotelian philosopher could also mention the worship of God. Further, lying is generally considered to be bad because it is liable to have bad consequences for those who are deceived. But deception is not of its essence. The really brazen liar lies through his teeth, not minding whether anyone will believe even that he believes himself what he says. This seems to prove that the ethical requirement of respect for truth is not exhausted by Aristotelian necessity, and the value of truthfulness is mystical. Also, what are we to say about American prisoners of war who were tortured by North Vietnamese interrogators until they signed a document in which they expressed their gratitude for the kind way they were being treated? Why did they resist as long as they did? Wasn't the motive something like attachment to the truth and/or fear to suffer loss of dignity? And if we admire their conduct, can we account for this by appealing only to an Aristotelian necessity of honouring truth and dignity?

is intended to show that, even though promise-keeping is a defeasible requirement, breach of a particular promise is *not* justified by the certainty that it cannot cause any harm at all. And she virtually admits that, by merely gesturing at a relevant “linguistic device that humans have developed for themselves”—viz. Anscombe’s “stopping modals” (cf. 1981, 101f., 138–45)—she is giving a rather inadequate explanation of the requirement’s rationale (NG 47–51).

One of Foot’s other examples supplies us with yet a further reason for doubting that the factuality and objectivity of moral value depend on and is secured by the Aristotelian necessity of virtuous conduct. This is “the ‘city hunter’ who seems to have thought that there was reason for him to let harmless animals live” (NG 20; cf. Sect. 4.2). Well, *what* reason? Is it merely the consideration that his vicious conduct—cruelty to animals—may damage his sensitivity to *human* suffering, or something similarly related to *our* species? If not, why is the cruel treatment of animals a matter of *morality*? It seems not to be excluded by an Aristotelian necessity grounded in the human form of life.

All these considerations point to the conclusion that the unity of the notion of *acting well* cannot be explained by saying merely that the good functioning of practical reason is an Aristotelian necessity. This is a problem for Foot, since her objective is to show the sceptic that *qua* human being he has got reason to act well because of teleological facts—facts he can become aware of by reflecting on how it is necessary for his will to operate “because and in so far as good hangs on it” (NG 15), the good in question being realization of “the pattern of life that is the good of creatures of this [here: his!] species” (NG 41; cf. NG 40). If no Aristotelian necessity attaches to acting morally *throughout*, her project has to this extent failed. Nor should the sceptic be expected to be satisfied with a proof of moral requirements that applies to quite a lot of acting well but does not at the same time rule out such things as cruelty to animals, or establish the value of virtue in its “mystical” aspects.

Doubts that, for a proof of all moral requirements, it is *enough* to appeal to Aristotelian necessities is only one form of what I call theoretical scepticism. Other forms press the question whether it is possible to show that no sound conception of human good can be such as to

import requirements that are *incompatible* with the demands of morality. Let us consider two versions of this query.

2.2 The Authority of "Private Ends"

Quite generally, Aristotelian necessity attaches to the components of a life by their being required for it to realize the organism's life form, which is its good. But Naturalism allows, and Foot emphasizes, that, while "in the botanical and zoological worlds" the goodness of an organism's operations is their contribution "to survival and reproduction, because it is in that that good lies [...]" this is not true when we come to human beings" (NG 42): "human good is *sui generis*" (NG 51; cf. NG 95). It is more complex and varied not least because reason can conceive of and *set up ends* that it may be rational to pursue even at the cost of survival or reproduction (NG 42, 95).

Man's rationality makes all the difference—not only on the level of his equipment and its instrumental *goodness*, but also in the constitution of what that equipment is for: his *good*. "Nevertheless", Foot writes, "it is possible to give some quite general account of human necessities, that is, of what is quite generally needed for human good" (NG 43). Is this claim sufficiently supported by her argument? If not, she has not refuted immoralism, which queries "whether human goodness and badness are what they are supposed to be" (NG 20).

The immoralist may grant that *on a certain kind of conception of the human good* achievement of that good will indeed require the practice of the established virtues. But whence the conception, if the *human* form of life cannot be simply characterized as a specific way of securing what for brevity may be called *life-maintenance*: development, survival, and reproduction, along with things like, say, health or safety (NG 42, 51; cf. NG 43)? If human good includes a further dimension—if "good hangs, too, on the careful and cognizant pursuit of many more particular ends, and in general in [on (?)] satisfying appetites and following desires" (NG 17)—then the question arises: What are the "Aristotelian" implications of such an open-ended constitution of the human good?

Foot's own conception of this constitution has two connected aspects that give rise to doubts about the possibility of viewing something like established morality as an Aristotelian necessity required by human good.

First, she treats life-maintenance only as a *defeasible* component of human good. This is clear from passages like the following: "Lack of capacity to reproduce is a defect in a human being. But choice of childlessness and even celibacy is not thereby shown to be defective choice, because human good is not the same as plant or animal good. The bearing and rearing of children is not an ultimate good in human life, because other elements of good such as the demands of work to be done may give a man or woman reason to renounce family life" (NG 43; cf. NG 17).

Second, the significance of life-maintenance is reduced, in particular, by the relevance of "more particular ends" (NG 17) or "innocent ends" (NG 11; cf. "right ends": NG 97) that are supplied by *individuals' contingent "appetites" and "desires"* that may vary from person to person (cf. NG 17, 61).¹³

The sceptic asks: Will the correspondingly diversified human good call for and comprise *morality*? Why should the variety of people's options admit of, or make for, a shape of the human good that would require everybody to practise one and the same set of motivational dispositions, let alone the established virtues, except perhaps prudential ones like temperance and courage?

Note that Foot calls the various ends¹⁴ that may shape the differential determination of the human good "innocent". Here, this word is not just an innocent epithet. It is to ensure that the agent's orientation

¹³The resulting diversity should not be viewed as undermining the commonality of the human life form. Rather, "the diversities of human life", i.e., individual and cultural variety in ideals and practices, and the infinite creativity of reason are themselves constitutive characteristics of that form (NG 43). Nonetheless, *human good* now appears to be a collective term for an indefinite *variety* of good-life conceptions, each of them importing its own standard of suitable conduct.

¹⁴Foot may be thinking of ends in areas such as friendship and conversation, play, creativity and artistic achievement, enjoyment of beauty, style and elegance, novelty and fun, discovery and learning, influence, fame and power, victory in competition and success as such. And of more idiosyncratic and extravagant ones: living the ascetic life of a yogi, turning one's life into a work of art, or (a project pursued by her friend Peter Geach) collecting bad logic books. But she is also aware of having to take care of other ends, such as the city hunter's cruel entertainment, the pleasures of the paedophile, the kinds of honour sought in duelling, vendetta, or potlatch, and some Nietzschean ideals, that are intrinsically opposed to demands of morality or prudence or both.

towards his private ends, as I will call them, though officially and ostensibly "on a par" with moral (and self-interested) considerations, will, roughly speaking, *not interfere* with them! More specifically, the word is to indicate that you fail to act in accordance with reason by pursuing ends whose very nature contravenes requirements of morality. And no doubt Foot also wants to exclude the pursuit of private ends by *means and ways* that flout such requirements. But if it is rationality as such that is the chief characteristic of the human life form, and its standard is determined by a) private projects and preferences *as much as* by b) morality and self-interested prudence,¹⁵ what justifies a tacit a priori stipulation that accords, as a rule, priority to (b) over (a) rather than the opposite or some mafioso style compromise?

Foot quotes, as an expression of shamelessness, words of the "city hunter" whom we have already met (Sect. 2.1): "I know I'm on earth 70 years and that I'm not going anywhere else. If I choose to spend my day out in the countryside doing whatever I feel like, then that's what I'll do" (NG 19). Well, what can she say in reply to this, if it is not *pre-supposed* that the pursuit of private ends must yield to the requirements of virtue?

If the sceptic asks for a reason *why* he should concede precedence to moral and prudential considerations, it is no good replying that he has not given a meaning to his question unless the "why?" is to relate to one of the three standards of rationality that Foot distinguishes (cf. Sect. 1.5 (b)).¹⁶ Here is one reason why this is no good: In identifying these three standards and their comparative standing she gives a *material* account of what goes into rationality; the sceptic's question, however, can be understood as asking how she gets from the *formal* notion of rationality to a (relatively) material determination that assigns a subordinate position to private ends.

¹⁵"The different considerations are on a par, moreover, in that a judgement about what is required by practical rationality must take account of their interaction: of the weight of the ones we call non-moral as well as those we call moral" (NG 11).

¹⁶Cf. NG 65: "To ask for a reason for acting rationally is to ask for a reason where reasons must a priori have come to an end. And if he goes on saying 'But why *should* I?', we may query the meaning of this 'should'".

2.3 Egoism in the Guise of “Psychological Individualism”

The preceding considerations can be summed up in the question: What is to regulate and restrain, on Foot’s account, the *shape* and *weight* of private ends? But the sceptic may also ask: Is there a feature of rationality as such that prevents the agent from rationally according a *privileged position* to his or her own pursuit of whatever ends, shared or private? If there is no such feature, the sceptic claims, the radical difference, acknowledged in *Natural Goodness*, by which rationality sets the good of man apart from the good of other organisms creates the space for a radical form of subjectivist egoism.

If it is rational to pursue private ends at the cost of survival or reproduction in particular cases (NG 42, 95) and, perhaps, to accord them more authority than Foot would allow quite generally (Sect. 2.2), why shouldn’t it be in the power of reason, and indeed rational, also to rise above requirements of impartiality¹⁷ in one’s concerns? Can I not, without betraying reason, set my private ends up as an overarching standard for my behaviour? Alternatively, in line with a group-partial conception, can I not classify myself as one of the masters in a society composed of masters and slaves (cf. Sect. 3.1)?

Foot in fact identifies a version of practical scepticism in Friedrich Nietzsche. His thought, she writes, “was that right and wrong in action could not be determined by *what* was done *except in so far as that stood in a certain relation to the particular nature of the person who performed it*” (NG 111). He “spoke with special scorn of the belief that there could be a good that was not just my good or your good but ‘good and evil the same for all’”. For him, human good lay in “something that an individual had to determine for himself, creating his own values rather than paying heed to anyone else” (NG 112). So, Nietzsche’s “prank-some” nobleman may be acting well in “performing acts of plunder,

¹⁷Virtuous rationality is anyway “partial” in both senses of the word, on account of demands of prudence. Note that the egoist’s scepticism is actually impartial in *this* sense: he can concede that it is equally *rational* for others to compete by pursuing the same kind of ruthless policy as he does—and hope they won’t, or won’t succeed.

murder, and rape" (cf. NG 111). For, whether "an injury, an oppression, an exploitation" or any other form of wicked conduct are wrong depends on that individual's values (NG 110).

How can this view, which Foot calls "psychological individualism" (NG 110), be shown to be false? It "is of course contrary to the principles of natural normativity [...], because there is nothing human beings need more than protection from those who would harm and oppress them" (NG 113). But has she shown that the human form of life does not allow for rational variants in which particular individuals, or a group, pursue ends at the cost of moral considerations? Perhaps such variants are in fact incompatible with the ideas of reason and rationality. But I do not find in Foot's work the resources to establish this.

3 Epistemic Scepticism

We now turn to a form of scepticism that questions the ability of Foot's work to show that we know, or can know, how we should act. It seems that any doubt whether her account of goodness *gives* us knowledge of this kind is irrelevant and inappropriate, since it is not meant to resolve "disputes about substantial moral questions". She does not claim to "have described a method for settling them all [...]. The account of vice as a natural defect merely gives a framework within which disputes are said to take place, and tries to get rid of some intruding philosophical theories and abstractions that tend to trip us up" (NG 116).

On the other hand, one of these theories is that of the sceptic who doubts that "we have reason to aim at those things at which a good human being must aim, as for instance good rather than harm to others, or keeping faith" (NG 53). How does Foot try to allay his doubt? Her programme is to show, a) by invoking *Aristotelian necessity*, what it is that a good human being must aim at (viz. things like keeping faith); and b) that morality is *part of rationality*, so that, once (a) is in place, we have been given what can be given in the way of reasons. Now (b) has been challenged already (Sects. 2.2–2.3). But (a), too, leaves us with questions: Does appeal to Aristotelian necessity really permit us

to *establish* the functionality of those virtues, or ethical norms, whose goodness has been subjected to sceptical doubt (Sect. 3.1)? And, if yes: Does such an argument supply us with relevant knowledge (Sect. 3.2)?

3.1 The Indeterminacy of Aristotelian Necessity

I have already argued (in Sect. 2) that considerations of Aristotelian necessity do not allow us to identify every substantial component of what we count as morality. For her part, Anscombe discovered this (cf. Sect. 2.1) *after* having tended to explain moral norms *quite generally* in terms of Aristotelian necessity (a discovery that *Natural Goodness* does not take on board). This already indicates that incompleteness, vagueness, uncertainty attach to any explanation—and *a fortiori* to any justification—of moral requirements by appeal to Aristotelian necessity.

The vagueness has various sources: a) As Foot is of course aware, human life admits of so much clearly non-defective diversification that its general form defies determinate description (cf. NG 43). b) Like every other kind of organism, a human being is characterized by *mutual* teleologies. Thus, rationality, including the practice of virtue, is not just required by, but at the same time a prominent part of, our form of life. Hence, a problem of circularity puts limits to the possibility of showing, concerning any particular motivational pattern of acting, that its necessity derives from a correct conception of human life. c) Quite apart from (a) and (b), we have to admit the following general point: Even if the necessity of any true virtue *V* could be said to *derive* from our life form's being *H*, this would not mean that *we can derive*, i.e., infer, from conception *H* that we need *V*. For the possibilities and tendencies and dependencies that go with human acting and interacting may just be too complex to allow for such a project.

There may be further reasons why our explanation of particular moral norms in terms of Aristotelian necessity has to be indeterminate, but the three I have mentioned under (a) to (c) seem quite enough. Sure, the institution of promising allows “human beings [...] to bind each other's wills” (NG 46). But can one *demonstrate* that no alternatives are possible? that expression of anger is/is not always bad? that paedophilia,

incest, occasional torture are incompatible with a people's doing well? that standards of Aristotelian necessity exclude the well-being of a slave-holding society?¹⁸

The epistemic scepticism I have sketched is partial, or specific, in the following sense: It can admit that by Aristotelian necessity a human society needs some system of practical norms that is *formally* like morality. But it denies that we have been given reason to think that only the morality we largely share or something very similar to it in content could be accounted for by the human life form, let alone derived from it.

3.2 Conferring Certainty Versus Explaining

In Foot's defence of morality by appeal to Aristotelian necessity the epistemic sceptic finds an additional defect, one that it shares with other moral theories that seek to answer the sceptical challenge. It fails to confer *certainty* on our moral convictions.

For, even if you *can derive* the need to keep your promises, say, from a correct conception of human nature, this does not imply that your conviction that you have to keep them is based on this derivation. Remember what Wittgenstein says in the very opening paragraph of *On Certainty*: "Any proposition can be derived from other ones. But they may be no more certain than it is itself" (1969, §1). Suppose that Foot is right to hold that truthfulness and promise-keeping and the rest are Aristotelian necessities, and that she has convinced you of this. It simply does not follow that you base your knowledge that you must keep your promises, etc., on the knowledge of those necessities. On the contrary, you are likely to be already certain that you must keep promises, more certain than of any piece of ethical theory; and this certainty inclines you to accept an account of human rationality that plausibly *explains* the necessity of promise-keeping.

¹⁸His conception could actually appeal to various models of "natural normativity" supplied by non-human forms of life. There are, e.g., species of frogs in which the less talented males spend their energy croaking in order to attract females, which are then available as mates to their less vociferous, hence less exhausted, competitors. Remember also that, ironically, no thought of Aristotelian necessity prevented Aristotle from holding that the human species featured natural slaves and an imperfectly rational sex besides fully rational males.

Now, if the epistemic sceptic is already certain that he must keep promises, what does he complain about when he is given a Naturalistic explanation of this necessity? Well, he at least pretends *not* to be certain. And if we can imagine him really to doubt that promises ought to be kept, we can perhaps imagine him also to be unusual enough to find its defence in terms of Aristotelian necessity more certain. To this extent, then, we might expect such a sceptic to have no complaint against Foot. It is more likely, however, that he is just a philosopher—one who simply wants to know whether the belief we have that we ought to keep promises draws whatever certainty it has from anything more certain. And *he* does have a complaint.

For Foot claims to show him “why he should do that which the good person must do”, things like “keeping promises [and] refraining from murder” (NG 64). He takes this to promise him a reason that confers certainty on the belief that promises must be kept, and thereby justifies and motivates the corresponding conduct. The “why”, however, is ambiguous, asking for explanation *or* justification. And what the philosophical sceptic is given is not what he hopes for, viz. *justifying grounds*, reasons *on which to rest* the belief that promises ought to be kept. What he receives instead is what might be called *ontological grounds*: reasons that *explain* the need to keep promises by facts of which a reasonable person may well be less certain.

4 Practical Scepticism

We finally come to a species of moral scepticism whose request is for *practical as opposed to theoretical* knowledge—although, we are going to see, it too appeals to the distinction between “justifying” and explanatory reasons. The practical sceptic questions the third Naturalistic thesis: He doubts that the moral judgements whose truth claims Foot shows to be plausible are practical judgements; and that reflexion on the human form of life or, indeed, any other theoretical considerations can supply him with *reasons to act* as he ought to by motivational rather than situational requirement.

Let us make sure he is a pure specimen of the species *practical sceptic* by assuming him to be a firm believer in natural normativity and in the determinative moral relevance of nothing other than Aristotelian

necessities. I will further assume that he has no qualms accepting that whatever *explains*, e.g., the fact the promises ought to be kept also *justifies* the belief that this is so, including the belief that he himself must keep his promises—he is not touched by the epistemic scepticism of Sect. 3.2.

Why, then, is he not satisfied with Foot's vindication of natural normativity? Answer: He claims he cannot be told *how to act* by being told *how he ought to act*. He denies that he has been given any reason *to do* what he has been given reason *to believe he ought to do*.

In other words: Foot asks him to recognize practically a requirement that she only *shows* to deserve theoretical recognition (Sect. 4.1). And she is not aware of this discrepancy because she fails clearly to keep those two kinds of recognition apart (Sects. 4.2–4.3) and ignores the distinction between motivational and situational requirements (Sect. 4.3).

4.1 Practical Versus Anthropological Inference

To treat morality as an Aristotelian necessity is to treat ethics, or at least its foundations, as a branch of anthropology in a wide sense: the study of man. *Natural Goodness* has convinced the practical sceptic that it is by an anthropological argument that he can establish the judgement "Humans ought not to tell lies" by examining the human form of life. Applying a bit of deductive logic, he passes from that proposition, together with "I am a human being", to "I ought not to tell lies"; and further, adding that he does not believe that *p*, to the conclusion "I ought not to say that *p*". Let us call the whole derivation an anthropological inference.

Some of Aristotle's "practical syllogisms" might actually be read as exhibiting this pattern.¹⁹ Note, however, that our sceptic's inference can be paralleled by a third person variant on it that is available even to scoundrels and immoralists (cf. Sect. 1.2). Aristotle's practical syllogism, by

¹⁹At *NE* VII.3.147a5–6, somebody is represented as reasoning: "Every man is benefited by dry food. I am a man. So I ought to eat dry food". We find a similar pattern in two examples at *De Motu Animalium* 7.701a13–15—though in both cases the first premise, "Every man / no man should walk", proposes a *telos* supplied by the occasion, rather than by human nature on its own.

contrast, is essentially first-personal, and first-personal because practical. It is thus in an obvious sense not available to anyone but a prospective agent.

This is clear, e.g., from the case where somebody reasons that he must produce something valuable, and that a house is such. In conclusion he “straightaway produces a house” (*De Motu Animalium* 7.701a16f.). This person *acts* on the reason articulated in the two premises. If his conclusion is to be verbalized, it will evidently *not express a fact*, potentially known to anybody (the fact *that* the agent ought to produce a house). No, the verbalized conclusion *has to* take the form “I should produce a house”: it inevitably belongs in the mouth of the agent. Foot recognizes this when speaking of “arguments that have as a conclusion ‘so that is what I shall do’” (NG 55).

Here and in what follows, I am using “should” to signal an essentially practical judgement, treating “ought” as practically non-committal.²⁰ “I should Φ ” claims *knowledge how to act* regarding the question whether to Φ or not.²¹ This claim serves to express the speaker’s²²

²⁰This distinction is of course merely technical and admittedly artificial. It is not meant to reflect a distinction in the common use of those words. It is to mark the important difference between a genuinely practical judgement and a theoretical judgement asserting a practical requirement (cf. fn. 4). An ordinary *ought/should*-judgements may sit on the fence between theoretical and practical recognition of a moral requirement. What counts, however, is this: you are confronted with a *genuine alternative* by the question: “When you say ‘I agree I *should* *ought* to Φ ’, are you just voicing an insight, or rather expressing readiness, in principle, to comply?”

²¹This is practical knowledge in one sense of the term: knowledge of what one *should* do. It manifests itself primarily in the knower’s acting *well*. It is not to be confused with Anscombe’s “practical knowledge”, which is non-observational knowledge of what one *is* doing and the cause of one’s doing it (1979, §28–32). Note also that knowledge how to act, and how to live, is *not* an instance of what, following Ryle, philosophers commonly call knowledge-how. You may know how to trim this rosebush but not do it; whereas arguably you can’t be said to know how to live and act unless you are at least bent on living and acting that way. Foot might find my use of “commitment” as unpalatable as Allan Gibbard’s “endorsing a norm”, of which she professes “not [to] know what is meant by this somewhat contrived expression” (NG 19). Well, “I should Φ ” expresses commitment in the sense that speakers’ Φ -ing is the primary criterion of their meaning it.

²²Does the second person admit of an analogy to the first-person *should*? Well, “You should / ought to Φ ” may be encouragement as well as statement of fact. (That it could be the latter *only* is shown by the consistency of saying: “I admit you ought to Φ , but I wouldn’t myself care a damn about Φ -ing in your place”.) On the other hand, my “You should Φ ” does not of course express *your* commitment, your readiness to Φ , as your “I should Φ ” would. The right thing to say, I think, is that by saying: “You (but equally: he / she) should Φ ” I typically mean to *ascribe* a requirement of the sort whose authority *I myself* recognize practically. Note, by the way, that by using the theoretical “what one ought to do” one does not distance oneself from commitment in the way one does by the phrase “what one ‘ought’ to do”, meaning: “what people say one ought to do”.

commitment to Φ -ing *as well as* awareness that by Φ -ing one satisfies a norm (which naturalism says is a norm of nature), while an *ought*-assertion only expresses such awareness.²³

4.2 Uncommitted "Practicality"

It will be said that we don't find the distinction I have just drawn in Foot—and I have said so myself (Sect. 1.2). But the distinction is justified, and indeed called for, by the naturalistic framework of her account of reasons for acting. To see this, it will help to adapt a thought experiment that Foot herself suggests.

To highlight the objectivity of the notion of goodness, she remarks that "intelligent Martians who themselves did not think in terms of goodness and badness might (even if landing in the rainforest and knowing nothing of humans) realize that the plants and animals on earth could be described in propositions with a special logical form [such as "The female bullfinch ..."], and come themselves to talk about the newly met living things as we do" (NG 36).

But Martians could of course equally come to know that such talk applies to human animals as well; that *their* doing well, too, requires the satisfaction of characteristic Aristotelian necessities; and that among the teleological demands on a human life the motivational ones play a special role.

Obviously, there could be no practicality to a Martian judgement that X ought to keep his promises. Hence, to the extent that X's own judgement that he ought to keep his promises is based on the same anthropological considerations and has the same content as the Martians', it too cannot claim practicality. What, then, does the practical character of a genuine moral judgement consist in?

²³Is a practical judgement really a judgement? Its formulation cannot, e.g., enter an if-clause!—I agree that truth-functions cannot be applied to it in the usual way—and add that little hangs on whether it is called a judgement (cf. statements hedged by "perhaps"!)—But can it then be true, and manifest knowledge?—Well, "I should F" is true if "I ought to F", which does enter truth-functions, is; and in this case it may display knowledge. The grammar of such a "should" needs exploration (cf. also fn. 22), esp. with regard to two questions: a) How does "should F" relate to "intend to F"? b) How does the categorical necessity it expresses relate to the hypothetical necessity that relates means to intended ends (cf. Müller 1989)?

Foot envisages a notion of practicality that does not “tie moral judgement too closely to action” (NG 18).²⁴ And she rightly points to examples of people who “are simply shameless” like the “city hunter” (Sect. 2.1) or “a certain Brooklyn machine politician who had the gall to say that while people think it hard to stand up for what is right, what is really hard is what he was doing, ‘standing up day after day, week after week, for what is wrong’” (NG 19). What such people recognize it would be right for them to do, however, does not seem at all to be something they recognize in the sense of even a minimal disposition to comply.

On the other hand, “it is in the concept of morality that the thought that something ought to be done has a relation to action lacked by such thoughts as that the earth is round [...]” (NG 20). Foot professes to agree with Hume that “morality [...] is necessarily practical, serving to produce and prevent action”, and that “‘Hume’s practicality requirement’ [...] must be met” (NG 9; cf. NG 18, 20).

It must be met—but not the way he thinks. It is rather “because moral action is a requirement of practical rationality that it has a special connection with the will” (NG 21). This, however, means only that a judgement is practical in virtue of representing a way of acting as complying with a motivational requirement. It does not exclude that the requirement is recognized in the “Martian” way, i.e., *without* “serving to produce and prevent action”. Given Foot’s explanations, a moral judgement is *practical* only by topic. Its sense seems to be exhausted by truth-conditions that consist in a teleological and motivational

²⁴I find this formulation revealing—revealing of an inkling that there are really two ways of understanding a sentence such as “For [NN] certain considerations count as reasons for action” (NG 12): does it ascribe to NN theoretical or rather practical recognition of such reasons? If “morality [...] serves to produce and prevent action, *because the understanding of reasons can do that*” (NG 18): what account is to be given of cases when it can but doesn’t? *Separate* accounts are evidently needed for shamelessness and weakness of will. But only *one* seems to be available to Foot, because she repudiates the idea of practical recognition as something which the shameless lacks, whereas the akratic manifests it obliquely.—Cf. also a curious formulation according to which the sense of *acting well* “is given primarily at least by [an agent’s] recognition of the force of particular considerations as reasons for acting: that and [!] the influence that this has on what he does” (NG 12). Doesn’t the agent’s—as opposed to the Martian’s—recognition of such a consideration *ipso facto* manifest itself primarily in “what he does”, if moral judgement is as such practical?

requirement based on Aristotelian necessity. A person's recognition that these truth-conditions are satisfied need in no way involve his tendency to satisfy the requirement. How could it, given that such recognition could exist in a non-human subject? And I cannot see that it acquires practicality (in the sense explained in Sect. 1.2) merely by occurring in a human one.

4.3 No Logical Gap?

The practical sceptic denies that Foot can have it both ways, viz. that *practicality* can be both action-producing and already present in *ought*-judgements based on an Aristotelian necessity for humans to act on a certain kind of reason—the sort of judgement that even anthropologically minded Martians could arrive at on the basis of studying the human life form. How can the *same recognition of reasons*, he wants to know, leave the shameless as cold as the Martian and at the same time manifest itself in another's "arguments that have as a conclusion 'so that is what I shall do'" (NG 55)? And why should the fact that "most people know that it is [...] unreasonable to take benefits and give nothing in return" mean that they will tend to *act* reasonably, so that "human cooperation [does not] need a special explanation" (NG 23)?

Foot writes: "The goodness of good action has a special relation to choice. But [...] this special relation is not what non-cognitivists think it is, but rather lies in the fact that moral action is rational action, and in the fact that human beings are creatures with the power to recognize reasons for action and to act on them" (NG 24). As already hinted (at the end of the last subsection), this means: The life of humans depends on practical rationality: they can, and need to, and do take certain types of fact as reasons to act in certain ways, and part of this is the implementation of virtuous motivational patterns; *this is why* we see them act from considerations of justice, generosity, etc.: People's acting from these is just as intelligible as their acting from considerations of prudence or private inclination. Hence, we shouldn't be surprised to find, e.g., that you, being one of them, act morally, and to find ourselves judging you defective if you don't.

My practical sceptic accepts all this. So he isn't surprised to find himself acting morally (though, he tells us, a bit defectively, too). He insists, however, that no valid argument has been adduced by Foot (or presumably anyone else) that would take us from *considerations to show that (and why)* humans ought (and actually tend) to recognize moral reasons, to *reasons in favour of recognizing* moral reasons. His worry, we might say, is the move, not from *is* to *ought*, but from *ought* to *should*. He finds himself well represented by the question "What if I do not care about being a good human being?" (NG 52), but fails to see how Naturalism could answer it.

At this point it becomes important also to remember the distinction of motivational from situational requirements that Foot seems to neglect (Sect. 1.3). The latter presuppose reasons *involved in* acting a certain way (reasons R why to Φ), the former raise the question of reasons *in favour of* acting that way (reasons X why to treat R as a reason to Φ). Which of these are the "grounds" intended in Foot's denial that "any reason [has] been given for the existence of a logical gap between a moral judgement and its grounds" (NG 23; cf. NG 8f., 20)?

The sceptic urges that the denial is only justified if the grounds in question are of the *first* kind. There is indeed no logical gap between, for instance, the promise you have given to Φ and your judgement that you should Φ , once you are a promise-keeper—one who judges that he should given-his-promise-to- Φ - Φ -because-of-the-promise-to- Φ . What, however, if the grounds are taken the second way? Then they are reasons *in favour of* acting as the hyphenated formula says: reasons for you to treat your promise to Φ as a reason to Φ , hence also reasons for your "moral judgement" that you should treat your promise to Φ as a reason to Φ . And it is reasons of *this* kind that the sceptic claims have not been supplied with the grounds that Naturalism makes available. For, these grounds, consisting as they do in considerations of natural normativity, can warrant at best theoretical, not practical, recognition of virtuous motivational requirements—"moral judgement[s]" of the *ought*, not the *should*, variety. Here, the sceptic holds, is indeed a fatal logical gap.

5 Whence Moral Knowledge?

I have presented three ways a sceptic might question Foot's claim to have given him reason to act morally. Can a naturalistic account of morality be developed in a version that satisfies the sceptical demands I have specified?

This question must be answered differentially in accordance with the different forms of scepticism I have discussed (Sect. 5.1). But there may be a way of meeting the challenges posed in Sects. 2–4 by supplementing Naturalism with an understanding of moral knowledge that does not rely on the idea that moral judgements are shown to be true by anthropological considerations (Sect. 5.2).

5.1 Three Sceptical Responses

a) The *theoretical sceptic* questions thesis (1), which says that the teleology of acting well by itself accounts for its necessity. He agrees that, typically, we need to act on moral as well as prudential considerations because human life depends on our doing so. But he claims that a) not all moral requirements can be accounted for in this way, and b) in general the vindication of particular such requirements can be no more than tentative because the relevant "facts of life" are too complex to permit sufficient evidence of necessity.

The Anscombian argument from the existence of *mystical value* strikes me as wholly successful. The idea of Aristotelian necessity certainly has its place in moral theory. But even if it were true that it could account for all of morality, this would be so far from being certain that it could not be made to bear the burden that Naturalism puts on it.

What relative weight should be accorded to private ends? I don't know. Foot is right to maintain that at times they give *prima facie* reasons for acting that genuinely compete with and legitimately overrule *prima facie* considerations of morality or prudence (NG 11).²⁵ But their

²⁵Only, the former reasons, consisting as they do of objects of desire, don't refer to *facts* in the way the latter do (NG 23f.).

nature and status in the whole of rationality may have to be further clarified before the sceptical argument from Sect. 2.2 can be evaluated. The same may be true with regard to a final verdict on “psychological individualism”, as well as to the claim that considerations of natural normativity do not have it in them to rule out a slaveholding society (cf. Sects. 2.3, 3.1).

Nevertheless, the theoretical sceptic is right to conclude: Appeal to *Aristotelian necessities* specific to human rationality, as developed in Naturalism, does *not suffice* to account for the norms of morality.

b) The *epistemic sceptic* doubts thesis (2)—that moral knowledge can be based on a grasp of the requirements of human life. At his arguments one might level a general objection: It is he himself who, in his mistaken reading of *Natural Goodness*, wrongly identifies (in Sect. 3.2) a philosophical *explanation* that bases judgements of motivational requirement on facts such as Aristotelian necessities, with an agent’s recourse to *reasons for* assenting to requirements situational or motivational. Foot herself does not take appeal to Aristotelian necessity to provide anyone with reasons for judging how to act, let alone for acting accordingly.

I reply that, on the contrary, an appeal to Aristotelian necessity as yielding “justificatory” reasons is an essential, though unworked-out, part of her programme. Consider this passage, which takes its clue from the goodness of promise-keeping “as simply one particular application of general (species-based) criteria of evaluation”:

Considerations about such things as promising, neighbourliness, and help for those in trouble have, I maintain, the same kind of connection with reasons for action as do considerations of self-interest or of means to our ends [!]: the connection going in each case through the concept of practical rationality and the facts of human life. So I think that we can see as hopeful the project of producing a cognitivist alternative to theories such as emotivism, prescriptivism, and expressivism: an alternative that takes care of just what they were trying to take care of, in the way of a necessary connection between moral judgement [!] and action. (NG 18)

The Naturalist’s “considerations about promising” cannot satisfy the practicality demand unless they are able to yield practical knowledge that one should keep one’s promises.

Later we read that "extant moral beliefs about various sexual practices have come to many of us to seem mistaken; we have re-evaluated old beliefs about the baneful influence of, for instance, masturbation or homosexuality"—much as we would have abandoned the idea "that it was good for human beings to be as fat as possible" when "it was realized that corpulence went with ill health" (NG 109). This remark proves that Foot does hold that quite ordinary moral judgements are corrected—or presumably verified, as the case may be—by attention to Aristotelian necessities, much as prudential judgements are.²⁶

But it also proves that this sort of evidence is obviously shaky—and reliance on it disastrous when it is unavailable or merely imaginary, as according to Foot has been the case with sexual morality. And because of this it seems rational for us to stick to a moral conviction of which we are more certain than of ostensible anthropological evidence (cf. Sect. 3.2). Hence the sceptic could be right if he takes the example to show, not that enhanced attention to Aristotelian necessity proves traditionally censured sexual practices to accord with virtue, but rather that their unexplained wrongness (cf. Sect. 2.1) proves that consideration of Aristotelian necessity is a tricky business or insufficient.²⁷

Foot's position, by contrast—if it is to answer the epistemic (as well as the practical) sceptic—has to be read as implying that we can and generally should rely on, or look for, facts about human nature that

²⁶What must of course be conceded is this: If particular moral requirements can be explained and justified in terms of Aristotelian necessity, it does not follow that these requirements can be derived from an independent prior conception of the human form of life (cf. Sect. 3.1).

²⁷Again, consider the passage that speaks of "reasons for believing propositions about natural goodness and badness in various plants, animals, and human beings; for instance, for believing that an individual oak tree with superficial, spindly roots was to be evaluated as defective, and [...] for the assertion that Maklay would have acted badly had he photographed his sleeping servant. In the latter case the immediate [!] reason was that he had promised not to do so". The suggestion implied is clearly that an *indirect* and possibly ultimate reason consists in the fact that "to break a promise was as such to act badly" (NG 64). But in the Maklay example, his having promised to Φ is *his reason* for judging that he should Φ (and for Φ -ing), whereas (I would argue) it is wrong to say that the natural badness of promise-breaking ought to, or even could, be *his* (indirect) *reason* for accepting the situational requirement to Φ . (If anything, the natural goodness of promise-keeping *might* be his reason for accepting the *motivational* requirement of Φ -ing *because of a promise to Φ* . But, as I have argued, this implies an implausible distribution of certainties.) Cf. also the phrase "an individual who knows that he has reason to act morally" (NG 18), and the sentence "A human being as a rational animal will ask 'Why should I do that?', particularly if told that he should do something distasteful that seems to be for the advantage of others rather than himself" (NG 56f).

explain the need of a motivational requirement, in order to find there, if anywhere, *reasons to accept* that requirement. And this position has, I think, been rightly and successfully called into question (Sect. 3.1). There is no good reason to hold that, even in general, *naturalistic considerations* command the *certainty* that would allow us to base moral convictions on them.

c) The *practical sceptic*, finally, argues against thesis (3) that a reason to recognize a moral requirement on the grounds suggested by Foot is not *eo ipso* a reason for its practical recognition.

Suppose that R is a reason to Φ . Then the fact that it is in the nature of humans to Φ because of R does show him that, given R, he has reason to Φ , hence ought to Φ , and is defective if he does not Φ . But it does not itself *give him any reason* either to Φ , or to assume the pattern $R \rightarrow \Phi$ into his motivational constitution. Nor should he expect such a reason to be possible. For I see no way of justifying the derivation of practical from theoretical recognition of moral requirements.

The practical sceptic therefore rightly concludes: *Practical* moral knowledge cannot be based on judgements of *natural normativity*, even if *ought*-judgements can.

If, then, reasons for acting are not supplied by form of life considerations, or any other theoretical argument, this leaves us with the question: How is knowledge how to act and live possible?—I have no answer to this question. But I'll end by mentioning a conception of such knowledge that we find in one of Foot's favourite authors, viz. Aquinas—a conception that promises to meet the challenges of the theoretical and the epistemic as well as the practical sceptic.

5.2 Unmediated Knowledge How to Act

On my reading of Aquinas he holds that the resources of the agent's practical thinking have to include, in advance of reflection and inference, *should*-judgements (in my special sense). Aristotelian necessities can then still determine the basic content of morality—on this point I agree with Foot. But they need not, on that conception, function as mere *evidential support* of practical judgements. Instead, the very human

nature that involves moral requirements *also* includes a corresponding *awareness*—not the theoretical knowledge of these requirements, but the *practical recognition* which ideally shapes the motivational dispositions which realize them, the virtues. (Why shouldn't it—just as sea turtle nature, which involves the need of ocean water, also supplies the hatchlings with an instinct to head for it?) The well-developed human mind by nature recognizes what to treat as a reason for doing what, in basic, "indemonstrable" (!) yet material *should*-convictions, or practical principles. Aquinas calls the natural disposition to become conscious of and apply these principles *synderesis*.²⁸

I cannot here discuss the details of this doctrine. Even so we can see how it might help us to meet the sceptical challenges we have ventilated, if we think of the synderetic principles as acceptance of virtuous motivational patterns.

- a. The assumption of synderetic knowledge deprives the *theoretical sceptic* of his central cause of complaint. Nothing about the nature of the relevant principles requires them to mirror Aristotelian necessities only. Other aspects of human nature ("mystical" ones perhaps) might account for some of their content. Furthermore, we can suppose that questions of priority among competing considerations (cf. Sects. 2.2–2.3) are settled within the content of those principles.
- b. The *epistemic sceptic*, too, is left without a target once the certainty he is after no longer seems to depend on any sort of derivation. There will of course be philosophical, and possibly empirical, questions about the credibility of Aquinas' account, the place it accords to happiness, the grounds and the "naturalness" of requirements *not* due to Aristotelian necessity, the dependence of justice on conventions, the developmental and moral psychology it presupposes, the role of socializing factors, the possibility of moral ignorance, wickedness, substantial disputes, etc. But *if* fundamental moral principles are agreed to be

²⁸*Principia operabilium nobis naturaliter indita [...] pertinent [...] ad specialem habitum naturalem, quem dicimus synderesim* (Aquinas 2008, I q 79 a 12c; cf. I–II q 94 a 1 ad 2). Examples of these *principia naturaliter cognita quasi indemonstrabilia* include not only *bonum faciendum*, *malum vitandum*, but substantial ones such as *nulli esse iniuste nocendum*, *non furandum*, and arguably also *quod pacta sint servanda, et quod legati apud hostes sint tuti* [!] *et alia huiusmodi* (1934, 1018–9).

“indemonstrable”, sceptical doubts cannot, obviously, be based on any “vagueness, indeterminacy, uncertainty” attaching to ways in which they might be *established* (cf. Sect. 3.1). If they represent motivational patterns of acting well, they are practical judgements saying *what is a reason to do what*; but neither the principles nor the operational dispositions they shape are themselves responses to reasons.

- c. I finally return to the worries of the *practical sceptic*. He sees no way of turning an “anthropological” proof that he, like any human being, must recognize his promise to Φ as a reason to Φ , into a reason for being motivated by that reason, i.e., for Φ -ing *because he has promised to Φ* . But, once Naturalism is modified by the doctrine of *synderesis*, it takes the *practical recognition* of basic motivational requirements to be in place *itself* as part of the human life form. There is then no question of “turning” theoretical considerations, or anything else, into *reasons for* that practical recognition.

The resulting position is, or can still be, naturalistic in three respects. First, in assuming *synderesis* itself to be part of common human nature rather than a subjective mindset. Second, in taking Aristotelian necessity to determine the *core* of morality, and essentially to enter a correct philosophical understanding of it (cf. Sect. 1.5 (a)). And, third, in excluding from what can be morally required anything that cannot count as contributing to human good.

Natural Goodness does much towards establishing that acting well is a requirement of our rational form of life. Not least, perhaps, it commands admiration because it helps the moral sceptic to articulate his doubts in reasonable ways. But I think we have to admit that Foot does not succeed in removing them. If something like *synderesis* is the root of moral knowledge, they cannot be removed by argument. How then can and should we respond to a sceptic’s claim not to know that he should act well?

Not by giving him reasons why he should, reasons drawn from a theoretical understanding of his life form or from anywhere else. Perhaps by saying: “Really? You don’t know? Not even dimly? And how did you manage to lay your knowledge at rest?” Well, if he is amenable at all, it will be better to try to cure him from misguided philosophy, and remind him of what his conduct *shows* his most basic certainties to be.

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The Deep and the Shallow

Gavin Lawrence

*What I am looking for is not happiness. I work solely because
it is impossible for me to do anything else*

Alberto Giacometti

1 Background Elements

In a footnote in *Natural Goodness* (2001), Foot writes:

I once discussed the difficult concept of depth in life and literature with Isaiah Berlin. Years later I asked him whether the problem still worried him, to which he replied... ‘I think about it *all* the time, *all* the time.’ (87f.6)

Years earlier, writing of wisdom in the title essay to *Virtues and Vices* (1978a), Foot claimed wisdom has two parts. The one, relatively easy to understand, is a matter of knowing “the means to certain good ends,”

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J. Hacker-Wright (ed.), *Philippa Foot on Goodness and Virtue*, Philosophers in Depth,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91256-1_7

where these ends are ends of human life in general, as against the delimited ones of the various arts (*technai*).¹ The other concerns these ends, and is a matter of knowing “how much particular ends are worth” (VV 1978b, 5)—and this part

... which has to do with values, is much harder to describe, because here we meet ideas which are curiously elusive, such as the thought that some pursuits are *trivial* and some *important* in human life. Since it makes good sense to say that *most* men **waste a lot of their lives in ardent pursuit of what is trivial and unimportant** it is not possible to explain **the important and the trivial** in terms of *the amount of attention* given to different subjects by the *average* man.² But I have never seen, or been able to think out, a true account of this matter, and I believe that a complete account of wisdom, and of certain other virtues and vices must wait until this gap can be filled. What we can see is that one of the things that a wise man knows and a foolish one does not is that such things as social position, and wealth, and the good opinion of the world, are too dearly bought at the cost of health or friendship or family ties. So we may say that a man who lacks wisdom has ‘false values’, and that vices such as vanity and worldliness and avarice are contrary to wisdom in a special way. There is always an element of *false judgment* about these vices... (VV 1978b, 6–7)

Foot touched on this topic again in “Rationality and Virtue” (2002b)

A special problem of precedence also arises from the distinction of greater and lesser human goods. Some things are important in human life, while others are less important or trivial; and wisdom, as part of practical rationality, must take account of this in governing our aims. I cannot even begin to deal with this topic here, except to notice a conceptual connexion with the concept of *deprivation* (as opposed to hardship). It is a reasonable assumption, however, that the idea of importance must depend on facts about the things that *run deep* in human life, however exactly that is to be understood. (MD 173)

¹Cf. Aristotle *NE* 6.5.1140a24–31. Also on the two parts: *NE* 6.9.1142b18–33; *Pol.* 7.13.1331b26–1332a3; cf. *EE* 1.7.1217a35–40).

²Foot perhaps has Murdoch’s views in sight here (Murdoch 1970, 34–8, 41).

For Aristotle, *wisdom* is to have correct views of the goods and bads of human life, and of their relative worth and standing, both in general and in the particular situation, whether in the agent's individual, domestic, or political, capacity. It is to understand how to navigate one's way through these, in the situations in which one finds oneself, so as to end in successful living (*euzoia*), where this is a matter successful action (*eupraxia*)—of fully rational action, *Praxis*. This is action that expresses the agent's judgment—their specification—of how best or wisely to act and to live in the light of their values, their view of human goods and bads; wisdom is matter of getting this right, of succeeding at *Praxis* (or being understandably mistaken). Importantly, wisdom is not only (a) something that both valorizes and integrates those goods enshrined in the different dimensions of the various virtues of character—transforming them from natural dispositions to fully rationally sensitive virtues, each openly and imaginatively sensitive to the demands of the others, in a fully integrated mature human; but also (b) it has within its purview the *entire* range of human goods and bads in all their aspects.³ And (c) wisdom, in what Aristotle calls its “architectonic” as against merely “experiential” form, *accounts* for the value of these goods and bads, the “*why*” of their goodness and badness, the proper appreciation of the correctness of one's action—which appreciation is itself a constitutive part of its being fully successful. Lacking wisdom, one is perforce living a life in some way bad or defective.⁴ It may be a really corrupt, wicked, life. Or it may be simply a *wasted* one, where the agent squanders talents and time, without doing anything so terribly bad, hurting themselves more than others. They were light-minded and frivolous in their ends or in their priorities; or else, while those were correct, the light-mindedness appeared in the means

³Aristotle does not include in matters of character the intellectual “emotions”—curiosity, wonder, awe, sense of nose and imagination, pertinacity, respect for truth, et al., and their proper objects. If so, it is for wisdom in reaching its judgments to bring in the consideration of goods and bads *beyond* those at issue in the virtues of character (e.g., for him, contemplation, *theoria*, a good suspectly humanly transcendent).

⁴The lack is a defect. Full human action, *Praxis*, involves the agent viewing their action *as* the wise thing to do; for it actually to be so, they need wisdom. It is possible to acknowledge the, perhaps partial, lack, and seek good advice: cf. *NE* 1.4.1095b10–14, the incisive quote from Hesiod. But without it, one is vulnerable (cf. *EE* 1.6.1216b35–1217a10).

they thought reasonable to take, but which were slapdash, insensitive, profligate, overly optimistic, and ineffective.⁵ Admittedly, we can speak of the wicked as in a certain way shallow, although that needs elaboration (our immediate reaction to extreme cruelty not being to cry “shallow, shallow!”); less contentiously, we can speak of the unjust life of an unjust person as one *wasted* (although that too is not the first thing we are likely to say, our initial focus being rather on victim than perpetrator). Our talk of waste, however, typically points to a more specific range of defects and misjudgments of worth, where the issues are rather with silliness, idleness, triviality, superficiality, and missed opportunity; with deprivation of things of real human worth, or with failures to appreciate, pursue, or be moved by, them. Much ethical philosophy is preoccupied with good versus wicked, while comparatively neglectful of questions of the deep and the serious, and the danger of wasting one’s life in trivialities. (Not wholly: the third part of Rawls’ *Theory of Justice*, comes to mind, as does literature on the meaning of life, David Wiggins, and Richard Taylor, or meaningfulness in it, for example, Harry Frankfurt and Susan Wolf.)⁶

Foot appreciates that wisdom covers such issues, and in the last passage adds two remarks on the grammar of “importance.” (1) The first, a conceptual connection with *deprivation*, reminds us, I think, that our topic also concerns *impoverishment*—not only wasting one’s life but equally *having it wasted*. It could be wasted as in “those that die like cattle” (Owen, “Anthem to Doomed Youth”). That aside, parents and society can fail adequately to prepare and educate the upcoming generation, to provide, in George Eliot’s releasing phrase, “*a social medium*,”

⁵There are other sorts of defect, for example, a failure to grow up and develop properly serious values, and then just drift through life. That would be one form of superficiality.

⁶“Meaning is commonly associated with a kind of depth. Often the need for meaning is connected to the sense that one’s life is empty or shallow” (Wolf, 7–8). Wolf sees meaningfulness in a life as a third kind of value besides happiness (prudence) and morality. Certainly, once happiness and morality are each flattened within some narrow compass—the egoistic versus the impersonal—space opens to require something else (1f.). Frankfurt does something somewhat similar, restricting morality to concerns with *others* (80–1, vii). These restricted “divisions” perhaps go back to the generation after Aristotle, and are endemic to much Western moral philosophy. I find them unclear, although concerned with their origin and attraction (e.g., roots in the contrast of the *utile* and the *honestum*, and in a connection of justice with the theme of the impersonality of law) (Lawrence 1995, 106).

in which the individual has the opportunities, and encouragement, to attain and realize a life truly rich and fulfilling, a life of some consequence.⁷ To see to it that, for instance, work isn't Taylorized, frittered into a series of simple operations, meaningless to its operators, or repeated into idiocy⁸:

...entering a spinning mill at the age of five, or some other factory, and from then on sitting there every day first 10, then 12, finally 14 hours and engaging in the same mechanical labor means paying dearly for the pleasure of drawing breath. This, however, is the destiny of millions, and many other millions have an analogous one. (Schopenhauer, Chapter 46, 643 (2007/1818))

To see to it that our capacity for wisdom—for the appreciation, prioritization, navigation, and specification of values—is not impeded in its development nor deformed. (2) The other conceptual connection, with what *runs deep in human life*, brings us to the core question of *what matters* in human life; of why we find it intelligible that someone be *deeply* saddened by an inability to have children, or at their untimely death; of why someone might give up much in their own life to care for others; of why, while we allow that reading mystery novels, window shopping, et al., may make properly innocent contributions to a life well lived, we would be puzzled were they put at the center of life and, absent some special story, see in that an error of judgment, of passion misplaced, lacking, or avoided—and sense a life lacking focus, or having the wrong focus. Yet great caution is needed, lest we find ourselves ineptly supposing that the life of, say, a golf correspondent is a wasted

⁷John Hacker-Wright notes that this resonates with the Confucian conception of *li* as an ideal of a social medium, in which socialized patterns of behavior enable us to frame, contour, and express our humanity and mutual respect. *Li* is helpfully articulated by Fingarette (1972), Chapter 1.

⁸As portrayed in Chaplin's *Modern Times*. Cf. Braverman (1974). One can be struck also by the almost Sisyphean aspects of modern life, with its bureaucratic demands, its legal labyrinths, its endless forms, and queues: the paler, not so blatantly exploitative, aspects of "*die Netzstadt*." "Ridiculous the waste sad time, stretching before and after." Someone is out there thinking to make their job easier, regardless of using up your life-hours: *collateral social damage*. The *business-ification of life*: rampant Taylorization, of labor and correlatively of charges. Not to mention the use of pointless labor precisely to torture—from the punishment of writing lines to things much darker.

one. Above, all, we need a fuller description of lives, of the wider settings in which work-activities take place, their personal and social resonance, their historical valence, their richness or lack of it: in short, an understanding of the *contextualism of value*, in all its local, historical, detailed, “Herder,” aspects.

We are concerned that our lives have meaning—that we “make something of ourselves,” do something with our lives; that we achieve or create a life of which we are proud and not ashamed; that our actions are straight, not crooked, and our talents not left idle, buried, suppressed, or frittered away, whether out of timidity, lack of encouragement or opportunity, or a disabling perfectionism; that our strengths and imagination are neither dissipated nor deformed whether through our own faults, or by the constricting conventionalities and injustices of society. A life which, and in which, we have *explored*—have tasted freedom in its most basic, primitive, human sense, from screaming and crawling, our earliest forays in the worlds of sound and space—and been enabled to go on exploring in ever more sophisticated and creative ways: like the progressively creative production of our sentences in which we ever strive to realize ourselves in speech (our “raid on the inarticulate”). It is one of the principal themes in Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, a book much on Foot’s mind. Dorothea Brook, her young spirit cramped by a mere “toy-box” education (79), is filled with “the desire to make her life greatly effective” (26), at her historical juncture, “here—now—in England” (27):

The intensity of her religious disposition, the coercion it exercised over her life, was but one aspect of a nature altogether ardent, theoretic, and intellectually consequent: and with such a nature, struggling in the bonds of a narrow teaching, hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses, a walled-in maze of small paths that led no whither, the outcome was sure to strike others as at once exaggeration and inconsistency. (26–7)

Yet, the desire that one’s life be of some consequence—be worth the living—while it may indeed fuel worldly ambition, doesn’t demand the greatest of public stages, the stage of a Saint Teresa or Antigone. There are smaller quieter settings in which it can be achieved—the lesson, say,

of John Berger's *A Fortunate Man*, or of the cautiously optimistic finale of *Middlemarch* itself:

Her [Dorothea's] full nature, ... spent itself in channels which had no great name on earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.⁹ (785)

We all have a partial responsibility for the social medium at our own historical juncture, the social medium which itself creates and shapes our possibilities of life—the “ecological niches” of our possible labors¹⁰ and the parameters of our imagination—and of its expression and its values, creating, and developing us or impeding and deforming us, and then which we in turn shape, making *it* more releasing, or, like Dorothea's education, more prejudicial and constricting, as may be. By turn, seedlings and gardeners of the soil in which we grow.

Admittedly one may hesitate, struck by Gorky's worry in *Lower Depths*, (1923), and a skepticism about “the growing good of the world,” and feel that the question of the depth and shallowness of life, like that of morality, is hollow and academic when so many in our world struggle just to get through the day alive. But the very form of our *social rationality* is aimed not at mere survival but at living successfully (*Pol.* 1.2.1252b27–1253a4), however sadly impeded that is. It is for us, as Kant might say, to operate under *that* Idea, it is under such an idea that we evaluate what is terribly wrong with our present world, and what needs putting right.¹¹

⁹So too Odysseus in his choice of a new life in the Myth of Er at the end of *Republic* 10: “By chance the soul of Odysseus was assigned the last lot of all and went out to choose, with the memory of his former toils having relieved him of his ambition for status [*philotimia*] it wandered around for a long time seeking a life of a private retiring [*apragmon*] man, and after difficulty found one lying somewhere passed by unconsidered by the others, and, seeing it, said that he would have done the same even if he had had the first lot, and chose it gladly” (*Rep.* 620c3–d2).

¹⁰I think here of Mayhew's (2012) *London Labour and the London Poor*.

¹¹Kant's (1784) marvelous “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose” (1963)."

This general theme links with that of the need, of the ideal, for a human “to realize their creative potential”—that Aristotelian theme of the actualization of potentiality echoed in the great liberals of the nineteenth century, the mundane liberalism of Mill and the historically transcending liberalism of Marx¹²: our need for *objectification*, or as Mill puts it “the love of *power*, not in the limited form of power over other human beings, but abstract power, the power of making our volitions effectual” (153).

In Aristotle’s *ergon* argument, the human good, success as a human, is defined as a life of fully valued action, Praxis, i.e., of reason-involving life activity done in accord with the relevant values, or excellences, which constitute the criteria of success in such action.¹³ This is *human-ing*, the exercise or realization of our *being*, our human essence: our end, our final cause. Aristotle, in his further specification of this, in terms of contemplation—understanding misunderstood as an activity—gives it an unfortunate theistic turn, constructed from his metaphysics of actuality and ontology. But for Marx, the *ergon* or work, of the human is precisely *that: ergon!* *Our work is work*, the first occurrence being formal and the second substantial, or constitutive. Our work as humans is made up of *creative rational work*, knowledge-exhibiting and knowledge-exploring work, work that even when essentially individual (and much is potentially joint or reciprocal) is still *essentially social*. There are no “private” actions any more than private languages. You may choose to show your poems to no-one, or to dance in the privacy of your own room, but poetry and dancing is what you are doing, *our* human activities: just as you may choose to keep your thoughts to yourself—only when you could have expressed them (and keeping them to yourself is also a human action, a human description). These are essentially human life-descriptions, and as such essentially social

¹²More recently, Rawls’ Aristotelian principle (Sec. 65). Cf. G. Cohen (2000), 13–5.

¹³The question of their number and internal structure is left open at this point, although if one turns out more valuable and final, then the optimal life would need at least to realize that (*NE* 1.7.1098a17–18).

forms of human life-activity.¹⁴ Given such work is the realization of our essence, our *human-ing*, its expropriation necessarily alienates us from our very being: we are made other to our own selves, selves whose creativity, often jointly contributive, is the profoundest aspect of our sociality. Such work is the realization of our human potential, of free humans working together, under conditions of freedom, and especially that of *free time*.¹⁵

‘Thou shalt labour by the sweat of thy brow!’ was Jehovah’s curse that he bestowed upon Adam. A. Smith conceives of labour as such a curse. ‘Rest’ appears to him a fitting state of things, and identical with ‘liberty’ and ‘happiness’. It seems far from A. Smith’s thoughts that the individual, ‘in

¹⁴This requires more discussion. At one level, any action of an individual of any species is not “private” in that it falls under a species life-description. (This is not to say that an individual’s “behavior” cannot fall apart into disarray and incoherence; nor that special things may not need to be said about the acquisition of mature forms of behavior.) At a second level, if the human is essentially a *politikon zoon*, then *to human* is to “politicize” or “socialize.” (We can broaden this from Aristotle’s own historically informed sense of “*polis*” to, e.g., “a mature form of rational life-activity in a community of such a size to produce and maintain an enriching *cultural* life, a properly releasing *social medium*.”) Our rational activities are social in themselves and in their resonance (their emotional and evaluative surround), something deeply connected with a species *consciousness*, of being *human*, one among others of one’s *kind*, a *conscious normativity* is thus achieved here (cf. Feuerbach (2008), 1f.; Marx, 1844, “Alienation”): our rationality, our identity, our consciousness, are all social.

¹⁵Our Individuality, as also our Communitary, have essential roles in our humanity: that we can sing solo, that we can sing in choir. Getting our Individuality intelligibly placed and characterized within our Sociality is a task. Once we allow **all** human activity is in a basic sense social, in contrast, say, to God’s, then contrasts between conjoint and lone work can be non-metaphysically re-deployed, as ones of *degree*, and variety. (a) There is the unique author’s, musician’s, sculptor’s voice, in its delicate, or perhaps iconoclastic, dance within its own tradition; and the intimacies of our personal ruminations. So many forms of working alone—at extremes the strengths to keep going when all around have no confidence, simply “because you must”: the antennae of society; or the isolated prisoner of conscience). (b) Equally there are many forms of our conjointness: drill marching, choirs, orchestras, builders, surgical teams, teaching a class, institutions with cooperative roles, professions with defining traditions.

By contrast, Aristotle’s god—contemplation—is an entirely *private* activity, one of which we too are to a degree capable: a metaphysical nonsense. The Berkeleian view of the individual spirit is one in an essentially *private* relation to its God, prior to any between human spirits, and equally nonsense. Both strands linger on as suspect underpinnings of individualist modern “Liberalism,” individual consciousness internalizing the role of God, as a metaphysically lone viewpoint on the world. No wonder Hume, and then Nietzsche saw the need to deconstruct the *self*, so conceived (Basic ontological dualism of soul/mind invites a metaphysical individualism, distorting appreciation of the nature of a social animal with a social identity).

his normal state of health, strength, activity, skill and efficiency', might also require a normal portion of work, and of cessation from rest. It is true that the quantity of labour to be provided seems to be conditioned by external circumstances, by the purpose to be achieved, and the obstacles to its achievement that have to be overcome by labour. But neither does it occur to A. Smith that the overcoming of such obstacles may itself constitute an exercise in liberty, and that these external purposes lose their character of mere natural necessities and are established as purposes which the individual himself fixes. The result is the self-realization and objectification of the subject, therefore real freedom, whose activity is precisely labour. [Etc. etc.] (Marx, "Alienated Labor" from *Grundrisse*, in McLellan (2000), 402–3)¹⁶

Again one may hesitate. Marx, like Aristotle, seems committed to a metaphysic, not one of actuality, but one of process—of history as a trans-generational process of maturation of the human species and the realization of its potential (in a Kantian-Hegelian tradition). Nonetheless the view is profound. (A) It repeats Aristotle's challenge to consider the proper purpose of politics—as in the great divide between wealth as essentially *means* and so delimited by the proper end which it serves, viz. the good of society, and the contra-categorical positing of wealth as *end*, unlimited because end; between the priority of society or else that of its bastard offspring, individualizing capital.¹⁷ The centripetal versus the centrifugal. (B) Second, Marx follows Aristotle in stressing the importance of *free time*. *Freizeit* lies at the heart of human freedom: the sense of a life-time that is ours, as humans, to fill (not the bizarre, metaphysical, totally unconditioned, un-circumstanced, freedom of a god, a form of life dwindled to an unintelligible point outside all context). To be a free human is fundamentally to have free time—time free relative to our necessities, and the parameters of our human situation, time free to realize and develop, to explore and express ourselves, to

¹⁶Nietzsche (1887) Essay 1, §10, uses the same contrast, but deploys it differently, class-wise, to distinguish between the healthy nobles' active conception of happiness as Greek *eupraxia*, and the sick slaves' passive Christian conception of it as "rest, peace, 'sabbath,'" etc.

¹⁷See *Pol.* 1.9.1257b25–31 for the *End-Means Limitation principle*: the pursuit of an end as such is unlimited, and delimits the pursuit of the means to those required for the end (cf. *Pol.* 7.1.1323b6–12; *NE* 7.13.1153b21–25).

work but not be *work-er*: to create, to make something of our individual selves as members of the human kind, objectifying our common humanity in individually creative ways (as with our unique voices). The deep truth in “*Die Arbeit macht frei*” (taking “*macht*” in the constitutive sense that both “*poiein*” and “*make*” also have).¹⁸ And this requires, or is for most enabled and enhanced by, a liberal social ethos and also *a liberal education*—liberal precisely in its sense of *fitting us for freedom*, equipping each to put free time to creative use. Marx at once poses and resolves the problematic of free time. The problem is whether, given free time, there is actually anything *seriously worth* a human’s doing—are we simply to *rest* or to *fritter*? His answer is in terms of the realization of our nature, our potential, as *creators*—a characteristic so fundamental to us that we inflate it to its maximum and project it, by an alienation, metaphysical not political, onto our idea of perfection in being, of success in the category of substance: the Perfect Being who is the divine Creator of the All, the entire Universe. This essence is now, in part, deflated and restored to its human home, and our human potential.¹⁹

If there is anything we can set in the balance against the appalling condition of humanity, it is at least the sheer immensity of human creativity and industry on every side.²⁰ Optimistically, we can add the “sprouts” of a sense of social justice, of a developing capacity for species care in our understanding of each of us as precisely one of *us*, as we struggle toward understanding and creating our species meaning: of

¹⁸Notoriously, this was a slogan in many German concentration camps, among them Dachau and Auschwitz. The exact why and who of its instigation is for historians. A dabble in Google makes one suspect its origin in a reference, at once both moralizing and contemptuous, to Lorenz Diefenbach’s *Arbeit macht frei: Erzählung von Lorenz Diefenbach*, in which “gamblers and fraudsters find the path to virtue through labour” (see Wikipedia) (itself likely referencing Heinrich Beta’s 1845 *Geld und Geist*). Perhaps it was instigated by Theodor Eicke, chief of the *Inspektion der Konzentrationslager*, commander of the *SS-Totenkopfverbände*, the second commandant of Dachau, succeeding the equally appalling Hilmar Wäckerle, after the latter’s dismissal for excessive cruelty in the early months following Hitler’s election to chancellor in January 1933. (See e.g. <https://www.scrapbookpages.com/DachauScrapbook/KZDachau/DachauLife2.html>.)

¹⁹A theme of Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* (translated by George Eliot, *soi-meme*), (2008).

²⁰Not just the arts. Everything from aviation to dentistry, from the cell phone to the parking meter. See also Marx and Engels (2008), I para 24; cf. para 17.

what we do and *can* mean for each other, or recognizing fully what is in front of our eyes. The long march to some *human cosmopolitanism*.

2 *Natural Goodness and Deep Happiness*

Foot takes up one aspect of *depth* in her Aristotelianizing book, *Natural Goodness* (2001), Chapter 6. She must, she thinks, fit happiness into her overall account, and in such a way that does justice to the thought that happiness in some sense is *humanity's good*. Yet to do so is problematic.

Her problems are *au fond* the old ones of the apparent logical independence of virtue and happiness. If independent ends, their pursuit *could* conflict: in conflict, if virtue is dominant, there is a sacrifice of happiness; if happiness, it is something attainable through evil action. In short, living or acting virtuously seems neither sufficient nor necessary for happiness. On precisely these grounds, Socrates criticizes the poets and prose writers as speaking badly about “the most important things for humans” (“*ta megista*”) when they claim that: “many unjust people are successful (*eudaimones*), and many just are wretched (*athlioi*); and that doing injustice is profitable if it escapes notice, but justice is another’s good and self penalty” (*Republic* 3.392b1–4). If so, and if happiness is humanity’s good, then it would be an independent criterion of rational action, and undermine the account of practical rationality offered by Foot in Chapter 4: the case for the rationality of virtue would be vulnerable to challenge (NG 82).²¹ At best we would be left trying to make out an *a posteriori* connection, viz. that, as things are, living virtuously *happens* to be necessary and sufficient for living happily.²²

²¹The problem is classic. Versions arise in questions as to why the *philosopher-kings* in Plato’s *Republic* should do their “-king” bit; or as to why Aristotle’s *theoretical contemplator* shouldn’t steal or let his children starve if that maximized time for contemplating.

²²The direction adopted in K. Wilkes (1980). This is perhaps Foot’s idea, raised only to be rejected as solution, in the case of Gustav Wagner, that vice may happen to have costs in human psychology (NG 90 f.12). However, if pushed, that too may involve conceptual connections (NG 90 f.12 tends that way).

Foot's strategy is to concede that there are senses, or uses, of "happiness"—enjoying an activity, contentment ("gladness"), mood (NG 82–5)—in which it is thus independent and compatible with wickedness, but then to argue that there is another that is not. This is a notion of "*deep happiness*," understood as "the enjoyment of good things," and this satisfies the desiderata of being both something that "can convincingly be called humanity's good" (NG 85), and something a priori incompatible with wickedness. In certain situations—such as that of political prisoners being tempted to give up their just cause in return for freedom to return to happy lives with their families (Foot's example of "the Letter-Writers")—the virtuous appreciate such happiness is out of their reach: and given there are no honorable means to get it, it isn't really available, and in that sense not something *sacrificed*.²³ Virtue is then necessary for deep happiness, but not sufficient, and so we should resist *identifying* a life of virtue with happiness.

Deep happiness is an "elusive" notion (NG 86). In characterizing it, she promptly dismisses suggestions that such depth is a state of mind in the sense in which excitement is or elation. The depth sought is not to be explained in terms (a) of what causes a lot of *disturbance* or perturbation in a life—trivial things can also do that; (b) nor is it a matter of *deep feelings* (for depth is what we are trying to understand); (c) nor what someone *on their death bed* says they mind about (not the place for a measured assessment of a life, NG 86–7). Foot takes these all as reductive suggestions and insists instead that we should look rather to the "grammar"—the surround—of our actual talk of things deep, and of deep happiness ((b) seems circular, not reductive; but no matter).

Her *positive* grammatical investigation moves in two steps. First is a *new* Conceptual Content Restriction, whose main point is to distance us from conceiving of happiness as above as a state of mind like

²³The young, 19-year-old, Alexander Ulyanov said at his execution trial in 1887: "You will always find in the Russian nation a dozen people who are so devoted to their ideals and who feel their country's misfortune so deeply that for them to die for their cause is not a sacrifice." Talk of "sacrifice" suggests a weighing model of deliberation. Foot here is in effect picking up an idea of John McDowell's (1978) about a different model wherein some considerations, properly appreciated, simply *silence*—take off the table—others which, had the former not been there, would have been reasons for action.

contentment, as something *detachable* from beliefs (NG 86; 89–90). To the contrary, happiness in this deep sense is one of a human adult, and in its nature impossible for a child (cf. *NE* 1.9.1100a1–5); it is *not detachable* from an adult’s “resources of experience and belief” (NG 86), but something that “must extend all the way into the underlying thoughts that a person has about himself and his life” (NG 91). However, somewhat surprisingly, this first step is not enough: for, she says, “we have *not yet said anything decisive* against the conjunction of even the greatest, deepest, happiness with wickedness” (NG 90). Her second step proceeds to rule out this conjunction a priori.

In sum, Foot starts from the assumption: [F1] Happiness in some sense is humanity’s good. This creates a problem for the rationality of virtue, to solve which happiness must be shown conceptually incompatible with wickedness. Foot argues for this in two steps. The first clarifies F1: [F2] To be plausible, the sense of happiness in F1 is that of *deep happiness*, where most importantly this is not a state of mind, detachable from beliefs about certain special objects.

The second step then argues for the target thesis: [F3] Such deep happiness is conceptually incompatible with wickedness; it cannot be isolated from virtue.

Problem solved. But what exactly are the two steps? Why is the first insufficient? And what does the second bring to complete the task?

3 Further Description of the Two Steps

3.1 Step 1: Conceptual Content Restriction

First, Foot offers a restriction “of cause and object” over what can intelligibly *count* as deep, just as earlier she had done over “the important” in terms of “what runs deep.” Here, she fills in that restriction. It doesn’t make sense—at least absent “a very special background”²⁴—“to suggest that someone found deep happiness, in, say, a running victory

²⁴On the importance of special background see, e.g., VV 112–4; 118–20; Anscombe (1958).

in a dispute with a neighbour over a morning newspaper or a milk bottle.... Whereas deep happiness and joy over the birth of a child? That is a different matter" (NG 88). It is not intelligible to separate deep happiness from its proper objects. And its possible objects "seem to be things that are **basic** in human life, such as home, and family, and work, and friendship" (NG 88). These are "in a way" *ordinary* things, and while they can be pursued in exceptional ways by exceptional men and women, they can also be found in mundane surroundings—Anna's pride in being a good cook for a doctor, Caleb Garth's attitude to managing a country estate (cf. *NE* 1.9.1099b18–20). Taking pride in one's work is a deep matter—in doing it well, to others' and perhaps more importantly to one's own, satisfaction (and who can set the proper bar higher than oneself, or perhaps a good teacher?). It is what the Taylorism of work undercuts. Such then are the core materials of the human good.²⁵ (At these moments I wonder why Foot didn't opt for "true" or "real" or "genuine" happiness.)

The move from "deep" to "basic" above doesn't get us far (like the earlier one from "important" to "what runs deep"). In lieu of a further *grammatical investigation*, Foot gives an elucidation by examples.²⁶ There is a certain thinness here. Their range is left under-described, and whether its items can be pursued both mundanely *and* exceptionally, or whether there are further exceptional goods (NG 88). Moreover, the lack of a fuller grammatical investigation perturbs Foot's project. The question of the *logical category* of items constituting deep happiness is

²⁵Initially, it seems plausible that (a) the specification of core objects is an open-ended list—completeness here being odd; and that (b) an agent need not score in each category (indeed some might exclude others), albeit certain ones may be so core as to be necessary components, at least absent some special story. However both points are impacted by the level of abstraction in the description of core items. Thus, if we replace "family" with "some long experience of intimate relationships" we go up a level; if we replace "work" with "commitment to some great or substantial cause" we go down a level. The higher the level, the more likely each is necessary and the "list" aspire to completeness. Is there (room for) disagreement over the central *core*, indeed *paradigm*, objects? This would, one supposes, have itself to be rather special, and reflect a deep division in views of basic human nature or of the world we live in (e.g., religion).

²⁶The relevant ones are not simply the necessities of life (*ta anagkaia*), such as oxygen and water (although they come in, as the pollution of both quickly indicates). Rather, they have to do with the expression and exploration of our humanity. (A grammatical investigation would advert to other vocabulary.)

not addressed, nor the multiply different ways items of other categories come into contribute to its attainment. This is part of the genius of Aristotle's discussion in *NE* 1.7–8 (cf. Lawrence 2001).

What underpins the restriction on objects? Foot presents the restriction as one not only on sorts of objects, but also on agents' "resources of experience and belief," on their thinking about objects in certain ways and not in others—e.g., about their place in human life generally, and in their own lives in particular, and with issues of what to be proud of and what to be ashamed of.²⁷ Such happiness, she says, "must extend all the way into the underlying thoughts that a person has about himself and his life" (NG 91). Her strategy is clearer if we remember her discussion of, for example, pride, in "Moral Beliefs." Crudely, pride can only be felt over certain objects, *because* for it to count as pride the agent has to be thinking of the objects a certain way, as, say, *achievements* of theirs or their kin, and not just anything can be viewed as an achievement, at least not without a special background. Raising one's hand is not something it ordinarily makes sense to claim to be proud of, although it does so in the special situation where it is a hard-fought-for stage in a long recovery after a nasty accident.²⁸ I take Foot's point here to be the same: for something to count as deep happiness only certain objects can be involved and the agent has to view them in certain ways, and not in others; victories in disputes with neighbors over milk bottles can't be so viewed, absent special circumstances, whereas those other things, like family life, and work, can be (and cannot not be, absent a special story). That is, not just anything can intelligibly be viewed as something *basic* in human life, nor as *nonbasic* or *trivial*.

This position I call *Criterionism*. It is a Wittgensteinianism, which Anscombe, Foot, and Geach sought to apply to practical philosophy.

²⁷Wolf (2010) puts a comparable point in terms of the need for both an objective restriction and a subjective one, but more in terms of emotion and behavior than explicitly in terms of thoughts (8–12). (She doesn't dwell sufficiently on the cognitive and objective commitments of these passions and feelings.) See also Adams' comments on Wolf, especially 76–9.

²⁸So in a sense *any* object could be an object of pride—but that is not the "any" of an empiricist's combinatorics of independent atoms, it is simply that there is no ban on any object, however initially outré, being brought under the criteria of the concept, given a suitable special story (although there are constraints of intelligibility also on those).

It presents an option from whose perspective debates between realism and anti-realism lack sense, and appear as bad philosophy of language. But it is difficult to appreciate because of a prejudice that invites us to peel language—or concepts (another term of philosophical art)—off the world they seek to describe and capture, whereas one might say the frame of language is the frame of our world, although “frame of language” has to be broadly understood as including the language of emotion and behavior. For our purposes here all we need are the notions of *brute relative to* and the consequent *stacking of predicates, descriptions, or facts*. Given certain facts about current life, *leaving potatoes on a doorstep* is, or counts as, *supplying someone*, which in that context, is *someone’s owing someone something*, *paying which is honest*, which in turn is a way of *acting justly*, which is a way of *acting virtuously*, which is *living successfully*.²⁹ Each step could be resisted, but a special counter would be needed to render the denial intelligible. We are not talking about “mere concepts” or “words” but about real human life at a certain historical juncture, about what is *actually going on*: although what is going on has to be captured—not so much captured, as expressed—in human life-descriptions, in human frames.

3.2 Step 2: The a Priori Exclusion of Wickedness

Now Foot claims this content restriction does not “say anything decisive against the conjunction of even the greatest, deepest, happiness with wickedness.” She terms this her “*new problem*” (NG 90), and poses it via the challenge of the character “Z”: a fictionalized Nazi commandant of a concentration camp who goes to his grave in unrepentant and unswerving loyalty to the ideals of the Führer and the Third Reich.

²⁹Foot moves freely between the notions of “a priori,” “conceptually speaking,” and “grammatical investigation.” I take it she supposes the “*a prioricity*” in question is grounded in its being a “conceptual” matter, and this in its being a matter of “grammatical investigation.” I follow Foot’s terminology, although, perhaps strangely, it is the latter notion I find clearest, because less Philosophical. By contrast the first two bring more Philosophical baggage, problems of their own, whose pursuit may or may not be illuminating.

Step 1's content intelligibility condition was not enough because, while it rules out the milk-bottle-battlers as not intelligibly having *the requisite kind of thoughts* about their activities, it doesn't rule out Z intelligibly having such thoughts about *his* activities: "He was not ashamed of the pleasure he took in tormenting and destroying the inmates of the camp; on the contrary, he thought he was helping to purify the Aryan race, inspired by Hitler's leadership and serving *a great cause*" (NG 91). Z is committed to something, which, unlike milk-bottles, could intelligibly count as "a great cause" and so deep happiness. How then to exclude this a priori?

Here, we hit our first real difficulty—dub it the "Exegetical" challenge. How exactly are we to understand Foot's argument? Later, I raise a "Strategic" challenge over whether Step 2, *whatever it is*, is even needed, once Step 1 is properly appreciated. If so, that pre-empts the Exegetical challenge. Nonetheless we should address it; indeed I suspect at bottom it flows into the Strategic challenge.³⁰

Foot subdivides Step 2. 2A shows how the notion of *benefit* is conceptually inseparable from what is for someone's good; 2B utilizes the example of the Letter-Writers to show that there is a way to think of *deep happiness* as conceptually "not isolatable" from virtue, (NG 96), i.e., the target solution [F3].

I take the basic structure to be:

- 2A: [T1] It is not the case that helping the Wests (in their child abuse and murder) can *count* as benefiting them, unless helping them were for their good (which it is not). Our acceptance of the truth of T1 *reveals* that our concept of benefit is such that it can only be for someone's good. This is the a priori, conceptual, connection under which T1 is true.
- 2B: [T2] It is not the case that accepting the Nazi's offer can *count* as making deep happiness available, unless it were virtuous to accept it (which it is not). Our acceptance of the truth of T2 *reveals* that our concept of deep happiness is such that it can only be available

³⁰I was much helped here by conversation with Andrew Flynn.

through virtue and virtuous action. This is the a priori, conceptual, connection, under which T2 is true.

There are two puzzles: what is the role of 2A? and how does 2B work? Foot vaguely describes 2A as “affording a first glimpse of our quarry” (NG 93), as “a first step” (NG 94). Are we to take it merely as an illustration, a useful parallel? However, she says that the target solution, [F3] “is *shown more closely...*” by 2B, which implies that 2A is *also* targeting it (NG 94).

Put pursuit of that aside. The argument of 2B seems unclear at the very point that matters.³¹ Imagine all want to eat chocolate cake: the wicked go for a second and third slice; the virtuous stop at one, seeing the need for others to have their slice. Their justice makes the second slice unavailable to them; it silences the thought that so doing would be the thing to do, a thought, which absent the other eaters, would, say, have been correct. Does this show that *there is a concept of eating chocolate cake that cannot be isolated from virtue, that can't be combined with greed?* A first off reaction would be to think that virtue is doing all the work; that it is acting as a filter on what ends the agent can pursue, and silencing such thoughts when inappropriate, in the manner of John McDowell's (1978) way of trying to restore a distinction between the moral and the prudential.

We can put a dilemma to Foot. On horn [1], if by “*they would not have felt that happiness lay in acceptance*” (NG 96) Foot means the Letter-Writers think they cannot get to happiness that way, so too the just eaters think they cannot get to more chocolate cake by taking a second slice (nor the just captain save the cargo by throwing the passengers overboard). That avenue at least is silenced—taken off the table, not available (no sacrifice). But they can see that taking the second slice *would* get them more chocolate cake, so why wouldn't acceptance of the Nazi offer get them happiness? Of course the virtuous can't take the

³¹Unclear even if we suppose it is aimed simply at offering an illustration of how there can be a certain use of a concept, related to the human good, that it is grammatically inappropriate to conjoin with wickedness—where combining it would show your lack of grasp of *that* concept.

slice, nor accept the offer, and if, fully virtuous, aren't even tempted. But isn't virtue doing all the work? It may be replied that Foot has already argued that deep happiness is different from eating chocolate cake, a mere enjoyment. True, but that isn't as yet to show that *that* difference is one that comes out in this way of conceptual connection. Indeed the way in which, in Step 1, she characterized deep happiness, in terms of work, family, and friends, left it, she supposed, at that point intelligible as obtainable by the wicked. Of course, it is precisely this she is aiming to close out here. But *how*? Now, all agree the virtuous Letter-Writers think of it as not obtainable by wicked means. But is this because [A] they think it would be *wicked* and unjust to obtain *it* that way, implying that it could be so obtained? Or [B] because it wouldn't then **be**, or count as, deep happiness if obtained that way? Compare: all agree the virtuous eaters suppose the second slice not obtainable. But is this [A*] because obtaining it would be unjust? or [B*] because it wouldn't be eating chocolate cake obtained that way! (If you think guilt might spoil their enjoyment, they too can have the Lethe drug.) [A] leaves Foot with her original problem: "so *why* isn't it rational to be wicked here?"; [B] solves it. But is [B] simply the assertion of the needed solution? "To solve it we need to think of happiness in a way that it can't be isolated from virtue—so that's how the Letters-writers think of it!" But do they? Maybe they are thinking [A]. Perhaps, she is supposing it enough simply to show that it is *possible* to think of it in the [B] way. But has she really done *even* that? What exactly is the content of their thought—other than whatever it is that is needed to solve the problem? How does [B] manage to be different from the absurd [B*]? This is especially acute given how Foot has so far characterized deep happiness. I am left floundering.

On horn [2], one may suggest there *is* after all *a* concept of eating chocolate cake that cannot be isolated from virtue. And this is to view it as a justly divisible good, and one can't participate in that by unjustly taking more than one's share. But this is somehow to put virtue into the end: justly sharing the cake and the enjoyment of eating it. And doesn't it have to be there? After all, as rational agents, their aim is for their eating to be wise eating, to be the expression of their values, their acting, and living excellently, and so successfully (*eupraxia*, *euzoia*).

Put a slightly different way, the eating can occur as a *pathetic* action—one done, “animal like,” simply on an appetitive desire; but it can, and for a human should, occur as a *Praxis*, a fully rational action expressive of the agent’s values and their judgment of what here counts as acting and living successfully as a human. Here, the virtuous judge its omission is what so counts. They are, they say, *happy to share*, and *would be unhappy to take more than their fair share*. So, of course, it can’t be separated from the agent’s conception of values, since its being an expression of them constitutes it as the very *kind* of action it is, a *Praxis*.³² Similarly, with deep happiness, viewed as a life of *Praxis*. (To accept and have the Lethe drug, would be to live like Oedipus, which, granted the awfulness the Greeks attached to incest and patricide, a life of delusion, of mock success, not the pin-up of a deeply happy life, even absent the plague and the *anagnorisis*.) But, **if so**, are we so sure there was a problem about isolating happiness from virtue to begin with, rather than true and false conceptions of happiness? And this is to raise the Strategic challenge.³³

³²The *akolastic*, the fully intemperate, agent similarly takes eating the second slice as what they *should* do, as expressive of what they take to be true values (“the virtues”), and so for them too their action cannot be isolated from “virtue,” only in their case, their values are false, “vices,” their success illusory.

³³One could reconfigure her argument as one turning in *both* subparts on the apparent grammar of our talk of what *benefits* a person. The first, the case of the Wests, illustrates the claim that it counts of no benefit to a person to attain, or be helped to attain, their *ends* (their heart’s desires), unless those ends are good. The second, the Letter-writers, shows that virtuous agents, with their good core ends, cannot be benefited by the pursuit of these unless the *means* are good, or unless helping them avoid *means* that are wicked, or unjust. The argument would then run along these lines outlining conceptual connections (where “X” is a human):

- (1) Benefiting X = Doing something for X’s good [the human good];
- (2) Benefiting X → X’s *ends* are good (Wests), and X’s *means* are good (Letter-Writers).
- (3) The human good = deep happiness
- (4) Deep Happiness of X → X’s ends and means are good.

While somewhat *indirect*, (and not totally clear), it would approach Aristotle’s *NE* 6.9’s argument, that for deliberation or reasoning to be successful, it must be of benefit to the agent, and that involves strictures over the end posited and means taken. It allows Foot to claim virtuous activity is not sufficient for happiness. Importantly, it would start further to condition the ends involved in deep happiness.

3.3 Virtue and Happiness/Successful Living Are Not Piecemeal

But first we need to note a difficulty. Let us suppose that Z returns from his day at the camp to married quarters and is, to all appearances, a loving husband and caring father; that he listens and plays the violin, not without some talent and sensitivity, has a serious interest in lepidoptery; has a circle of admiring friends; that, in another life, he would have run a railway system with the same efficiency he runs the camp.

Are we to say that, while his life overall is not one of deep happiness, it has its parts, moments or aspects of deep happiness, with things that run deep in life? After all, he could be worse—an abusive husband and incestuous father. All too briefly on something complex.

- (i) We allow people to have a degree of fault and imperfection in their lives, to be blinkered in certain areas, and yet have successful lives (they are generally just, but not very good at returning books; are rather irritable, full of themselves, etc.). But Z has strayed across this line.
- (ii) We can say he has seriously distorted values. To be a good loving father involves appreciating the need to do certain things because this is a *child* and as such demands love and care (and *pari passu* for *wife* and *friends*). Yet he does not express these values to children, women, his fellow man, in the camp, where the same considerations hold. He speaks a bit of the language of humanity but in a very distorted form. Typically, he may attempt to “retrieve his humanity” by reconfiguring the virtues to his needs, via drawing a distinction that relevantly separates those that he treats as human from those he does not, or not fully so.³⁴ But he cannot, since they *are* human, and *fully* human.

³⁴Typical of certain Spanish writings on the Indians, of slave-owners, of colonialists, of attitudes to the working-class, women, etc. Rorty (1998) also notes this move (although I do not share his approach) (167–9, 177). Of course when the oppressor is *in extremis* the humanity of the “other” is suddenly re-discovered, although, saved, the response may be not gratitude but revenge for the temporary “humiliation.”

- (iii) Is he at these other moments acting well? Living successfully? Partaking to an extent in a deeply happy life? Say, when he delights his daughter singing at her birthday party—a day whose rosy happy glow she will remember all her life? (Again, he could have been doing worse.) There are two aspects here. (A) The wise and virtuous would not be doing what Z is doing in these moments; they would be trying to disrupt and sabotage the system “from inside,” contact the Allies, etc.; if they held the party and “behaved as normal,” then, looked at in the wider context, this was, say, in part to maintain cover for their activities of resistance. Z, by contrast, is *partying while Rome burns*, when he should be doing something else. (B) But he *is* doing something else: partying *while burning Rome*. Here, we get into that mistake of thinking of action as too segmented (almost a Taylorization of action), and issues of how to conceive of action and life. Like the cook who, while cooking the roast, fits in many other things besides, so Z has, say, “left the ovens on”—working while he parties; but in any case, going wider, “I am running an extermination camp” can be a true answer to “what are you doing at the moment /at present/ these days?.” even “at this precise moment,” asked of Z when on vacation. (It can require explication to narrow down the context: “what are you doing...—I mean when you are not at work.”) So at the moment, in the party, playing the violin, on vacation, etc. he is not acting or living successfully: not doing what he should, and doing what he should not.
- (iv) Yet, how about afterwards, escaping to Paraguay with family, and running a modestly successful music business, while searching for *Catharisa cerina* Jordan? Is he now acting successfully, enjoying a bit of deep happiness? (a) We are historical beings, with our pasts and futures. How does Z subjectively accommodate his history, “live with himself”? Perhaps, he looks back with pride and nostalgia; perhaps he has “put it behind him”: “I have forgotten, turned my back on, all that; I now have a new face.” Either way his conscience, sense of valuation and of self, is not speaking, not keeping accounts, *as it should*: this is false-consciousness, false construction of the person. This management of self—real

integrity and integration, in which self-examination and a readiness to admit error plays a constitutive role—is part of the proper operation of practical rationality, and so of living successfully, of exercising a proper humanity. He should be his own accuser. (b) In any case, forgotten or not, his past accompanies him objectively. And this creates its own present and future demands on successful action and living, whether he can hear them or not. What is he doing? He is avoiding justice, dancing with indifference on his crimes. What should he do? Turn himself in, to seek a kind of reparation even if, his crimes too large for redemption, all he can provide is the reparation of justice being done his victims, (cf. Plato's *Gorgias* 476a–481b, especially 480c8–d6).³⁵

3.4 The Complaint Over McDowell's Identification of Happiness and the Life of Virtue

Foot ends by criticizing John McDowell (1980, in Rorty 1980) for what she takes as his *identification* of happiness with a life of virtue and

[H]is idea that a loss incurred through an action necessary for virtue is 'no loss at all'. He seems to me to allow too little for the genuine tragedy that there may be in a moral choice.... There is a kind of happiness that only goodness can achieve, but that by one of the evil chances of life it may be out of the reach of even the best of men. (NG 97)

So, for Foot, virtue, or living virtuously is a *necessary* condition of enjoying deep happiness, understood as enjoyment of good things—of the good things of life, as that is ordinarily and unqualifiedly understood. But it is not *sufficient*, as witness the tragedy of the Letter-Writers.

³⁵Our lives at any one point have many strands—of thoughts, feelings and actions: much is going on, and much of it diachronic, though, like a braided rope, the strands do not persist the entire length. These strands constitute a context in which what is going on, and not going on, takes on its valence (reading a mystery novel for relaxation while engaged in medical research; watching TV while failing to visit a friend in hospital). These strands often involve other interpersonal ones, creating a still richer contextual valence; wider still the larger rope of the social medium in which our lives entwine and take on their valence (listening to music while authorities, uncriticized, deport the persecuted to camps; sleeping in and so failing to vote; abandoning geographical studies, to take on political activity to help the exploited and downtrodden).

There is much food for thought here. I focus on two puzzles—the first about the two steps, the second about the Greeks and Foot’s criticism of McDowell.

4 Puzzle 1: Why Isn’t Step 1 Enough? “The Strategic Challenge”

4.1 The Adequacy of the First Step?

Why doesn’t the first step *already* delineate a concept of happiness that is a priori—or conceptually—exclusive of wickedness? Let us start with two, not unconnected, preliminaries.

First, there is something *prima facie* strange about the whole enterprise of justifying a connection between happiness and virtue. Admittedly, as in the above quote from the *Republic*, this is a Platonic enterprise, and one to which Foot appears to be subscribing. Yet, isn’t it really something about which, as Anscombe says of justice, we all already “in fact know quite a lot”? And, by contrast, the Aristotelian approach is rather one of elucidation, of reminding us what we know and putting it in some logical order or arrangement (cf. Lawrence 2001). Of course the environment can disturb, or limit, our judgment. In impoverished, or fraught, circumstances our ideal may be “Food!” or “Clean sheets!” (cf. *NE* 1.4.1095a22–25); or the surround so rough, unsupportive, and unforgiving, that it may corrupt our judgment and envisionment of life. The point deserves more discussion. But clearly, on reflection, how could one have friends without justice, generosity, and respect? Or what sense could one make of a claim of global immoralism, where the virtues and vices are inverted? The justificatory enterprise has an air of “shooting through bedrock,” perhaps misled by too high, too rarified, a level of abstraction from the facts of human life (facts that nonetheless must take into account vastly defective circumstances).

Second, I note a piece of *unfinished business* over what counts as a special background. Do I find Z’s position “conceptually speaking” intelligible, as against the bottle-battlers? Don’t I need some special background to find it even vaguely intelligible—say, some sense of

historically prevalent misguided racist theories and perhaps a certain setting of economic depression, national humiliation, and political instability? How about the “great cause” of elongating the human race, by extermination and sterilization of the short? Again, much seemingly depends on where the conversation starts. Described initially one way, I would be puzzled how Z’s suggested “great cause” is intelligible: “How can Z? What is he thinking? Is he mad?”; described another way, it would move gradually into the penumbra, as it gets more detailed specification, and the rationales become more bizarre (absent a special story). Yet, much the same can be said of bottle-battlers, whose initial claim might be in terms of the importance of standing up for one’s rights and principles, and only stumble into unintelligibility as they elaborate (absent some special story).

There are two ways at least to press the idea that the first step takes us all the way. Anyway that is the challenge.

4.2 The Direct Argument

The most immediate is very straightforward—and comprises three points. **(P1)** If the objects or activities that can intelligibly comprise deep happiness are ones **basic** in human life “such as home, and family, and work and friendship,” then aren’t justice and mutual respect, generosity and courage, love and kindness, obviously also basic—don’t *they* run deep in human life? How were you thinking of bringing up children? Without justice and respect, how can you look at another eye to eye, and not as a pawn to manipulate for your own ends or be manipulated for theirs, and thus lose any sense of proper human relations, and ultimately of human identity? To reiterate Anscombe’s remark, “... people of the most horrible principles know quite well how to cry out against injustice and lying and treachery, say, when their enemies are guilty of them. So they in fact know quite a lot” (45). Foot (1972) herself in “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives” allows justice et al. as ends that many of us have (although she was there still caught in a Humean conception of reason, and unable to attach sense to the claim that individuals *ought* to have these ends). Justice, concern, care,

and affection both contour and constitute the proper relationships and activities between humans. Nothing more basic. (P2) And what of the goods Foot does list—are we to think of them as in some special way uncontroversial—*prudential* goods or activities of self-interest as against the supposedly troubling or contentious ones of virtue or *morality*? Yet, Foot herself admits the distinction is dubious, as ordinarily deployed by moral philosophers (cf. NG 68). And *in any case*, how could you enjoy domestic bliss or friendship without its requiring and exhibiting respect, generosity, and love, in deed, attitude, and thought? Such are already in the mix unless your vision, say, of family-life as a core good encompasses domestic violence, abuse, and exploitation, or emotional coldness. So I am perplexed at this point: we are concerned with the *basic* things in human life, but “shush, we can’t mention *those*!”³⁶ Again, nothing more basic than virtue and its realization. (P3) It seems clear that certain ordinary bads—the deprivations (*stereseis*) or absences of the goods Foot cites, lack of family, friends, and work—are incompatible with, or at least inhibitory of, deep happiness; as are bads that so to speak have a positive valence, such as loneliness and unemployment now thought of not as mere absences, and not just these, but also famine, slavery, ill-health and disabilities, physical and mental, abuse, degradation, and humiliation.³⁷ And now what of the presence of the vices?—meanness, cowardice, injustice, bigotry, cruelty, unreflective arrogant stupidity... how could these not be plainly incompatible with deep happiness (not to mention vanity and superficiality)? Conceptually so, or least in that someone say defending miserliness, or with Erasmus, folly, has a hard running to make (short of a joke). Not surprisingly they shift the goal posts of virtue and vice—their miserliness they represent as a virtuous thrift, etc. (NE 2.8.1108b19–26; cf. Thucydides 3.82; Nietzsche 1887, I.14). (Justice may seem the odd one out, another’s good and self-harm—until you think about properly relating to people: want to look straight into someone’s eyes, or complain about their treatment of

³⁶However see NG 90 and esp. note 12 for perhaps some inkling of this.

³⁷These may be compensated for in the individual case, and weaknesses surprisingly turned into strengths.

you.) In short, there are core goods and core bads, and the virtues and vices are right there. Indeed, this was the whole thrust of the Platonic-Aristotelian central argument for *the revaluation of value* that put the excellences of character and intellect as the primary unconditional goods, the criteria of success in human life-activity, instead of the external goods of wealth and fitness (cf. Lawrence 2001, 456–7; 2006, 50).

The worry then is that:

- (1) what can intelligibly count as deep happiness is a matter of the basic things of human life;
- (2) these include justice et al., and the absence of vices;
- (3) so deep happiness excludes wickedness—along with milk-bottle disputes.

(A) If she is thinking that it would be *parti pris* to add (2) in as part of the core, that strikes me as falling back into a dubiously intelligible prudentialism, (which may be what is happening); and, in any case, these are inextricably bound in with the goodness of the items she cites as core to deep happiness (points (P1) and (P2) above). (B) If she allows them in, but supposes *as yet* they could be held in corrupt forms, variant “moralities”—justice, say, misconceived—we are straight into a criterialist conversation about justice: not simply anything counts as just, and the conversation again is principled, pressuring the interlocutors, engaged in what in fact is a common task, toward the truth, (compatibly with the game and its point itself developing). The terrain of step 1. (C) If she were thinking of virtues as defect-rectifying (the justice of punishing an errant child), while this is true, they *also* come in optimistic, good-enjoying, situations, not merely as constraints but the very point of the action, the fine, the *kalon*, (doing something generous for someone, celebrating their good fortune): in short, situations the agent rightly hopes arise in their life.³⁸

³⁸Cf. *Pol.* 7.13. 1332a7–18. I tasked Foot about this in connection with “Virtues and Vices,” and a failure there to stress the central positive role of virtues in the enjoyment of the good things of life.

One reason she divides the steps I suspect has to do with not rushing the argument, with taking it slowly, letting each doubt have space as it arrives. Perfect. But it is still not clear to me *what gap* Foot is seeing between step 1 and step 2.

4.3 The Indirect Argument

The second avenue of pressure is less direct. Of deep happiness Foot says that, grammatically speaking, it is restricted to certain objects and is something that “must extend all the way into the underlying thoughts that a person has about himself and his life” (NG 90–1). It is such thoughts that mediate the constraint on possible proper objects—in *both directions*. That is, (I), absent a special story, it is not intelligible to think of milk-bottle battling as a great cause (although one hears the plaintive voice “but it matters to *me!*”)—nor presumably to think the role of friendship and family as amusing trivia. But (II), conversely, the content of this thinking “about himself and his life” must involve thoughts about *the nature and worth* of these basic constraining objects, of their goodness and point. Surely, at their most abstract or formal, these thoughts of the agent are thoughts about what sort of person he is and what sort of life he is living: *that* he is a worthy person, a fine figure of humanity living a fine life, a person properly with self-respect and deserving to command the respect and admiration of others, leading a life whose worth he is right to be proud of; *that* he is living successfully, and that a successful life is a matter of obtaining, appreciating, and enjoying the real goods life has to offer and avoiding its bads, at least so far as in him lies: *that* his values—his views of what is good and bad—are *true and correct*, and are being correctly brought to bear and realized in his situation as regards ends and means to achieve them; *that* his cause truly is a “great” one; and *that* if he is wrong, he is not, after all, living the life of deep happiness he thinks he is, but rather one deluded and perhaps of awfulness, the lack of which recognition perhaps only adds to his awfulness. So he better be right! In sum, his thoughts about

his happiness—his and anyone else’s—are taken to be *truth vulnerable*.³⁹ But if such are the relevant kinds of thoughts, *why won’t they take us all the way to the main target?*

Foot, as we said, allows that Z may intelligibly have such thoughts as that he was serving a great cause, and rightly so, etc. (NG 91),—and *then* goes on to say: “So far, as for instance in considering the case of ‘Z’, we have supposed that [S1] *conceptually speaking* we must allow that a wicked character could have an extremely happy life” (NG 92, my addition of [S1]).

But have we so supposed? Surely all that has been supposed so far is that

[S2] conceptually speaking we must allow that a wicked character *could intelligibly think and be understood as claiming* that he was having a deeply happy life: we could make sense of his claim.

—as we could not of a similar claim made by the milk-bottle-battlers, without a special background. However this second supposition, [S2], seemingly leaves it intelligible that the wicked character could be right and be deeply happy—and so [S1]. If so, then even taken as the second supposition, [S2], the first step doesn’t reach through to Foot’s target of showing deep happiness *a priori* exclusive of wickedness. (We may seem to be in the territory of nonsense versus falsehood.)

But has Foot’s first step left the combination of deep happiness and wickedness *as yet* an intelligible possibility? There is a certain analogy here to the shape of a dispute between causal or disjunctive theories of perception. (a) We might think that Z, unlike the milk bottlers, is in a position where he could count as deeply happy, and we need to search for *further* conditions to rule out his experiences and thoughts so counting, and to show that he is in error; (b) or we might think deep happiness, like perception, already contains sufficient conditions: and that Z would accept

³⁹This “valuational” or “reflective” condition is, I take it, linked to Socrates’ demand for life-examination and to Aquinas’ claim that the agent, to be acting with full rationality, must view their action *as* the good one, a claim admitting of a certain qualified understanding, say, with a self-deprecating muddling through.

that *either* he really is deeply happy *or* else merely under the illusion of so being, if his values are mistaken, his great cause a great error.

Two directions one can explore here: formality and subjectivity.

First, we may suppose that what is *a priori* in a concept is merely in a sense formal (“analytic”): that to count as deep happiness

- (1) the agent’s life has to incorporate certain basic human goods which they take to be, and appreciate as, such goods;
- (2) that what ends they take to be valuable have really to be so (and for the reasons they suppose), and the means they take to be proper to attain them have really to be so (and for the reasons they suppose);
- (3) that were anyone mistaken, they would not in fact be enjoying a life of deep happiness, but only *under the illusion* of so doing; and if their values are sufficiently erroneous, they are perhaps living a life of real awfulness, one that would be the proper object of utmost shame.

These we may posit as the merely formal conceptual conditions of this concept, but then suppose it a further, “empirical” question, what materially constitutes satisfying them in human life, e.g., what really are the correct values, the great causes. So armed, we may suggest that Step 1 is analytic, Step 2 synthetic. **But** (i) that is not it. Foot’s Step 2 is also “conceptual.” (ii) Moreover within Criterialism, “the” distinction between formal and material turns out relative. The notion of “great cause” is pretty abstract or formal—as is “benefit”—but these are principled concepts, and not just anything can be so claimed and understood.⁴⁰ And why shouldn’t the principled conversation, the Criterialism take us all the way? (Of course, the interlocutor may not wish to engage, or be incapable, past a certain point, of appreciating their error: too large for them to take in or get a perspective on.) This is the input of Anscombe’s key notion of “*brute relative to*” and the *stacking of predicates*. So I don’t see that as Foot’s gap.

⁴⁰Cf. VV 106. There, and in “Moral Beliefs” Foot presciently makes moves both against the “Verticalists” who would distinguish evaluative predicates into *thick* and *thin*, conceding criterialism for the thick but not the thin; and against the “Horizontalists” who would distinguish two kinds of meaning within evaluative predicates, “*descriptive*” and “*evaluative*.”

What then of a certain subjectivism? I understand Foot as saying:

to have deep happiness requires the agent to have thoughts that what he is doing is something worthwhile, e.g. a great cause to be proud of, etc., something realizing a correct set of values—where these thoughts, even if not correct, are intelligible, unlike the milk-bottle batblers.

Now this seems ambiguous between:

- (S) requires the agent simply *have thoughts* with that kind of content—irrespective of their truth; or
- (O) requires the agent have such thoughts where *their content is true*.

The first is a “subjective” requirement albeit of cognition, a “cognitive subjectivism,” whereas the second is an objectively appreciative one—the agent has to see and appreciate the value of what they are doing: something possible only if it really, or “objectively”, has the value that they, “subjectively,” take it to have. They really have *the thats* of it, as Aristotle might say. Indeed the agent must have *the thats*, the correct views (e.g., that I should return the book), in order to be in a position to understand *the whys* of them, their correctness. With false “that’s” there is no coming to understand their correctness. This characterizes a kind of shallowness in wickedness, explanatory, and justificatory.⁴¹

Now, on (S), whether Z’s cause really is a great one or not, is *irrelevant* as regards deep happiness: true, the agent *must suppose* that his happiness turns on the truth of his claim, but he is mistaken in so supposing that. An odd mistake. On (O), the truth matters; and Z will agree—and be correct in admitting to us that *if* he is wrong and his cause not after all truly “great,” then his life is not after all one of deep happiness but perchance a disaster. Doubtless, he will point out that, *pari passu*, the same holds for us. Both interpretations, (S) and (O),

⁴¹This comes out in other ways. Aristotle talks of “*bebaiotes*” in connection with virtues, and we too talk of resoluteness, constancy, firmness in that connection, whereas we talk rather of the wicked being obstinate, unremitting, and perverse or corrupt, all of which have aspects of cognitive faults.

hold that it is a condition on deep happiness that the agent himself accepts it to be a condition on his happiness that it turns on the truth of whether, e.g., his cause actually is great—an *internal* or subjective commitment to objectivity. But on the first, the agent's acceptance of this is in fact mistaken. His happiness does not, in fact, turn on the truth of his thinking it a great cause, merely on his subjectively *thinking* it does. On the second, the agent is correct in his acceptance. It is indeed a condition on his enjoying deep happiness that his needed thought that his cause is great is correct, and doesn't turn merely on his thinking it so turns: the "internal" commitment to objectivity must be met externally or objectively, and is not a mistaken commitment.

To replay this. We can distinguish three conditions, C1–C3. In order for the agent to count as having deep happiness:

- (C1) The agent has intelligibly—to self and others—to be thinking of what he is doing as pertaining to the basic materials of human life, or a great cause, where it is not intelligible to think just anything is basic or great, absent a special story; this defines the arena of intelligible error.
- (C2) The agent's thoughts are objectively committed: he must *think* that his deep happiness turns on the *truth* of what he is doing really being basic, worthwhile, or a great cause; i.e., (C2) the agent must think it is a condition on his being deeply happy that (C3) his thought that what he is doing is basic or great is actually *true*. His commitment is objectivist.
- (C3) The C3 condition that C2 requires the agent internally or subjectively to hold as a condition is indeed a condition. He is right to say he is not after all deeply happy if it turns out he is wrong and his cause is not great or worthwhile. To be deeply happy, he not only has to *think* the truth really matters, C2, it really does, C3.

To resist the C1–C3 package, is hard. C1 is common ground. Can we balk at C2 or C3? Neither is easy to do.

(1) To reject C2 involves embracing an even less palatable alternative: that the agent himself *accepts* that whether or not his is *really* a great cause or really radically mistaken is *of no relevance* to whether he

is really deeply happy, really engaged with and enjoying what actually are the basic and important things of life: what matters is just that this *appears* so to him. (1) There is no impetus here for him to examine or question its truth—rather the reverse. (2) And it is not clear how an agent can coherently hold these thoughts together—his belief in the greatness of his cause, or domestic bliss, and his acceptance that it really doesn't matter to the worth of his life whether in fact, his belief is true.⁴² (Someone, fearful of the truth, might, of course, want to remain under the illusion of being deeply happy, and not look too deeply into the facts, but that is a different matter). (3) It seems dubiously consistent with the content restriction, which is most naturally interpreted as one where to be deeply happy is a matter of really enjoying what really are the core goods of human life. Perhaps, this has to be reinterpreted as a restriction to real or apparent core goods, or the real or apparent engagement with such—and what is the motivation for that? (Cf. Aristotle *NE* 3.4. for some further exploration.)

(2) If we accept C2, can we then reject C3? This involves crediting the agent with making, and needing to make, a mistake. In accepting C2, the agent is required to suppose C3 *is* a condition on deep happiness, but, if we reject C3, then the agent is mistaken in doing this—*although required to make this mistake if he is to count as happy*. I.e. what matters in deep happiness is not that the things the agent takes to be basic or great causes really are so, just that he holds they are, and that his candidates are to an extent intelligibly cast in such a role. (1) “From within,” from the first personal perspective, he holds C3. So presumably he can't himself, from this stance, hold (C2) and reject C3—or not unless he retreats to a third person perspective on himself—enters the Humean study, and there are problems about that strangely schizoid door. (2) There is not merely a problem of who can accept C1 and C2 and reject C3; there is a question of its motivation. It smacks of a subjectivist error theory: that (a) *even* deep happiness is really a matter of *the state of the agent's mind*, where “state” here includes the presence of

⁴²To be told or to tell oneself “it doesn't matter whether it is true, I just have to believe it is true” is a somewhat special scenario.

certain beliefs about how his life is going and its worth, beliefs that are only intelligible within certain limits, and whose truth he takes to matter, to sustain his deep happiness, and to underpin the need to respond to the charge that he is merely deluded; (b) but the agent has to reject that this is what deep happiness really is. But what is the rationale for this?—other than a subjectivist mental-state view extended from attitudes to encompass beliefs, a “cognitive subjectivism”? A view Foot is herself concerned to reject (cf. NG 85–6).

4.4 The Adequacy of Step 1

The Criterialism of Step 1 articulates the rules for playing the “deep happiness” game. This faces in two directions. In the one, it shows that certain claims to be living a life of deep happiness would be unintelligible, absent a special story. In the other, it creates the sense and room for intelligible, but mistaken, claims, for people taking themselves to be deeply happy when in fact they are not (like Z). But an argument over whether someone is or is not deeply happy—enjoying the good things of life—is principled, is already articulated by the logical grammar, and the stacking of predicates each brute relative to the one above. It is like an argument of whether some piece of behavior is rude, or an evaluation of someone’s claim to have done “important work” in a particular subject. You cannot call, or reject, anything you like as a great cause or a good thing in life, and be understood; you have to point to certain relevant factors, and to be able to respond to others. In short, you are not in command of what is relevant and what not—no “private enterprise” view of concept mastery (NG 108). If Z is to talk in terms of deep happiness, then he needs to work within its logical grammar, its criteria—and now he is involved in a principled conversation of showing that his great cause is indeed great, its success of benefit, his work worthwhile, and answer the objections we will bring that establish its wickedness, given the facts of human life, nature and psychology. His claim will fail, and a failure to engage or listen will open him to the charges bigotry, and racism, and to mass murder, charges that follow him however he proceeds—even, as we envisaged, to Paraguay.

All we need then are two elements: a conception of practical rationality and criterialism with the brute relative relation.

(1) *The Human Good as the object of practical rationality*

The human good is a matter of a life lived excellently, of the relevant correct values correctly realized, in the ends and means pursued. Such is a successful life, where the criteria of successful living are the excellences (correct values). This says nothing about what the excellences, or virtues, or correct values, are (cf. *Rep.* 1.353b14–c7). Excellences, or virtues, occur simply in a “formal” sense of a trait that disposes the agent to live excellently, and so successfully. It is, e.g., as yet open whether justice or injustice is an excellence. Instead of “excellently” we might put “wisely.” That would bring out that the human good is being taken as a matter of rational attainment. “Wise” simply marks the need to get it correct, but as yet leaves open what materially is wise, and what the other criteria of success are. It would be to assume that we could expect all to agree to “you want a wise life, not a foolish one” (a rejection would require explanation).

(2) *Criterialism and the brute relative relation*

We start off then from a position to which any rational person should agree. And now the Criterialism bites. You cannot say any action you choose is done excellently, that any way of living is worthwhile, and be understood; or that any trait you like is a virtue; or that anything you like is just; honest; a returning of what was borrowed; a borrowing... The conversations are principled. The lower predicates or descriptions are brute relative to the higher, or more sophisticated, ones that they support.

This may be resisted this in various ways, for example, by claiming that some concepts are “essentially contested” (e.g., Gallie 1955; Williams’ 1986 “relativism of distance”); or that virtues are relative to a moral code which may differ wildly, or that morality can (cf. VV 120; VV 106–8 for criticism), or whatever. Pursued closely these fade away, but are not our current concern (not avenues to which Foot is sympathetic). Z’s view will simply be squeezed out. Either its falsity will be revealed, or we shall stop understanding him as his responses drift into the penumbra and on out into the dark.

If Foot were to concede this, she would still have her complaint that in the above we have been *identifying* the human good (happiness) with virtuous activity, implausibly, as the Letter-Writers show. So let us turn to that.

5 Puzzle 2: Foot's Criticism of McDowell

Foot argues for a conceptual connection between acting virtuously and deep happiness, but one that, contrary to McDowell, does not amount to an *identification*. The former is necessary, but not always sufficient for the latter: for the virtuous see that happiness is sometimes not obtainable by them.

I believe this criticism confused. I articulate further the traditional conception of reason; then apply it to Foot's criticism; and end by entertaining possible grounds for preferring the Aristotelian approach as articulating a more nuanced conceptualization of the terrain.

5.1 The Traditional Conception of Practical Reason⁴³

Briefly, the traditional conception of Practical Reason is a *sub specie boni* conception. Its formal end is to determine the best or wisest thing for the agent to do in order for them to do it; to determine what the agent should do *haplos*, where the "should" is *tout court*, not subscripted to any particular dimension. This is its formal end, which thus defines, or constitutes, it as the very activity it is. It itself also defines a kind of action, fully rational valued action, Action, *Praxis*. (This is specifically *human* action, *actus humanus* as Aquinas would say.) Agents may fail to Act, through *akrasia*, depression, tiredness et al. Again, agents may reason about how to obtain ends they do not value, or do not fully value, but this does *not* count as Practical Reasoning, or not that unqualified.

⁴³These paragraphs in part repeat material from Lawrence, for example (1993, 2004).

For such reasoning does not *aim* at Praxis, at determining a conclusion about what the agent should do, what is best or wisest, *unqualifiedly*.⁴⁴

There is the following **double duality** in this conception.

- [D1] *Means and Ends* First, as Foot notes, practical reasoning covers not only means but also judgments about what ends should be pursued, and its excellence, wisdom, gets it right. Its conclusions about what the agent should do are thus *doubly assessable*: they may be false because the end is incorrect or because the means are, or both.⁴⁵

There is also a second duality.

- [D2] *Two Aims of Practical Rationality: Whatever Circumstanced Ideal and Ideally Circumstanced, or Utopian, Ideal* Reason has, in a sense, a duality of formal aims. This is not the problematically divisive duality of the Right and the Good (although that can be viewed as deriving from a distorted understanding of this).⁴⁶ Rather both concern the Good. One ideal, we have as rational agents is to do what is best or wisest *whatever the circumstances* that face us in life—to get through it with no, or the minimum, of regret about doing what we did, and in that sense live the best life we possibly could. A second ideal is to live the humanly optimal life, the best life a human ever can, to find ourselves placed in the humanly optimal circumstances (perhaps in certain respects relativized to our historical juncture), rise to that occasion and so in *this* sense live the best life we possibly could. Where the first instantiates the second, we won't qualify it; where it fails because of nonoptimal circumstances, we will say we lived the best life we could “given the circumstances” (the absence of the qualification would mislead and imply it was the optimal life).

⁴⁴The view is not, I believe, open to the kind of objections to *sub specie boni* conceptions made for example by Stocker (1979), or Velleman (1992). But that is for another occasion. Cf. Lawrence (2004).

⁴⁵Cf. Lawrence (1995, 2004). In many cases at least the error of the means is due to their being contrary to other ends of the agent, or ends that agent should have, that block the pursuit of the first end from counting as acting well or wisely.

⁴⁶Initially via a division into two major virtues, benevolence and justice—the *utile* and the *honestum*—where the one aligns with greatest happiness and the other constrains its pursuit.

This second ideal is no mere idle wish. Clearly, even lives lived wisely may be impeded by circumstances, but circumstances about whose occurrence we can oftentimes do something. This thought requires us to investigate and develop some idea of what are better, or optimal, circumstances, of what can be done to achieve them, and how this bears on present decisions. That is, in an agent's working out what is best that they do here and now, one determining factor concerns what will improve their *situational environment*—what situations they will likely face: is it best to buy a new fridge now, or save that money for activities in retirement, or to enable the family to emigrate to a land of better opportunities? Practical reasoning has this *constitutively* “Utopian” element. It is tempting to say that in a sense the proper form of rationality is one where we deliberate *under the Idea of the Optimal*, adjusting down from that to what is best in the possibly nonoptimal circumstances we are in: really needing a new fridge. If you didn't understand what was best *haplos*, there is a sense in which you would not *fully* understand what was best in the (defective) circumstances.⁴⁷ In short, the Optimal is not the lucky icing on the cake of life, but the formal end of our practical rationality, the Idea under which we deliberate both personally and what earlier I called our social rationality, the measure of our success.

This optimal life, Aristotle terms *makaria*, “felicity”: it is perfect, unqualified *eudaimonia*.⁴⁸ This latter I find most releasing to translate

⁴⁷(i) Part of the importance of treating someone's pain is to fit them once again to enjoy their life. If so, the optimal good is to be seen as the formal end of the activity. We deliberate about the best in the circumstances in order to move us, where possible, closer to the optimal best, the best *haplos* (cf. Wildean Progressive Utopianism, in 4.4). Again, this “Utopian” aspect of the form of our rationality connects with our need to develop and posit ideals. (ii) There is, so to speak, a *negative silhouette*. The wise are in a position to answer the question: “Don't you take ϕ ing to be the optimal thing? So why aren't you doing that then?” To explain why the (more) ideal, or optimal, activity would not be the best or wisest in the circumstances, and to justify it. (Exactly what they say depends on the puzzle raised; whether it will satisfy or be understood by the interlocutor are further questions, as is the question of just *how* the wise apprehend what end is to be pursued in the situation.)

⁴⁸“A congratulatory first” in Life! I prefer “felicity” as a token translation to the more traditional “blessedness” given the latter's religious overtones. Admittedly, Aristotle's own view of felicity indeed has something of those because of a *third* duality: that between the optimal *human* life *haplos*, and the optimal life *haplos*, i.e., the life of the Perfect Substance. The qualified/unqualified game is reiterated: the secret end of practical reasoning, as of theoretical reasoning, is god—conceived of as “success in the category of substance.” Formally god *is* theoretical reasoning (of a sort), and it is the final end of practical attain this so far as is humanly possible (NE 6.12.1144a3–6, 6.13.1145a608).

as “success.” Aristotle’s view is that (i) *any* life that realizes the human excellences, is a case of living or acting *excellently or virtuously* (*kat’areten*); and (ii) this constitutes living well or successfully (*eu*), i.e., *eudaimonia*, albeit perhaps qualified. Anyone who manages to act virtuously throughout their lives has made a success of it—*no-one could ask anything more of them!*—the success being within the parameters of the situations of their lives. Maybe these were optimal and *their eudaimonia* was *makaria*, their success felicity; maybe not, but heroines and heroes, like Nijinska and the Letter-Writers, they did what they had to do, and command a certain nobility and grandeur, a certain glory and admiration (NE 10.7.1177b16–17).

Naturally, questions remain over just how qualified this could become and still count as a *eudaimon* life. (A) If there is *no* possibility of the exercise of virtue—the agent is dreamlessly asleep or in a coma—then none at all: there is no life in the most proper, governing, sense of actualization. But how minimal could exercise be and still get purchase? Maybe very. People tend to forget that thoughts and attitudes and reactions are such exercises, that much that is hard for others to access nevertheless counts.⁴⁹ Of course, as Aristotle says, lack of resources can severely inhibit the forms such exercise can take. (B) There is the possibility also of what we may call *regretful virtue*—not deeds that one regrets doing but deeds one regrets having to do (turning a friend in).⁵⁰ It would be artificial to think that there could be a life comprised only of such “defect-rectifying” virtuous exercise (a life without even a smile). But that aside, a constitutive part of the success and worth of such a life would consist in its operating in a surround where it is working, if not always successfully, toward making positively “good-enjoying” lives possible, even if not the agent’s own: part at least of its worth lying in the wider context.

⁴⁹E.g., Christy Brown (*My Left Foot*), or the playwright Jaromir Hladik in Borges’ story *The Secret Miracle*. (I am not thinking primarily here of cases of mental disability, whose complexity demands their own discussion, especially given their enormous range, e.g., from Clive Wearing’s anterograde and retrograde amnesia through to advanced cases of various senilities.)

⁵⁰Aristotle’s distinction here (e.g., *Pol.* 7.13.1332a7–18) is not easy. There are clear cases either side; but what, e.g., of paying taxes, being chair of one’s department?

5.2 Application

With this backdrop, it is clear that by deep happiness, “the enjoyment of good things,” Foot has in mind something like *makaria*. Nothing wrong with that. Yet *it* has no obvious critical traction against the Aristotelian perspective that there is *always* a constitutive (indeed “conceptual”) relation of *living excellently* (exercising virtue) with *living successfully* (*eudaimonia*), in *some possibly qualified manner*.⁵¹ *Makaria* is simply the optimal condition, the unqualified perfection, of this. Viewed through this lens, Foot’s criticism passes McDowell by.⁵²

Foot remarks at one point: “It is too quick to say that because human *goodness* belongs to those who have the virtues, human *good* is what they will attain in acting well” (NG 92). Indeed she ends up holding it not only too quick, but erroneous (97). I take it that by “acting well” Foot here has to mean “acting virtuously.” And Aristotle would indeed agree that (1) *that* need not suffice for *makaria*, the optimal good, the unqualifiedly best life. But the Aristotelian conception of the terrain is somewhat different. By “acting well” Aristotle means “acting successfully—eudaimonically.” Now he would also agree that (2) acting eudaimonically need not suffice for *makaria*. But, *against* Foot, he would claim that: (3) acting virtuously constitutes acting eudaimonically/successfully. (The virtues are *kuriai* the activities, are the criteria of their success, e.g., NE 1.10.1100b8–11; NG 33–35; 2.1.1103b29–31); (4) *eudaimonia* is the human good: perfect (*teleia*) or unqualified *eudaimonia*—i.e., *makaria*—is the perfect, unqualified, human good; *eudaimonia* qualified, is the human good qualified. (Taking the excellences as values, it seems obvious that the optimal life must realize the highest value, if there is one, even if doing so also realizes other values.)⁵³

⁵¹The excellences in any area of activity just are the criteria of its success: what count as doing it successfully. Along with other qualifications, Aristotle uses “*deuterus*” and “*pollostus*.” I avoid talk of “degree” because of its quantitative suggestion; if taken ‘lightly’ that would be all right.

⁵²That said, I would not myself have gone for McDowell’s *identification* and the consequent idea of an equation, which then could be read from one direction or the other. Rather, the relation is constitutive (Lawrence 2001). Similarly, I believe “Water = H₂O” is misleading, and the relation is constitutive.

⁵³For this solution to the comprehensive/selective, inclusive/dominant, debates see Lawrence (2006).

To describe the Aristotelian terrain more abstractly. Goodness in an X is a matter of possessing the excellences of X; these are the states which dispose an X to carry out its X-an activity, x'ing, excellently (*kat'areten*), i.e., successfully (*eu*), which activities constitute the exercise of its essence, and thus, done successfully, the good of an X as such. So, in acting successfully, X attains the X-an good. The “quickness” is conceptual. Add to this: (i) an X can be good, i.e., have the X-an excellences, but not exercise them (e.g., be asleep)—that is why *being* a good X is not the good of an X; and (ii) the exercise can be more or less successful (depending on impeding factors, which may be internal or external and situational), and so X's good achieved perfectly, or else to some qualified extent.

So where human goodness is exercised in acting excellently, or virtuously, the agent will be acting successfully/eudaimonically either perfectly or qualifiedly, and will be attaining the human good, perfectly or qualifiedly.⁵⁴ One might say that where Foot sees a distinction of kind, Aristotle sees one of unqualified versus qualified (*haplos* versus *pos*, i.e., adding a clause, *prostitheis*). Asked whether the Letter-Writers had a successful life (attained the human good), Aristotle would respond in the affirmative, but would add a qualification, “given their imperfect circumstances.” They did what a human should do in those kinds of circumstances—all honor to them for that—albeit these are not the circumstances that make an optimal life, or its continuation, possible for them.⁵⁵

⁵⁴We may think of these connections between (a) the human good and *eudaimonia*; (b) *eudaimonia* and *eu*—living successfully and acting successfully (*eu-zoia* and *eu-praxia*); (c) *eu* and *kat'areten* “in accord with virtue or excellence,” as “conceptual.” For doubts see note 29. By contrast, Aristotle argues by the smallest moves, each increment hard to resist, though not necessarily in principle impossible: what I term the method of “formal squeeze.” It is inappropriate to divide *NE* Bk 1 into an analytic part and a synthetic part.

⁵⁵This is not to deny the complexity when we put Z in a simulacrum of the Letter-Writers' situation, and find him refusing to “betray” comrades and cause, a kind of almost “tribal” honor displayed in the cause of the bad (cf. honor among thieves, and *Rep.* 1.350e11–352d2).

5.3 Conceptualization of Terrain

Perhaps, then there is no real difference here. Yet, the Aristotelian approach strikes me as *prima facie* more evidently nuanced and rich. First, its conceptualization of the terrain admits of qualifications; and second, its notions, of *eudaimonia* and *makaria*, even of free time, strike me as more formal and receptive to complexification than that of deep happiness. Perhaps Foot can accommodate them; perhaps too there remains “an unwelcome whiff of philosophy” about both.

5.3.1 First Contrast

First, Foot can be read as offering a rather tough, if not bleak, view. If you are to get the human good you have to live virtuously; but that is not sufficient, for “by one of the evil chances of life it may be out of the reach of even the best of men” (NG 97). But in such circumstances *the worth of the life of virtue seems left oddly detached from the human good*: “tough that you missed out.” Foot seemingly operates with the human good as *makaria*, and then with living virtuously, but without having a *third* notion of *eudaimonia* which in its possible qualifications characterizes virtuous lives as ones really successful and worth the living despite not amounting to felicity. Once, we allow in qualification from the unqualified ideal we can keep a clear connection between practical reason, the human good of acting successfully, and acting excellently or virtuously. Acting virtuously constitutes acting successfully—making a success of one’s life—in the way possible in the situation: that will be a *fine* life, one worth the living. The qualifications can occur along any dimension needed to reflect the factors we consider to impinge on, or impede, optimal success.

One dimension as above concerns the ideal worth of the activity, and what the circumstances dictate as wise to the agent. Thus a statesman’s political activity cannot, on pain of regress, count as the most optimal: for it is an activity whose principal aim is so to organize society to secure the optimal life for the citizens. Yet, it can constitute a very successful life, only with a qualification that relates it to the optimal

expression of that. Another dimension concerns the number and size of deeds and events.⁵⁶ Yet, a third responds to intricacies about differing roles and talents.⁵⁷ I focus on another, the qualifications to do with time, which link with two aspects of Foot's account I find unclear.

(A) *Living and Life*

Aristotle is clear that the human good is a temporally extended, diachronic, matter. It concerns the conditions for living successfully in the immediate, but does so under the consideration of that constituting a successful life (*NE* 1.7.1098a18–20). This works in both directions. A small period of successful living won't suffice for a life's counting as successful, a large amount of such living gives the life a certain resilience, albeit not full immunity, to its so being despite some upsets. A young person on the cusp of life, just on the verge of *Praxis*, sadly cut short, counts as having "lived successfully" *only* as a promissory note of their trajectory (*NE* 1.9.1100a1–4). Of someone cut off in their prime we say: "it was a wonderful life" but add the qualification "cruelly cut short." But now what of developing Alzheimer's at age 90 after a wonderful life? Not the best way to go. Yet, while perhaps noting that, it hardly disturbs the overall judgment (even less so perhaps, if realizing the incipient condition they had instead chosen means swiftly to depart).

⁵⁶"Many things happen by chance and differ in their largeness and smallness. Now small pieces of good fortune, and likewise their opposites, clearly do not tip the scale of life, while things that are large and numerous if *they* turn out well will make the life more felicitous (for they are of a nature themselves to add adornment to life [make it sparkle], and the use of them is fine and seriously good), but if they occur in reverse depress and spoil felicity: for they both bring pains and impede many activities. Nevertheless even in these circumstances fineness shines through whenever someone bears calmly many great misfortunes, not through insensitivity but because he is nobly bred and great-hearted" (*NE* 1.10.1100b22–33).

⁵⁷Aristotle approves of the Gorgianic style of defining the excellences or virtues against Plato (*Pol.* 1.13. 1260a24–33), a definition that allocates excellences to people under specific social roles or phases (women; slaves, children; young, old). This can endanger the recognition of a basic humanity. Less complex is a sensitivity to the differences, range, and variety of talents and creative power: not everyone is suited to go to music school (cf. *Rep.* 2.370a7–b3). At more specific levels, such considerations feature in the specification of which activities constitute living successfully for individuals and the realization of their individual potential.

Foot speaks of the Letter-writers as likely fitted for great happiness, but blocked from it. Yet, what of an 80-year-old Letter-Writer, a German Socrates, who has up to now had a life of deep happiness? Certain sadnesses and misfortunes, even tragedy, all things the agent could well have done without, do not always suffice to take the success out of a life lived largely successfully; its history gives it a certain resilience, a contextual accommodation. Our 80-year-old has been concerned that the arc of their living describes an arc of virtue through the situational space of their lives. There is an inner integrity to the line, a beauty or fineness to it. They have up to now been fortunate in that situational space. What matters to them is that they continue the trajectory of this arc, a continuation of the values they have lived by, of wise action—albeit now a continuation in more difficult, darker, conditions. And yet, with this powerful sense of integrity and self-respect, their lives at the same time rise to greatness—in actions that not merely continue the line, but cap the lives they have lived, revealing the true hardness of a life-time's commitment to certain values, a commitment pure, and crystalline against temptation. There is a sense in which their action *preserves*, even crowns, the success of their lives.⁵⁸ Perhaps, it takes misfortune of a more terrible size to unseat the judgment about success, misfortune such as that of Priam (*NE* 1.9.1100a5–9). But with a 19-year-old Letter-writer?

(B) *The Temporal Surround*

Another, more surprising, way time impinges on, and potentially qualifies, the human good, or success in a life, is that the latter is vulnerable to factors and events outside the agent's lifetime: the evaluation of our lives has a wider temporal context (cf. *NE* 1.7.1097b8–14; 1.10 *passim*).

⁵⁸The sense in which the *Phaedo*, Plato's "tragedy," with its theme of philosophy as preparation for death, portrays Socrates, like Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, as so in command of the situation that he can rebut its tragic nature. The point is not, I think, essentially religious; rather it is the power of virtue to drive the arc of the agent's life through the assault of fate—to rise above and be wholly in control of one's life and death: "strong enough to remain upright in the face of mishap or even 'in the face of fate'...this sovereign human..." (Nietzsche 1887, Essay 2 §2).

(i) Artificially, consider a scientist who dies at a good age, with important lifetime results on the verge of publication, with a successful family and warm circle of friends, a fabulous art collection, etc. On the way back from the memorial service, the bus carrying them all plunges over a cliff, at the same time as, by mischance, his laboratory burns down with all the results that an assistant had neglected to back up, and where the art collection was temporarily housed on its way to a museum as a public gift...all, all, reduced to ashes. The eulogies, which had spoken of his achievements, domestic, professional, and public, now ring hollow. "Thank goodness he didn't live to see this." The Martian asks you to pick a paradigm of a successful human life. I don't think you can any longer choose this. (There are limits to how far into the future post-death events can affect the truth conditions. Ozymandias may be safe.)⁵⁹ On reflection, this is perhaps not surprising once you keep in mind that human activities and "projects"—like bringing up a family—tend to be collaborative (in varying ways) and that many of these are *trans-generational*. (ii) Somewhat differently, the success of a life, or of a generation's way of life, can be affected—for good or ill—by the later effect of its projects on the upcoming generations and the resources and ways of life open to them. The activities were not as innocent as they seemed at the time, and with hindsight look like squandering of precious resources and creating enormous ecological damage. (iii) Or it was not so evident at the time how fertile the contribution was, how rich a vein of creativity and expression was being added to the human repertoire (discovery of penicillin, creation of the saxophone, or development of film). Its later impact adds to the stature of the original achievement, the degree of its success—a stature now demanding statues. But, in a more minor key, of "unhistoric acts," our responsibility to garden the social medium is also evidently a trans-generational one: will we pass on wider or narrower horizons? and this legacy is a factor in the success of these life-activities. If so, the human good, viewed as deep happiness, either is not just the enjoyment of good things, or else the enjoyment

⁵⁹One should resist the temptation to *sub specie aeternitatis* thoughts that evacuate human life of all meaning and good. (I suspect we misconstrue the exploratory or challenging nature of these thoughts.)

of good things turns out more complex and the truth-conditions of whether you *are* enjoying these goods are to an extent sensitive to the future, even one past your demise.

5.3.2 Second Contrast

Turning to our second point of contrast, Foot explicates (1) the human good in terms of deep happiness, and then (2) deep happiness in terms of the enjoyment of good things or the best things in life (NG 95, 97). I retain a residual worry about both these “nodes” of explication. Over (1) I worry whether deep happiness, especially understood in terms of (2), plausibly covers all modes of realizing the human good, all ideals whose realization we intelligibly count as constituting successful lives. Alternatively, if we uncover or stipulate a sense in which it does, and so hold (1) steady, then I worry about (2), over whether deep happiness can now plausibly be explicated in terms of “the enjoyment of good things.” To an extent the explications are in tension with each other—loosening the one connection makes the other easier of acceptance.

Nietzsche berates the English moralists for their fixation with happiness—sensing something ineliminably cozy and fireside at its heart.⁶⁰ Foot, admittedly, is, like Mill, to be viewed as set on rescuing for English philosophy a less shopkeeperly, less Benthamite, less Adam Smith, sense of *happiness*.⁶¹ But why bother? There is a more abstract notion of *success* at hand.

Two examples stick in my mind. Dummett put philosophy aside for a time to combat racism in Britain; Kropotkin gave up his geographical researches for a lifetime to address the parlous condition of the Russian people. Let us, in Foot’s footsteps, imagine the figure D. D correctly views his ideal life as, say, one of philosophizing or scientific research or playing the cello or... all within the context of enjoying a rich family life, with quality time for children, and for walks in nature and raking

⁶⁰E.g. 1886 §228. Cf. *Twilight of the Idols*, Arrows and Epigrams 12; *Late Notebooks* 11[93].

⁶¹Foot can be viewed as, in her own way, retracing the path of Mill’s critique of Bentham’s impoverished conception of happiness—his striving to enrich Bentham’s impoverished “theory of life”: Mill, 151–8; “On Liberty” *passim*, especially Chapter 3; “Utilitarianism” Chapter 2.

his Zen garden. But he sees his situation as one where really he must devote his life, or a goodly portion thereof, to combatting some blatant social injustice, or addressing, by virtuous means, some manifest human need (world health, education, or local environmental issues). He has no regrets doing what he sees he has to; he regrets the defective circumstances whose occurrence demands this of him. Like the Letter-Writers, D feels he cannot *justly* pursue his ideal life, its continued availability is blocked. Perhaps unlike the Letter-Writers, the positive contribution to human welfare of the ends he now pursues is manifest (although sitting in jail may be a valuable activity of protest). Is D's life one of *deep happiness*? (A) For Foot to answer "**yes**" seems strained. This is not *prima facie* what one would enunciate or picture as the enjoyment of the good things of life—nor does D do so. It is rather working hard and strenuously to remove human defects, improving the human lot—things presenting themselves as *problems* needing one's (life-) time to address, but which one thinks better not to have arisen and to have left one *free* to pursue the more ideal. ("Why this just war in *my* life time?") (B) For Foot to answer "**no**," on the other hand, doesn't seem to do justice to the strength, passion, and vitality of such commitments. This is a life so worthwhile that D may see it as so deeply satisfying that their more ideal life as cellist, geographer, or philosopher, takes on a certain unreality, a preciousness, a human distance, in contrast to this life among people whose needs, so immediate and acute, give it a depth, a vividness—even a drama—of meaning and human connection not readily available elsewhere. Hands held so warmly across needs, a bond forever.

So why not deep happiness, even if not exactly the enjoyment of good things?⁶² (a) If we allow that good causes or "works" can be a primary ingredient in deep happiness, they nonetheless can come—even tend to come—with considerable demands of devotion on the agent and attendant strains and stresses: we might talk of challenges, and of "sacrifices" in some sense, that going down certain paths makes the availability of other goods impossible or more difficult fully to attain

⁶²Chapter 6 explicates deep happiness in terms of "the enjoyment of the best things of life" (NG 95). In Chapter 7, however, Foot talks of those who "find special happiness in working for the relief of suffering" (NG 107). It raises a question of how stable her conception of deep happiness is.

(as the priesthood demands chastity, a military life the frequent relocation of, and long absences from, family; a ballerina's retirement of podiatric suffering, etc.). (b) Moreover, we suggested earlier that the exercise of virtues was itself a core good, basic to deep happiness, much in the spirit of Aristotle's remark at *NE* 1.10. and elsewhere on the life of virtuous activity:

If, as we said, it is the activities that are the determinants (*kuriai*) of a life, then none of the felicitous (*makarioi*) could become *wretched* (*athlios*): for he will never do things that are hateful and mean (*phaula*). For we suppose the truly good and right-minded (*emphron*) human bears all fortunes composedly and from what is available always does the best, just as a good general uses the army at hand as strategically as possible and a cobbler makes the finest shoe possible from the hides given him (and the same goes for all the other technists). But if so, the *eudaimon* would never become wretched, albeit not felicitous (*makarios*) if he falls in with the fortunes of a Priam. (*NE* 1.10.1100b33–1101a8)⁶³

The life of D is outstanding in its exercise of virtue. Nor does it strike one as speaking simply to the necessary—there is a fineness, a beauty, here, cut from the situations given him.

Let us nonetheless concede that as described there is at least a case for D's life not being the human good in the sense of the optimal human life. It is directed at removing or ameliorating human conditions that should not be there, and so, in more optimal conditions, would not be available to live—and would be “somewhat bloodthirsty” to desire obtain (*NE* 10.7.1177b9–12) (although not exactly true of the *standing* role of the military and emergency services). It is so to speak “tarred with imperfection.” So let us modify D's life slightly. D's consuming project is now one aimed at scientific or mathematical understanding,

⁶³I take the point to be that “the felicitous” can never become *wretched*, although they might become merely “*eudaimones*” given certain circumstances—but these can't become wretched (in disagreement with Brown 2009). The remark conflicts with 1.9.1100a5–9, where it is said no one would call Priam *eudaimon* suffering such great misfortunes in old age, having “ended *wretchedly*.” The wretchedness there is not that of the corruption of values, as in the 1.10 passage, a different focus. Yet some tension remains.

even philosophical, or some artistic—even athletic—endeavor. Are these also parasitic on an imperfect condition of humanity, all speaking to some deficiency (e.g., our current ignorance)? Were you to think so, it would risk importing a certain static conception of completeness into that condition. (Aristotle fell into this error.) Maybe it makes sense to think certain sciences are completable, but not, for example, music. These activities address our human needs in some sense, but not in one that is “tarred with imperfection” or only if imperfection is not thought of pejoratively (the beauty of fallen blossoms, the blown rose). The important point is that here too the *terrain* of demand and devotion—its stresses, strains, and struggles—may be *much the same*. Suicide rates along such paths may be high.⁶⁴ Consider, what is involved in bringing up a family, a not un-heroic endeavor!

My initial quote from Giacometti suggests that a creative life, devoted to working something out, may be a constant battle to articulate a vision, to forge a new language that extends the boundaries of human sensibility, to struggle and despair, one’s inadequacies daily exposed by the Idea under which one operates (an Idea so to speak both vague and under continual evolution and revision), the standards to which one holds oneself. “I should have liked to produce a good book. It has not turned out that way, but the time is past in which I could improve it” (Wittgenstein, Preface, 2009/1953). Human life under bad circumstances is a big challenge to survive; human life under better circumstances can remain a challenge, of a different order. A basic challenge to creativity. This underpins a characterization of human life—even “optimally” considered—as potentially one of heroic *struggle*. The lack, or avoidance, of it is not necessarily worrying, although we sometimes worry, or are disappointed, that someone is not challenging their potential enough: we have a sense of something marvelous going to waste. Foot characterizes “contentment” in a way

⁶⁴Sophocles’ famous remark that “to live greatly is greatly to suffer” applies here too. It is not clear to me that such lives need be of “benefit” exactly to the agent considered more individually, although it is socially such, and part of the, and their, human good: such creative pioneers enrich our humanity, our vocabulary of thought, sentiment, and vision, often at enormous costs to themselves as individuals. They are *our* boldness, *our* antennae.

that it is neither necessary nor sufficient for “a happiness that could convincingly be called humanity’s good” (NG 85–6). Let us reconfigure this and take it instead to characterize one ideal of life: *the Quiet Life*, that chosen by Odysseus second time around, perhaps Dorothea Brook’s unhistoric life, Berger’s country doctor. No doubt, like any life it has its ups and downs, its modest challenges and dramas, its quiet joys. Its path follows a gentle, not a steep, slope. It is not silly to reject the high road of challenge (which would you choose for a child?). This could be a deeply happy life, one indeed characterized by the enjoyment of good things. But it is not Giacometti’s life (Lord 1985), nor Wittgenstein’s, as I envisage them. Human life is deeply dynamic: ideals of static perfection are misleading. “For last year’s words belong to last year’s language//And next year’s words await another voice” (T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*, 1968). Providing that voice may be fraught with anxiety and self-doubt.

In short, it is not obvious that the human good need be a deeply happy life, or, if we adjust our understanding of deep happiness, then not obvious that such lives are naturally described as ones of “the enjoyment of good things.”

5.4 Further Remarks on Ideals

[A] *Human Ideals and their Variety*⁶⁵

Plato, followed by Aristotle, offers a picture of three central human life-ideals—lives devoted to understanding and wisdom; to status; and to wealth (and the sensual pleasures it bankrolls).⁶⁶ But there are many ideals. The human sense for adventure and challenge, with its attendant risks and dangers; for understanding; for creativity and the significance

⁶⁵I avoid the scientizing term, “*theory*,” in our area. Granted that, Frankfurt’s insistence on our need for a *theory of ideals* is well taken (1998, vii–viii).

⁶⁶For Plato this is aligned with the three parts of the human psyche, for Aristotle with a common *tropos* of three lives (cf. *NE* 1.5); that underlies Plato’s psychology too (cf. *Rep.* 1.345c1–347e2).

it adds to the human repertoire of engagement and response; for problem-solving; for leadership, for greatness, fame, and glory (Achilles' choice); for service to others (as in medicine, the military, the emergency services, engineering, etc.); for a quiet life of slow contentment and ordinary fulfillment.

Consider briefly the first. One thinks immediately of the great explorers, navigators, great travelers, mountaineers: those for whom Tennyson's Ulysses, "always roaming with a hungry heart" gives one classic expression:

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone, ...
... strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. (6–11)

The sense of life needing a keen edge, of its being so very vital, so full, in the moment, because of the risk it will be gone in the next. Nor need this be an individual's lone concern. (a) The achievements are often with crew, "those that loved me" (the camaraderie that leads men and women to take another tour of duty). (b) Often too we—whether as comrades, fellow-citizens, countrymen, humans—feel their deeds and achievements enlarge us, a part of our collective shared achievement: providing and symbolizing the occasion for pride in our unit, our city, our country, our humanity, the conquest of Everest, of the moon: "...a giant step for mankind." All this occurs too in much more ordinary forms. The actor Anthony Quayle insightfully remarked: "If life doesn't have that little bit of danger about it, you'd better create it. If life hands you that danger, accept it gratefully." So *even at our best* we are so situated as to have to, and as being willing to, give up much to achieve much, whichever way you look at it: we are a delicate mix of *consumers* and enjoyers of the goods and riches we have achieved, and then of driven and reflective *producers* of new goods, new challenges.

[B] *Life's Parameters: (River-) Delta Structures, Contextualism of Value, and Wildean Progressive Utopianism*

The range of intelligible human ideals doesn't appear from nowhere. It is rooted in our basic nature, the changing natural facts of our world, the changing facts of social history and of our world: the natural facts of human existence, *our form of life*. As with natural facts about cheese (Wittgenstein, §142, 2009/1953).

By these I mean, somewhat vaguely, the waters in which we swim: the parameters, or frame conditions, of human life. Just as we don't immediately suppose a life defective or marred by some bruises or headaches or colds: they are a given (although an individual might happen to escape them). So too with grief, sadness, disappointment, heartbreak; frustration, tiredness, boredom, irritation, impatience; danger and risk, and the various needs to run them; curiosity, wonder and surprise; a sense of the everyday fragility and transitoriness of life; of trust and distrust; the importance and often positive impact of mistake, failure and defeat; of being geographically, historically, and socially located; the gamut of emotions and moods, and of personal and social relations—many “positive” things as well as “negative” ones. The point here is that such “negatives” and “positives” play an equal role in our lives—almost in a sense the rules of the human game, our parameters.⁶⁷ For an individual, it can go right or wrong, be well or badly dealt with: for instance a grief that proves insurmountable and destructive. But that, in an ordinary way of things, one would feel grief at the death of parents, or of friends—or tired, or bored by some mundane duties within a larger project—*cannot properly be regarded as a defect*, any more than our mortality: there is not ultimately a perspective from which that makes sense.⁶⁸ Grief and a certain sadness are, so to speak, constitutive parts of our life, of its frame, themes on which as individuals we will play our variations.

⁶⁷A deeper discussion would explore levels of basicness, between the more permanent aspects of human life and nature, and those more contextual and sociohistorical.

⁶⁸Caution is needed, as Wittgenstein notes in *On Certainty*. Things apparently constitutive of the frame and lacking sense to challenge at one time (“humans going to the moon!”) can at another be brought into senseful challenge (one thinks, for example, also of Hume on Christian humility as a virtue).

These, and handling them well, all are part of the human good, and if you like, of deep happiness, although, if so, it would be a strain to characterize all as enjoyment of good things. It is more that one who succeeds has their measure, the measure of human terrain, *the human given*: can, perhaps, *compose* a life worth living and full of humanity.

It is from such a soil that human ideals grow, get their impetus, our curiosity, our sense of movement, our creative power, our desire to speak and be heard. And also, our fears and insecurities. A certain protest, a repugnance, at our mortality, at its, almost moral, “unacceptability,” may power an ideal, an aspirational and projective ideology, of an eternal life hereafter. Ideals are themselves a creative, and ongoing, business. We have some need to integrate and patch together a life—one that recognizes core relations between people, of justice and mutual respect—but the form of success, even as rational success, exhibits what I term a “*delta structure*.” There are many routes by which the river of life can *successfully* run its course to the sea, routes which criss-cross and enrich (or impede) each other in multiple ways, both individually and collectively: the meaningfulness of my activity takes on its valence as serious endeavor, through others pursuing theirs, as equally it can be cheapened and threatened (“the social medium”): a fluid yet partially structured holism.⁶⁹

Such structure thus goes hand in hand with the contextualism of value, where the value, the goodness or badness, of things is a function of their role, their contribution, good or bad, in their context.⁷⁰

⁶⁹Growing up has such a structure (or learning a particular discipline). There are many aspects to it and things to be acquired, but there is considerable variety in their possible order of acquisition and interaction, e.g., learning some things before others makes others easier or harder to acquire, or casts them in a different light. This resonates with Berlin’s view of the difficulties of a scientific history: “...that the facts to be fitted into the scientific grid and subsumed under the adopted laws or model (even if public criteria for selecting what is important, relevant, etc. from what is trivial, peripheral, etc. can be found and employed) are too many, too minute, too fleeting, too blurred at the edges. They criss-cross and penetrate each other at many levels simultaneously, and the attempt to prise them apart, as it were, and pin them down, and classify them, and fit them into their specific compartments turns out to be impracticable” (Berlin 1978).

⁷⁰Crudely, if NASA had used slaves for the Apollo project, it would have a different valence. Or the Great Pyramid viewed as built on the now silent shrieks and groans of the un-mummified multitude transposes it from Seven Wonder to Seven Horror. Or Pierre Menard, author of the Quixote.

This creates their valence, what something *means*, its import, much like the meaning of a sentence in a language. Some values are more constant than others, because their contexts remain relatively stable. (So, for instance, grief at the death of parents, although even its import, its social and emotional resonance, modulates within the setting of religious beliefs.)⁷¹

This too accommodates the dynamism of human life. Our earlier talk of the optimal good, *makaria*, may suggest a somewhat static ideal for human life. But the optimizing aim of our practical rationality, *its utopian aspect*, should be thought of neither as static nor as a blueprint. It is often piecemeal—we tend to be clearer about what factors would generally improve our lives and the situational environment likely to face us (saving for activities in retirement), than we are of grand life-plans. And more generally it is a progressive utopianism of the kind characterized by Wilde when he writes:

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias. (141, 2001)

6 Back to the Deep

Finally, I turn briefly to some other aspects of the deep, especially deep humanity.

6.1 Registers of Depth: Ordinary Depth and Liberal Education

Our talk of the deep can be grammatically deployed in two registers, two kinds of conversation, the extraordinary and the ordinary.

⁷¹Thus value would neither be intrinsic in Moore's sense, nor a matter of individual's happenstance desires.

(1) *The “sage” level*

Even among the good and the wise, there are exceptional humans, of staggering breadth of vision and understanding, whether unqualifiedly of the human heart and the measure of human life, or in special areas of science, mathematics, and art, able to dig deep and out of the box.⁷² One might instance Ghandi or Mandela, yet one need not think here of household names, but perhaps a few whom you have met that stand out, with a certain intense humanity that cuts to the quick of life. It is of its nature rare. (Sometimes depth is also in part a construction by what the admirers find in the person or the work; if one thinks of much art appreciation on the model of friendship, the audience is also a constructive presence.)

(2) *An ordinary, “Dorothea Brooke,” sense of depth*

There is an *ordinary* sense of depth where this mastery, this taking the measure, of the terrain of life and heart is something that is taken to lie within any ordinary human’s capacity to attain. We all have the potential to be deep in this way, just as we can all be sensitive, or wise (both not unrelated to this depth). Talking of *eudaimonia* conceived of as the prize and end of virtue, i.e., as activity realizing virtue, Aristotle says that so conceived: “It would also be widely shared: for it is possible for it to belong to all who are not impaired as regards excellence, through some learning and care” (*NE* 1.9.1099b18–20). In some such sense, we take depth to be open virtually to all—not a natural given, but possible for all, given experience, and suitably encouraged and resourced, to strive for and attain. The obvious antonym set, of the shallow, frivolous, the silly and light-minded, suggests that depth in this register is a matter of giving human goods and bads, especially life-activities, the valence, consideration, and attention—observation (in both senses)—they deserve. On the one side a certain resilience, a serious-mindedness

⁷²This points the need to discuss the concept of *genius*, a preoccupying theme in Kant (e.g. 3rd Critique §§46–50), Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (e.g., “The Greek State”).

that connects with notions of being *spoudaios*, having gravitas or “bottom,” or being *grounded*, and with self-cultivation; on the other, a cognitive appreciation and sensitivity to the complexity of life, a proper measure of it. All consistent with carrying depth lightly, when appropriate.

Ordinarily attainable, however, it may not be ordinarily attained. That may be impeded. Perhaps, the large bulk of the population—workers, women, minorities—are so downtrodden and exploited, so weary, disease-ridden, and lacking education, their lives so much foreshortened and impoverished, that experience and reflection only play a much constrained role (e.g., Turnbull’s Ik, 1987; Gorky’s *The Lower Depths*, 1923). Many, if they have the strength to rise from beds of famine, may be *naïve*, easily led, or misled, of limited vision, easily turned into a mob, subjected to ideological falsehood for ulterior purposes. Or perhaps the customs of society are rigid, admiring of standards of unreflective “good form” (“it was good enough for your father...”). So people of ordinary depth *may* actually also be rare, but this be due to more contingent circumstances of a severely defective social medium.

Here, liberal upbringing, education, a nurturing social medium are needed elements for most of us. Foot, wishing to keep deep happiness as something ordinary, instances the cook Anna. Anna is proud of her life, and attitude to one’s life and work is important—indeed, a central piece of *self-accounting*; but suppose Anna, unlike the concierge Renée Michel (in *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, by Barbery and Anderson (2008)), doesn’t read, or have friends. Her upbringing is impoverished. So is she deeply happy?—or is she in something of damaged paradise?—her servant’s pride of service evincing a suspect complicity, ignorant of exploitation, perhaps creating for herself a kind of depth of commitment because of those very blinkers, focusing attention on a small patch of available life, assiduously cultivated.

Dangers lurk on all sides. Briefly, one lies in taking the pressure off the need for the universal provision of a liberal education and the proper provision of social opportunities, a preparation for creative free-time, and the free time itself. A second in not hearing Anna’s own voice. “I am my own person,” Anna may say. This must be heard, but it is difficult for individuals to attain the higher ground of a wider context that reveals

to them their social manipulation and unjustly imposed limitations.⁷³ A third occurs in education itself, itself susceptible as ever to social and political exploitation. As Gibbon notes of the clergy, they have tended to side with the powers-that-be, so too professional educators (the Young Hegelians something of an exception). This puts pressure on articulating a *liberal* education, and the liberal ethos that sustains it.

6.2 Some Marks of the Deep

If our talk of the deep comes in two registers, what is it that so comes?

One basic use of “deep” is as an intensifier, (“deep sleep, concentration, trouble, despair, sympathy, longing, ignorance”; “deep in thought”; “deeply moved, alarmed”), like a use also of “real,” “true,” “great,” and “very,” with which it is sometimes interchangeable. Another is a distancing from a surface or reference point—usually in a downward direction (“deep cut, wound; valley, sea, space”; “deep in the countryside, or in the heart of Texas”). This modulates into getting from the surface of something to its heart, or the bottom of it, or engaged in so doing (“deep knowledge, understanding, study”; “an ever deepening appreciation”; “deeply involved in...”). And of course, for that there has to *be* depth, or something deeper, to get to.

The uses *intertwine*. Talk of a “deep person” combines aspects of seeing more fully into the heart of human life, below its surface, and also of intensity in what it means to be a person, “a real person.” Similarly, perhaps with friendship, love, care; even hatred and dislike at least for certain range objects (one who professes a deep dislike of X is expected to give reasons of a certain seriousness where X is, say, a person, although not where it is pistachio ice-cream, but then the depth is a joke or heavily contextualized). But it is more than intertwining. “Deep sleep” is “intense,” but also *far from the surface* of wakefulness; the second use characterizes the *mode* of the intensification (as “great” does in the mode of size or quantity, and “real” and “true” in their differing

⁷³Cf. Nietzsche (1862, 1887) *Gay Science* Bk 5, §380 “...like a wanderer who wants to know how high the towers in a town are: he *leaves* town.”

modes of “thinginess” and of genuineness). If so, it seems the more basic, or more illuminating.

Yet, this appealing image of “getting below the surface,” to the “real heart of the matter,” to “the bottom of things,” is challenging to cash out, other than in generalities that lack life and traction. (This is a general problem with predicates at the “thin,” more abstract, end when we run with their abstraction and avoid the particular; yet if we turn to the latter, we can get lost in them.)⁷⁴ I offer some provisional remarks, and then outline two contrasts to depth.

The marks of a person as “deep” are close to those that mark them as “wise” (both can be relativized, or qualified, with respect to a particular domain). Some marks of wisdom as traditionally conceived have already been noted (Sects. 1, 5.1), and in part reprise we may offer the following. (i) Correct general values, and emotional maturity. (ii) Experience of life and situational appreciation of the particular. (Experience may be direct or more widely through, for example, human history, novels, and films, a more extensive education in human psychology.)⁷⁵ (iii) Emotional and actional repertoire and response, together with creative imagination in deliberation, in appreciation and in response (seeing that bad news has to be broken, how to do it, and with sensitive support) (iv) Alongside deliberative finesse are what I term *the practices of conscience*. These are the practices of constant self-examination, self-critique and *self-accounting* that go into attaining and maintaining *true consciousness*, a lively and present sense of self-knowledge and self-measurement; and openness to evaluation by others. (Compare responsibly maintaining a car in good running order, and yourself as good driver, involving also comparison with others, doing worse, or better, than yourself.) More positively, the practice of self-cultivation and improvement.

⁷⁴A more adequate treatment would move on several fronts, among them: (i) answering Frankfurt’s call for a “theory of ideals” (ii) offering an array of paradigm case studies; (iii) a greater understanding of the notion of work.

⁷⁵A paradigm here is that implicitly general investigation and understanding of human nature and psychology and its behavioral susceptibilities that Thucydides saw the need to provide in his particular study of the Peloponnesian War (Bk 1. §22). Now there is not simply personal, or family, experience to draw on, but recorded human history, a sense of one’s geography, of human psychology, the great shift of evolutionary perspective sparking the revolution in the sciences in the 19c.

There is no ceiling to virtue.⁷⁶ You need to evaluate others, and, for that, the critical eye must be turned also to the self: maybe you need to learn from them, maybe you are not in a strong position to criticize, etc. (*Analects* 4.17.) (v) The self-confidence that goes with self-knowledge and being able to handle oneself; groundedness, and resoluteness (*bebaiotes*; *gravitas*); confident where you should be, modest and ready to seek advice where that too is appropriate.

In sum, knowledge and experience of the world and of humanity as it is and its proper values, and knowledge of yourself, and yourself as a practical being. That outlines a *general* background. Beyond that, I offer two inchoate suggestions for marks more *specific* to the deep.

[I] *The deep as continual querying and adventuring*

The deep in subject matter is connected with the difficult, the wonderful, the, in some sense, spiritual, (cf. *NE* 6.7.1141b3–8)—not that the deep person need find the matters difficult or obscure: indeed its appearing so clear to them is testimony to the very depth of their understanding. It connects with the thought that life, looked squarely in the face, is and remains a *challenge*, a gauntlet, to make what you can and will of it and of yourself. It demands both a willingness to question and challenge the conventional, the social medium, a readiness, a freedom, to explore alternatives. “*Freiheit ist immer die Freiheit des Andersdenkenden.*” It is not a comfort zone—the old image of the easy life of South Sea Islander, a life’s vacation, Adam Smith’s leisure.

[II] *The deep as commitment and devotion*

It is human to need some depth in life—something, or things, to be committed and devoted to, things one really cares about and sees as

⁷⁶Such self-examination might be taken to acknowledge an imperfection in one’s practical wisdom, and so be in tension with full wisdom and virtue as it appears in Aristotle (John Hacker-Wright referred me to Confucius, *Analects* 2.4). As regards Aristotle, I address this in “Moral Conscience and *Praxis*.” As regards Confucius, *Analects* 2.11 and 4.17 seemingly point in the other direction, as does 1.4., in connection with Master Zeng’s views (who, if “slow,” apparently influenced Mencius).

making important contributions, which calls forth persistence and determination. It may be a commitment that unsettles others—perhaps that is Gauguin’s decision—negotiating which is not necessarily easy nor easy to make others understand or appreciate. But there is also an ordinariness to the need: for most, family plays some role, but also their work, the institutions, professions, traditions, which infuse a sense of meaning to life in one’s contributing to a larger whole, collective aspirations—another aspect of our sociality, once so evident in the work-song.

6.3 Contrasts with the Deep: Superficiality and False Ideology

Returning to the connection of depth with wisdom, there are two directions of “un-wisdom” (*aphrosune*): a mere lack of wisdom, which is folly, light-mindedness, and stupidity; and a positive corruption or distortion of it, dub that “perversity” (e.g., *NE* 6.5.1140b11–20). (In Aristotelian terms, a failure to attain fully valued action, mature *Praxis*, and a failure to get the values in *Praxis* correct.) Correspondingly, depth, as a matter of going beneath the surface, to the heart or bottom of things—in our case, human life and humanity—suggests two directions of failure: *superficiality* and *false depth*.

The first is the one that naturally springs naturally to mind. Superficiality appears, as Foot suggests, in the vices of vanity, worldliness, avarice, and, we may add, in various kinds of light-mindedness and irresponsibility, cleverness, short-sightedness, and lack of circumspection. These cheapen life, prevent or distort the proper appreciation of its glories, of the import and value of its goods and bads, and their priorities. It takes various forms. (i) The agent may simply drift through life, a butterfly in a social whirl, hopping from flower to flower, who fails to develop much a sense of values, but, like a child, passes from one amusement to the next; or be forced, by an impoverishing social medium, to drift and remain child-like (the paternalist view of the working class as mere children). (ii) But may not an agent also have values—have a conception of *the fine way to live*—and so engage in *Praxis*, only their values be superficial? (Aristotle’s *akolastos* taking it that they should pursue the

present pleasure). In many cases we may hesitate fully to grant this, taking the understanding of values, of real goods and bads in life, to be so very shallow and dis-engaged that the agent seems more like a child playing at, or imitating, being grown up—as when, by a kind of alienation, people imitate the way of life and valuations they imagine the rich and famous to pursue (cf. *NE* 1.5.1095b21–22; 10.6.1176b6–17; also Rousseau’s description of the alienated condition of *amour propre*, for a view of status-seeking valuations that undercut the central point of valuation; as Aristotle too notes, 1095b24–27, “rather superficial”). Such faults may be the individuals’ own, or lie with their society. They have unreflectively picked up on valuations endemic in their social medium, whether of consumerism and “bread and circuses,” or of unquestioned senses of entitlement of their class, race, or gender. There is a lack of conscience, reflection, and education—of self-knowledge—for which they may not be wholly to blame, but which prevents any depth of appreciation of what “life is about,” of “where things are at.” One thinks of the gullible Justice Shallow, or even Lear whose majesty “stoops to folly” (*King Lear* 1.1.148, 2016/1606) and of whom Regan remarks “yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself” (*King Lear* 1.1.290–1). But (iii) we can also allow more serious pursuits of superficiality where we may be more willing to begin talking of mistaken or false valuations. Perhaps, these stem from thoughts about the general *vanitas* of things human; of a sense of personal worthlessness, lack of talent, of an almost forced ennui; or from a misplaced sense of where real passion and vitality lie in life; or of obsessional and idiosyncratic passions, as with certain collectors of objects, beautiful or not (e.g., *arktophilia*). But with this, we shift further toward the second failure.

This, more difficult, contrast is a form of error we may term “*ideological*.” It is perhaps in part what Foot was after in her figure of Z. Z has a sense of deep values and commitments, which for him make up a conception of a successful life; and as part of that, we have argued, it is essential to Z, that this view of what is worthwhile and important in life is correct. Its falsity would imply it was a life *wasted* in pursuit of illusory goals (and worse)—and this be evident to Z, although its falsity may strike him as not much more than a logical possibility. Aztec High Priests with their tecpatls did not appease non-existent gods, nor

Salem witch-trials and executions save souls from the devil or purify the community. Of the European religious wars, the Thirty Years war is estimated to have killed 8 million, the French or Huguenot wars 3 million. (Of course, as Thucydides noted long ago, other agendas can ride piggy-back on, or even power, the ostensible cause.) Violence aside, the cloistered contemplative order of monks spend a lifetime in prayer. All can see that if there were no Tlaloc, no Xipe Totec, no God, this is all vulnerable to a charge of being hollow, a simply terrifying waste of human life, both in its violence and its peace. Similar concerns about false ideology obviously arise over politics: civil war,⁷⁷ imperialism, and colonialism, the wasting of millions of lives to no good end (the Melian dialog; Genghis Khan; Timur; the Third Reich, Stalin's pogroms, Pol Pot...); and over ideological commitments regarding class, race and gender, or over what is justly acceptable as the condition of public health and education.

My concern here is not with where ideological falsity actually lies, but the abstract issue of its compatibility with depth. It may be that backed off the concrete details we cannot make much progress, but by way of both a start, and a conclusion, I offer some inadequate remarks.

First, a two-sided remark. It is not easy to challenge the social medium—a medium that provides social identity, and oftentimes a medium that makes the oppressed complicit in their oppression. Not for nothing were von Humboldt (1994/1851, written 1791–2) and Mill concerned with the tyranny of the majority. The vibrantly questioning 17-year-old Nietzsche's writes:

Oh, pulling down is easy; but rebuilding! And pulling down seems easier than it is. We are determined in our innermost being by the impressions of our childhood, the influence of our parents, our educations. These deeply rooted prejudices are not so easily removed by reasoning or mere will.⁷⁸

⁷⁷See the depressing: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_civil_wars.

⁷⁸Nietzsche (1862) in Pearson and Large (2006), 13. On the difficulties of rebuilding, see Lenin's "On Climbing a High Mountain" (V.I. Lenin, *Internet Archive at marx.org*). I owe the reference to Ali (2017).

This, our *first dogmatism*, our conventionalities, our first “musts” or “can’t be otherwises,” need to be examined and challenged if one is to succeed in maturing into a gardener, to play one’s proper part. Yet, the challenge too has its dangers, one of which is that of *first reflection*. Psychologically the effect of standing back from the accepted, and being struck by a new thought—“it is all wrong”—has the force of *revelation*, of insight into the True, the veil has dropped from one’s eyes. The “theory of ideas”—that we do not “directly” perceive the world—struck English philosophers, even one as brilliant as Hume, with just such a force.⁷⁹ Revelatory, like customary, “truth” is suspect, as the grip of the old picture yields to the grip of a new one. (The point is not unrelated to Wittgenstein’s suspicion of “*musts*,” of being caught by pictures.) It is suggestive of a need for healthy skepticism and for being historically informed.

Second, falsity in an ideology is a delicate matter. Three overlapping thoughts. (1) Despite elements of falsity, it can seem necessary as a narrative of social identity, unity and harmony—whether or not in the form of a noble lie (cf. Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, 57). It provides a focus, a standard, a way of looking at one’s position in the cosmos, it sustains a form, a pattern, under which to live and order a life of loving and caring for others, rather a sort of organizational principle, or touch-stone.⁸⁰ It is an element in a stabilizing traditional social medium. Some ideological structuring is socially necessary. Falsity, nonetheless, remains ever dangerous. It tends to distort, to unsettle priorities with other values, and is potentially harmful also in the consequences it appears to rationalize and demand. In the social medium, it can be as constricting as stabilizing, or even *in* stabilizing (the worries of von Humboldt and Mill). (2) It can be aspirational and developmental, despite its falsity. Feuerbach decomposes Christianity into a *religion* of the projection of deep human aspirations and a *theology* of false metaphysical doctrine.

⁷⁹And perhaps the slave-boy’s first answer at *Meno* 82d5–e9.

⁸⁰Burke Trend, a distinguished British civil servant (later Lord Trend), explained to me his adherence to the Church of England in just such terms, of the need for a pattern to live one’s life by and give order to its events of moment. It calls up again Confucian *li* (note 7). Of course a pattern may become progressively harder to adhere to with sincerity, and can enshrine expressions e.g. of class prejudice rather than humanity.

Nietzsche's (1887) democrat in 1.9. approves of the Christian slaves' morality having undermined the "noble" morality, with its equalizing "brothers and sisters in Christ," and seeks to preserve that equality, while crossing out the "in Christ." What at one point seems the very identifying center of an ideology can be abandoned, the importance being found to lie rather in the surround. (3) It can be patchy, some elements and practices worth preserving (as in the practices of conscience), and some elements less obviously ideological than others, or more complexly interwoven (Church music); or fertile in tensions between rival elements in it.

I am tempted to suggest that deep humanity lies in one's attitude to the social medium of one's time—in being able to take on and exercise one's role and place as gardener of it. It is a work in progress (when not in regress). One has to work with and from the materials at hand, weeding out the false and nurturing the true (e.g., combatting the endless stupidity of racism). Just as I have suggested that it is of the very nature of practical reason to have that central progressively utopian aspect, this is as true of practical reason in its political sphere as public reason, as in its personal and domestic spheres. And working with the material "at hand" is a matter not only of the contemporary scene, but of recorded history and research, which so enlarges the diachronic experience we can draw on, and whose need was so clearly seen by Thucydides. And it suggests caution. Socrates' professed lack of wisdom, his call for the revaluation of values, and continual examination, stand as beacons of integrity against the next 2000 years of appalling human history—the *dreckhaufen* of superstition, arrogance, and inhumanity. Yet, in case we despair, recall Kant, who, while understanding the importance of public education, and too diplomatically conceding its contemporary expense, nonetheless focuses on the rising feeling for a still distant international government or condition: "This gives hope finally that after many reformative revolutions, a universal cosmopolitan condition, which Nature has as her ultimate purpose, will come into being as the womb wherein all the original capacities of the human race can develop."⁸¹

⁸¹Kant (1997); see also the justly famous conclusion to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5: 161–3.

So, with Progressive Utopianism and historically informed caution, there is perhaps hope for the deep. First and foremost we need political depth in the direction of an ever more resilient form of cosmopolitanism, an ideal of social justice, mutual respect, and human freedom in its most basic sense. A trans-generational project worthy of a long march.

Acknowledgements This draws from a larger project. Earlier versions were given at memorial sessions in honor of Professor Foot at Somerville, Oxford in 2011, and at the Western APA in Seattle in 2012. More recently, I should like to acknowledge debts, and thanks, to the editor John Hacker-Wright, and to my colleagues, Barbara Herman, John Carriero, and Andrew Flynn. Philippa was the principal philosophical interlocutor in my life for thirty years. I am delighted to dedicate this piece to her—and, at random, to the memory of a particular evening when she outpaced Michael Thompson and myself around Blenheim Palace, at sunset, past a field of strangely innumerable hares up by the Column of Victory, and then on into the gathering dusk of ambulant companionship.

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Foot's Grammar of Goodness

Micah Lott

1 Introduction

Before Philippa Foot gave her book the title *Natural Goodness*, she planned to call it *The Grammar of Goodness* (Hursthouse, 191). By “grammar” Foot means the logical connections among a certain class of judgments.¹ The judgments at issue here are those that concern a special type of goodness, which Foot calls “natural goodness.” Such goodness “is attributable only to living things themselves and to their parts, characteristics, and operations,” and it is “intrinsic or ‘autonomous’ goodness in that it depends directly on the relation of an individual to the ‘life form’ of its species” (NG 26–7). In her book, Foot argues both that a distinctive grammar of goodness applies to living things generally, and that moral goodness in human beings is a special instance of natural goodness.²

¹Foot takes this sense of “grammar” from Wittgenstein. See NG 91.

²Of course, Foot also speaks about natural defect, and she argues that moral vice is a form of natural defect in the human will. Judgments of natural goodness and natural defect belong to the same grammar.

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My goal in this chapter is to provide a sympathetic interpretation of Foot's grammar of goodness, clarifying and expanding it in a few places, and defending it against some objections. I begin by sketching Foot's grammar. As I understand it, that grammar includes four main notions: (1) THE GOOD OF, (2) GOOD AS/GOOD IN, (3) GOOD FOR, and (4) GOODS/GOOD THINGS. I then consider the relation between GOOD FOR, on the one hand, and THE GOOD OF and GOOD AS, on the other. Is it always GOOD FOR a living thing to be GOOD AS the kind of thing it is? Could something be GOOD FOR an organism without being part of THE GOOD OF that kind of thing? I argue that GOOD FOR, GOOD AS, and THE GOOD OF are inseparable: What is GOOD FOR a living thing *just is* that which furthers or constitutes THE GOOD OF such a creature, and THE GOOD OF any creature is the actualization of those well-formed capacities that make it GOOD AS the kind of creature that it is. In the final part of this chapter, I consider how happiness fits into Foot's grammar of goodness as applied to human beings, paying special attention to the idea that THE GOOD OF any living thing consists in a certain form of activity.

2 A Short Grammar Lesson with Professor Foot

Foot's grammar of goodness begins with a point from Michael Thompson about the representation of living things. Thompson argues that in order to see something *as* a living thing, we must view it as the bearer of some life form. This is because any individual that we represent as living must be viewed as engaging in some vital processes—e.g., eating, breathing, sleeping, blossoming, photosynthesizing. And an individual's life form provides the necessary context for any interpretation of its vital processes. Unless we bring to bear some (perhaps implicit) understanding of the *kind* of organism we are dealing with, we can have no way of interpreting an individual's vital processes—which means we cannot so much as see the individual as a living thing.

We can articulate our understanding of a life form in a system of natural-historical judgments. Such judgments have some canonical forms: "The S is/has/does F" or "S's are/have/do F." For example: "The Asian

elephant has four legs" or "Hawksbill hatchlings crawl to the sea guided by moonlight." Natural-historical judgments describe an organism's characteristic features and activities, and they do so in a way that identifies the *function* of those features and activities. An ordered system of such judgments—a natural-history, in Thompson's sense—provides an interpretation of the life form. It answers the question, "How do they live?"

Importantly, natural-historical judgments possess a generality that is neither statistical nor universal. From the fact that "the Asian elephant has four legs," it does not follow that Annie the Asian Elephant has four legs, or even that *any* Asian elephant now living has four legs (a horrible, leg-destroying disease might be attacking the elephants). Thus natural-historical judgments do not explain "how they live" in the sense of what is statistically common. Rather, a natural-history describes the characteristic life-cycle of this kind of creature—a life-cycle that might be interrupted or frustrated for most individuals.

We can now identify the central elements in Foot's grammar of goodness. First, Foot refers to "the pattern of life that is the *good of* creatures of this species," and "the life that is its good to live" (NG 41, 42). THE GOOD OF an organism is its characteristic way of living, as described in a natural-history. In spelling out the characteristic life of "the mole rat" or "the Bengal tiger" we have articulated THE GOOD OF mole rats or Bengal tigers—or, equivalently, Mole Rat Good or Bengal Tiger Good.

THE GOOD OF a given life form provides the criterion for judgments of excellence and defect in individual bearers of that form. It provides the standard for determining whether an individual is GOOD AS that type of organism—its GOODNESS AS a mole rat, or Bengal tiger, etc. Evaluations of natural goodness and defect are made possible by joining two kinds of judgment, one about the life form and the other about individual bearers of the form. From the fact that "the Asian elephant has four legs," combined with the fact that "Annie the Asian Elephant has three legs," we can conclude that Annie is missing a leg. *Qua* Asian elephant, Annie is defective leg-wise.

Foot also speaks about an organism's "goodness in various respects" (NG 41). Evaluations of GOODNESS IN the parts or operations of an organism capture the same notion of excellence or defect *qua* type of living thing as GOODNESS AS. So in terms of the grammar of goodness

we can group together judgments of GOODNESS AS and GOODNESS IN. When it comes to such judgments, understanding and evaluation are two sides of the same coin. We grasp what an organism has or does by seeing it as the bearer of some life form, and the life form determines THE GOOD OF such creatures, which is the criterion for evaluating the organism's parts and activities. Thus judgments of GOOD AS/GOOD IN must be indexed to a particular life form—good eyes in a mole rat, proper flowering *qua* marigold, etc.

In addition to THE GOOD OF and GOOD AS, Foot's grammar includes the notion of GOOD FOR. Whereas GOOD AS refers to an organism's excellence, GOOD FOR refers to what benefits an organism. And just as there is a conceptual connection between THE GOOD OF and GOOD AS, there is also a connection between THE GOOD OF and GOOD FOR (NG 94). What is GOOD FOR an individual living thing, *qua* its kind of organism, is that which fosters or sustains that individual's GOOD—i.e., THE GOOD OF the individual, *qua* its kind of organism, as defined by its life form.

Finally, Foot speaks about "goods" and "good things." For instance, she refers to "the diversity of human goods—the elements that can make up good human lives" (NG 44). She also speaks about "a readiness to accept good things" (NG 79), being conscious of "the good things in" one's life (NG 84), "the ordinary human goods of affection and friendship" (NG 91), and enjoyment of "the best things in life" (NG 95). How should we understand this notion of GOODS/GOOD THINGS? We might suppose that this is simply another way of talking about those things that are GOOD FOR an organism. And in many contexts this seems to be the case. For instance, we seem to express the same thought by saying either "mother's milk is good for baby giraffes" or "in the life of baby giraffes, mother's milk is a good thing."

However, I doubt that Foot's notion of GOOD(s) is simply the same notion as what is GOOD FOR an organism. At the end of her discussion of happiness and human good, Foot says: "In my own terminology 'happiness' is here understood as *the enjoyment of good things*, meaning enjoyment in attaining, and in pursuing, right ends" (NG 97). Here, the phrase "good things" refers to "right ends," and it implies being desirable or choiceworthy. Of course, it might be the case that everything that is

properly pursued and enjoyed by an individual is also good *for* that individual, or good for someone else. Still, the concept of an end—even a right end—is not the same as the concept of what is beneficial. Clearly organisms sometimes desire and choose things which are in fact bad for them. More importantly, even if organisms were to always pursue and choose what they *took* to be good for them, it is still the case that we express two different thoughts by saying “Y (rightly) desires / values X” and “X is good for Y.” Thus, although Foot does not say so explicitly, I take it that the notion of a GOOD/GOOD THING cannot be equated with any of the other three main elements in Foot's grammar of goodness.

At the same time, I think that Foot would hold that the idea of a GOOD/GOOD THING in the life of an organism needs to be understood as an aspect of the grammar of goodness, rather than as standing outside of it. For that reason, I have included the notion in my reconstruction of Foot's grammar. This issue calls for much more discussion than I will give it here. But at the least, I think we can say that nothing could be a GOOD/GOOD THING in the life of an individual if it did not belong to THE GOOD OF such creatures to pursue and/or enjoy that sort of thing.³

3 The Swiftest Deer and the Hunter's Trap

In Foot's grammar of goodness, the relation between THE GOOD OF and GOOD AS is fairly straightforward. But things are trickier in the case of GOOD FOR and its relation to both GOOD AS and THE GOOD OF. In discussing natural goodness (GOOD AS), benefit (GOOD FOR), and an organism's good (THE GOOD OF), Foot writes:

Very often, to be sure, a living thing is benefited by itself being made better, and there must be a systematic connection between natural goodness and benefit – whether reflexive or other-related as in the case of

³Cf. Foot's gloss of “human goods” as “the elements that can make up good human lives” (NG 44). For another passage relevant to this issue, see Foot's brief remarks on the notion of “good and better states of affairs” (NG 48–51), and also the arguments in her earlier essays “Utilitarianism and the Virtues” and “Morality, Action, and Outcome,” both collected in MD.

stinging bees. But it does not follow that benefit of either kind follows goodness whatever circumstance an individual happens to be in. In our earlier example, it was the swiftest deer, ahead of the others, that fell into the hunter's trap; and the properly acting bee that stings a gardener may well bring about the destruction of the nest. Whether an individual plant or animal succeeds in living the life that is its good to live depends on chance as well as on its own qualities. (NG 41–2)

And later, Foot says:

Let us ask what it is to benefit a living thing, as this seems, after all, to be the same as doing something that is for its good... To benefit an individual it may be necessary to act on it – to make it better – or on the other hand to act on its environment. St. Jerome healed the lion's paw, but Noah sheltered his animals from the flood. We may notice in passing, however, that neither making a plant, animal, or person better by providing what makes him or it better, like medicine, nor improving environmental circumstances, is necessarily beneficial as things work out. St. Jerome would not have benefited the lion had it leaped forward in relief from pain, but fallen straight into a trap. (NG 93–4)

I do not disagree with anything Foot says in these passages. But in teaching and discussing *Natural Goodness*, I have found that these passages give some readers the impression that Foot believes that there is a merely statistical connection between being GOOD AS and GOOD FOR. Because Foot highlights the unfortunate deer and bees and lion, it is tempting to interpret her as saying that while being excellent is *usually* beneficial for an organism, it might not be. However, I think that is a misleading way to understand the connections between these notions, and it misses the deeper insights of Foot's grammar.⁴

To see why, let us make a distinction that Foot does not make in *Natural Goodness*, between: (1) a well-formed vital capacity or

⁴A recent example of this misinterpretation of Foot is Harcourt (2016): "But although Foot too wants to connect excellence and flourishing in some sense, she is not trying to connect excellence with benefit or well-being or happiness, for she thinks that excellence of one's kind and benefit need not go together: 'the swiftest deer falls into the hunter's trap' (Foot 2001, 42)" (220).

disposition, and (2) the proper actualization of a capacity or disposition in non-interrupted vital activity. If Annie the Asian Elephant has properly formed elephantine lungs, then she has (1) with respect to pulmonary matters. And if Annie is breathing easily in the forests of Sri Lanka, then she also enjoys (2). However, if Annie has well-formed lungs but finds herself at the bottom of the Indian Ocean and unable to breathe, then she has (1) but lacks (2). Borrowing traditional Aristotelian terminology, we can refer to (1) as “first actuality” and (2) as “second actuality.” First actuality refers to an organism’s properly formed, developed capacities. Second actuality refers to the proper exercise of those capacities.

How does this distinction between first actuality and second actuality relate to Foot’s grammar of goodness? Foot applies the notion of GOOD AS to both. With respect to first actuality, she speaks about excellence or defect (GOOD AS) in an organism’s “parts,” “capacities,” and “dispositions.” With respect to second actuality, Foot speaks about excellence or defect (GOOD AS) in “operations.” The distinction between first and second actuality is also implicit in Foot’s notion of THE GOOD OF. For Foot, THE GOOD OF is a conception of a life form’s characteristic suite of capacities (first actuality) as those capacities come into being, develop, and are exercised (second actuality) over the course of the life-cycle. THE GOOD OF a mole rat or Bengal tiger is the proper unfolding of its species-specific vital capacities, which is its distinctive type of *activity* (or set of activities, depending on how we wish to describe it/them).⁵

Let us return, then, to Foot’s swift but unlucky deer.⁶ An aspect of the creature’s GOODNESS AS a deer (its swiftness) has resulted in a situation that is bad for the deer. Why is being in the hunter’s trap bad for the deer? For two related reasons. First and foremost, being in the trap

⁵In speaking about vital activities, in the plural, we focus on the various things that an organism does, such as breathing, hunting, reproducing. But since those various activities are teleologically related to one another as aspects of a unified whole, we can also talk of an organism’s whole way of living as an activity, in the singular.

⁶The following points also apply to the unlucky lion who falls into a trap after being healed by St. Jerome, and to the bees whose nest is destroyed by the gardener.

prevents the deer from fulfilling some of its most important vital activities. It does not belong to the life of “the deer” to be in a hunter’s trap, and being in the trap impedes an individual deer from living the life that is its good to live. The trap frustrates second actuality. Second, suppose that the trap has also damaged some part of the deer—e.g., broken its leg, leaving it unable to run. In this respect, the deer has been made less healthy, less excellent *qua* deer. The deer’s vital capacities (first actuality) have been diminished. To damage a living thing in this way is clearly to harm it. Why? Because damaging an organism’s vital capacities prevents it from exercising those capacities in characteristic, unimpeded activity. It prevents an organism from living some aspect of the life that is its good to live.

In cases like the unlucky deer, the organism is harmed because the activities that constitute THE GOOD OF the organism are impeded, or because the organism has been damaged and made less GOOD As, or both. Such cases give us no reason to suppose that the condition of being GOOD As itself is ever harmful to an organism, whatever further harmful situations might result from that condition in unfortunate situations. On the contrary, we have reason to think that the connection between GOOD As and GOOD FOR is not merely statistical but conceptual in the following way: Something is GOOD FOR an organism if it furthers or sustains THE GOOD OF that organism. THE GOOD OF an organism consists in its proper, unimpeded vital activities. Such activities require the individual to be GOOD As that kind of organism, because the well-formed capacities that make an individual GOOD As its kind of organism *just are* those capacities that fit the individual for its characteristic vital activities.

I believe this is the best way to interpret Foot’s grammar of goodness. But interpreted this way, the view faces two important objections, each of which seems to be backed up by examples that are ready to hand.

Objection #1: Even if being GOOD As is never itself bad for an organism, something can be GOOD FOR an organism without furthering, fostering, or belonging to THE GOOD OF an organism as defined by its life form. For example, it belongs to wolves to hunt in packs. However, wolves in a zoo are benefited when they given healthy food by the zookeepers

without having to hunt. Indeed, the wolves who get food this way are better off than their cousins in the wild, since hunting is a difficult and dangerous task. But being given food by a zookeeper does not belong to the life of “the wolf” – it is not part of Wolf Good, as defined by natural-historical description. Thus furthering or sustaining THE GOOD OF an organism (as that notion is defined by Foot's grammar) is not necessary for something to be GOOD FOR an organism.

In response to this objection, we can begin by acknowledging that a wolf in a zoo is benefited to the extent that it gets healthy food. But if we ask *why* this benefits a wolf, we see that it confirms rather than undermines the connection we have found between characteristic vital activities (THE GOOD OF) and benefit (GOOD FOR). Healthy food is good for a wolf precisely because it enables the wolf's organs to function and its vital activities to unfold properly. Indeed, what counts as “healthy food” for an individual wolf—as opposed to something unhealthy, or even poisonous and harmful—is precisely the material that is suited to the characteristic digestive processes of “the wolf.” Now, we can also focus not on the healthy food per se, but on the fact that this wolf is prevented from carrying out its characteristic activity of hunting. And there is no reason to think that such inactivity is itself beneficial to a creature. On the contrary, insofar as the wolf fails to carry out this characteristic activity, the wolf is *not* better off but worse off.⁷

A second objection attempts to pry apart THE GOOD OF and GOOD FOR in a different way:

Objection #2: Not everything that belongs to THE GOOD OF an organism in the sense defined by its life form is GOOD FOR an organism. On the contrary, aspects of an organism's characteristic life are sometimes harmful to that organism. For example, bull elk fight one another for control of the harem during the fall rut. While amazing to watch, these fights often result in injury, and sometimes even death. Such fighting is part of the life

⁷Cf. Groll and Lott: “[Z]oos that are better for their animals are ones that allow them to be active to a greater degree – and active precisely in those ways that are most naturally good for them (i.e., re-creating habitat, climate, objects of interest that engage the organism's capacities and allow those capacities to develop and be active)” (Groll and Lott, 23).

of “the elk,” but it seems to be *bad* for these creatures, not good for them. Thus, furthering or sustaining THE GOOD OF an organism (as that notion is defined by Foot’s grammar) is not sufficient for something to be GOOD FOR an organism.

Like the first objection, this objection contains an element of truth. Clearly, when an individual elk is injured in a fight over the harem, that injury is bad for it. But we can distinguish between the injury and the activity of fighting. For a bull elk, possessing the properly developed capacities to fight makes it GOOD As an elk, and the exercise of those capacities in fighting is an aspect of THE GOOD OF an elk. The activity of fighting itself is not bad for them. On the contrary, it is GOOD FOR an elk to exercise its capacities in this way. An injury that results from fighting is bad for an elk precisely *because* it impedes its ability to carry out some of its vital activities.

What is noteworthy about a case like the elk is that one of their characteristic activities (fighting for the harem) exposes them to harm in a consistent, even systematic, way.⁸ And it is not hard to imagine a different way of breeding that would expose the elk to less harm. So it seems the elk would be *better off* if fighting for the harem were not an aspect of their characteristic life. It seems it would be GOOD FOR the elk if they could depart from the way of life that, according to the grammar of goodness, constitutes THE GOOD OF an elk.

Does this thought pose a problem for Foot’s grammar? I don’t think so. But it does raise an important issue about how the formal grammar of goodness relates to what is substantively true about “the human.” To begin, it is important to realize that Foot’s grammar does not claim that THE GOOD OF any organism—the proper unfolding of its characteristic vital activities—will be such as to minimize the risk of danger or injury. Rather THE GOOD OF determines what *counts as* danger and injury. What is harmful to an organism is whatever damages its capacities or impedes its species-specific vital activities. That is why something that is harmful for one type of organism can be beneficial for another. Any sense that

⁸Of course, there are many other examples with the same features as the elk case.

the elk would be better off departing from their characteristic way of life depends upon this very point. After all, the problem with fighting over the harem is that it exposes the elk to injury. But what counts as injury for an elk is whatever damages elk capacities and impedes elk vital functions. To the extent we can make sense of the thought that elk would be better off with a different way of living, that is only because we imagine that different way of living as allowing for a great degree of unimpeded elk-activity. What is GOOD FOR an elk still consists in THE GOOD OF the elk—in its species-specific way of being alive, as described in natural-historical judgments about “the elk.” This is confirmed by the fact that whatever better way of breeding we might imagine for the elk would strike us as GOOD FOR them only if it fit with the proper unfolding of their *other* characteristic activities. And some ways of doing things would be so radically incompatible with elk capacities that to imagine the elk doing things that way would be tantamount to imagining a different life form altogether. For example, would the elk be better off if they settled all their communal disputes with a parliamentary style debate followed by a vote? No. Doing that would not be GOOD FOR an elk, because any creature that could live that way would not *be* an elk. Harm and benefit for an individual living thing are rooted in the same thing that makes that individual one type of organism rather than another: its life form.⁹

Still, it might seem that we have not gotten to the bottom of the worry. For even if we can in principle distinguish between the activity of fighting and the suffering of injury, isn't it also the case that to fight is to *attempt* to injure or incapacitate one's opponent, or at least to prevent him from doing what he is trying to do? And if we accept that thought, then it seems like elk form is at odds with itself, insofar as the characteristic activity of some elk not only results in but *aims at* frustrating the characteristic activity of other elk. It looks like it belongs to THE GOOD OF a bull elk to attempt that which will hinder the realization of another bull elk's GOOD.¹⁰ What should a Footian say about this?

⁹For further discussion, Groll and Lott, 20–7.

¹⁰Related to this, we might also consider the sexual cannibalism of some species of arachnids and insects.

We might start by pointing out is that there is a *function* to this particular fighting. Elk fighting is part of how they acquire mates and reproduce. And that's why we don't think that the bulls who are fighting over the harem are suffering some disease or madness. Rather, the fighting has a part to play in the life of "the elk." This is how *they* live, and something is achieved by this whole process—elk reproduction.

Unfortunately, this point does not remove the worry that THE GOOD OF the elk is at odds with itself in the sense identified above. In fact, it seems to confirm that worry. For it seems that how *they* live is to compete for the chance to live a characteristically good life, as defined by their life form. The characteristic life of a bull elk includes acting to prevent other bull elk from carrying out the vital activity of reproduction in an unhindered way. In effect, their naturally excellent way of living seems to involve doing what is bad for other members of their kind.

However, perhaps we should not be too quick in accepting the idea that losing a fight is bad for the losing elk, or that it necessarily hinders the elk's characteristic activities. Granting that it is characteristic of bull elk to fight over the harem, and granting that fighting implies some losers who will not have access to females, we might conclude that what is characteristic for a bull elk is *either* to win and reproduce *or* to lose and not reproduce (at least not that season, or at least not as much as some other elk). And the simple fact that an organism does not reproduce (or reproduces less than others) does not show that its characteristic vital activities are being impeded. After all, honeybee workers are typically sterile, but that is part of the characteristic life of "the honeybee," and we need not think that being sterile is bad for any individual worker bee. We might suppose that something similar is true of elk, with the only difference being that, with the elk, whichever (equally characteristic) path an individual takes is determined by fighting.

I am not satisfied with this line of thought. There seems to be an important difference between a sterile worker bee and a losing elk, which can be brought out by considering first and second actuality. A losing elk has first actuality with respect to its reproductive capacities, and it is attempting to exercise those capacities, although its attempts fail. The same cannot be said for the worker bee. That underlies our sense that the worker bee is *supposed to be* sterile, whereas no particular

elk is supposed to lose a fight for the harem. The losing elk is missing out on something that belongs to the actualization of its capacities in a way that the worker bee is not.

At the same time, I do not think that a case like the elk actually poses a problem for Foot's grammar of goodness. It simply might be the case that, for some organisms, it belongs to THE GOOD OF those organisms to do that which will prevent their conspecifics from living the life that is THE GOOD OF such organisms. In itself, that possibility does not violate any of the conceptual connections that Foot finds between THE GOOD OF, GOOD AS, and GOOD FOR.

However, it does raise an important question: How do things stand with human beings? Is "the human" such that some individuals can realize THE GOOD OF human beings only by doing that which will prevent other humans from realizing that same GOOD? I believe that the answer is: No. And I am confident that Foot would agree. However, I think a case like the elk shows that the grammar of goodness on its own does not guarantee that this is the correct answer. If we are to show that our characteristic form of life does not involve competition over the chance to realize THE GOOD OF humans beings, and hence to show that being GOOD AS a human not require doing that which is harmful to other human beings, then we must appeal to something more than the conceptual connections that make up Foot's grammar.¹¹

4 Virtuous Activity, Happiness, and Human Good

In the last section, I attempted to clarify and defend some aspects of Foot's grammar of goodness, and I focused on examples of plants and non-human animals. In this section, I turn to the case of human beings, and in particular to the question of how happiness fits into the grammar of goodness. I first reconstruct some of Foot's main arguments about happiness and THE GOOD OF human beings. I then suggest one way that we might extend Foot's account.

¹¹Thanks to Daniel Groll for helping me to think about the issues in this section.

In Chapter 6 of *Natural Goodness*, “Happiness and Human Good,” Foot writes:

Given that goodness in respect of bodily health, of faculties such as intelligence and memory, and so on is precisely that which fits a living thing for the instantiation of the life form of its species, and that this counts as the good of a living thing, then in so far as this instantiation in humans can be identified with having a good life, the question that concerns us in this chapter is the relation between virtue and a good life and the connection of that with the happiness of the one whose life it is. (NG 92)

By this point in *Natural Goodness*, Foot has argued that: (1) the grammar of goodness applies to human beings, (2) the moral virtues make a person GOOD As a human being with respect to the rational will, and (3) considerations of the moral virtues are partly constitutive of practical rationality—i.e., virtue has a claim on reason even apart from how it might serve the desires or self-interest of the agent, and it is rational to do what virtue requires. In chapter six, Foot turns to the concept of happiness, and the idea that “happiness is Man’s good.”

Foot begins by noting a couple of ways that this idea, combined with other premises, might threaten her effort to apply the grammar of goodness to human beings. One argument goes like this: Happiness is the human good, and it is therefore rational to pursue happiness. But happiness can sometimes be achieved best through evil actions. And thus rationality sometimes favors or even requires actions that virtue forbids—a conclusion that Foot rejects. A second, related line of thought is: Happiness is the human good (“the instantiation of the human life form lies in happiness”). And given the framework of natural goodness, this means that happiness is “the determinant of virtue,” in which case virtue could never require the sacrifice of happiness. But virtue does sometimes require the sacrifice of happiness in those cases when happiness can only be obtained by wicked means—so there must be something wrong with the framework of natural goodness.¹²

¹²This paragraph contains my reconstructions of arguments that are presented, in a highly compressed form, at NG 82. Foot says that there is a “tangled skein of ideas” in this area, and she aims to unravel them in Chapter 6.

In response to these worries, Foot argues that we have a way of understanding the concept of happiness that precludes the combination of happiness and viciousness and has conformity with the virtues as part of its meaning. And this sort of happiness is the happiness that we should accept as being identical to the human good. To avoid confusion, let us call this sort of happiness *eudaimonia*. The first argument fails because the sort of “happiness” that can be achieved best through evil actions is not the sort of happiness that is equal to human good. It is not *eudaimonia*. The second argument fails for a similar reason. For if we understand happiness as *eudaimonia*, then virtue does not require one to sacrifice happiness in cases where happiness might have been achieved through vice. Rather, the “happiness” achievable through vice is not *eudaimonia*. What is true instead is that in extremely unfortunate circumstances, *eudaimonia* might not be possible for a person, no matter what choices she makes.

For Foot, it is important to show that the relevant concept of happiness is not merely the invention of philosophers but already present in our ordinary practical thinking. To show this, she appeals to two examples: the horrible Wests, murderers and sexual abusers, and the honorable Letter-Writers, Germans who were murdered for their opposition to the Nazis. Foot's line of thought about the Wests can be reconstructed as follows: To benefit an organism or person—to do what is GOOD FOR them—is to help them realize their GOOD, i.e., THE GOOD OF their life form. But if one were to have helped the Wests to pursue their way of life, one would not have thereby benefited them. Offering assistance to the Wests to keep up their wicked ways would not have been doing anything GOOD FOR the Wests. Thus, living the way the Wests lived is *not* THE GOOD OF a human being. The attitudes and actions of the Wests are incompatible with human good. And what *explains* this is the fact that the Wests were so vicious. That is why we think their way of living was incompatible with human good, and hence why we think that assisting them in their wicked ways would not have been a genuine benefit for them. And this shows that we have, implicit in our thinking, a conception of human good that is incompatible with wickedness and has conformity with the virtues as part of its meaning. If we claim that “happiness is Man's good,” then this is the understanding of human

good with which happiness is properly equated. And that brings to light a kind of happiness that is incompatible with evil and inseparable from moral goodness.¹³

The case of the Letter-Writers leads to the same conclusion from a different direction. The Letter-Writers resisted the Nazis out of conscience, even though their resistance led to their persecution and death. Foot invites us to suppose that these individuals were given a choice between returning to their families, if they would give up their resistance, or being executed, if they would not. And they chose to accept death rather than collaborate with the Nazi's evil schemes. We might say, then, that the Letter-Writers knowingly sacrificed their happiness. However, we might understand the situation differently. As Foot says:

One may think that there was a sense in which the Letter-Writers did, *but also a sense in which they did not*, sacrifice their happiness in refusing to go along with the Nazis. In the abstract what they so longed for – to get back to their families – was of course wholly good. But as they were placed it was impossible to pursue this end by just and honourable means. And this, I suggest, explains the sense in which they did not see as their happiness what they could have got by giving in. Happiness in life, they might have said, was not something possible for them. (NG 95)

The key thought is this: Happiness was not possible for the Letter-Writers because, given their circumstances, what might otherwise have constituted a happy life could only be achieved by vicious means, but if achieved this way it would not *be* genuine happiness. If we accept this thought, then we recognize a sort of happiness that is inseparable from the virtues, because it is exactly that sort of happiness that was unavailable to the Letter-Writers.

¹³“Benefiting someone means doing something that is for his or her good. If I am right, then the concept of benefiting someone reveals a way of thinking about the human good that excludes the pursuit of evil things, as is shown by my observation about prolonging the pleasures of the Wests. But then the concept of happiness that one finds in the expression ‘Happiness is Man’s good’ must also exclude the pursuit of evil. So considering the notion of benefiting someone offers us a glimpse of a way we have of thinking about happiness that involves goodness.” Foot quoted in Voorhoeve, 106–7.

Thus the idea that “happiness is Man’s good” does not prevent us from applying the grammar of goodness to human beings. The virtues make a person GOOD As a human being, and they fit one for a life of virtuous activity—happiness as *eudaimonia*. That sort of life is THE GOOD OF a human being. And what is GOOD FOR a human is that which fosters or sustains our characteristic way of being alive.

Aristotle, of course, stresses that *eudaimonia* consists in virtuous *activity*, not merely in possessing the virtues or the condition of being GOOD As a human being (NE I.8.1098b30-a7). Aristotle also claims that a *eudaimon* life requires a degree of favorable external circumstances, which is (at least partly) a matter of fortune. Although Foot endorses both of these claims from Aristotle, she does not discuss the connection between them. What Foot should say, I suggest, is that the claim about activity explains the claim about circumstances. That is, the reason that a happy life requires favorable circumstances is that *eudaimonia* consists in virtuous activities and those activities require favorable circumstances. How favorable? Certainly not ideal or even rare. Still, the world must cooperate to some extent if a person is to be active in the ways that constitute happiness.

To see this, consider a modified version of the Letter-Writer case. Suppose that instead of being threatened with death, a person who steadfastly refused to cooperate with an evil regime was imprisoned in isolation for many years, away from friends and family, and without the opportunity to read or write or go outside. Let us grant that taking such a stand is virtuous, even noble and heroic. However, as a result of her choice, this person is placed in circumstances in which many forms of virtuous activity become impossible, including those virtuous ways of listening, speaking, feeling, and understanding that are possible only in personal relationships. This does not mean, of course, that the person has a less than virtuous character or is acting viciously. But it does mean that her *eudaimonia* is compromised, because her possibilities for being active in characteristically human ways are severely diminished. We should distinguish between the claim that one can make a virtuous choice, or proceed virtuously, in any circumstances, and the claim that those virtuous activities that constitute the human good can be realized in any circumstances. Whether or not the first claim is true, the second

is not. And that is why a *eudaimon* life requires a (minimal) level of favorable circumstances.¹⁴

These points about activity and circumstances bring out a continuity between the grammar of goodness as applied to human beings and to non-human organisms. They also help us to identify what is distinctive about the human case. As we have seen, THE GOOD OF non-human organisms consists in the proper unfolding of their characteristic vital capacities. Such unfolding requires both that the organism's capacities be in good condition (a matter of GOODNESS As) and that its circumstances not frustrate or impede its activities. Since what is GOOD FOR an organism is what furthers or sustains THE GOOD OF such a creature, these points about activity and circumstances explain Foot's observation that to benefit a living thing, "it may be necessary to act on it – to make it better – or on the other hand to act on its environment." For these are two ways of making possible the proper unfolding of its characteristic vital activities.

If human good is understood as activity in accordance with virtue, then it is clear how to apply the same conceptual structure to human beings. THE GOOD OF a human being is the actualization of our species-specific vital capacities in virtuous activities. Living virtuously is our characteristic way of being active, and the virtues make one GOOD As a human being because they fit one for that sort of activity. And what is GOOD FOR a human being is what furthers or sustains the characteristic unfolding of our vital capacities. Thus what is distinctive about human beings is not that our GOOD lies in characteristic vital activity. That is true of living things generally. What is distinctive about humans is the nature of our vital activities—rational, self-conscious, and linguistically infused activities, guided by a developing grasp of our own GOOD.¹⁵

¹⁴For very helpful discussion of these issues, see Russell (2012), especially Chapters 4, 5, and 8.

¹⁵In my view, the best contemporary account of virtuous activity is found in Brewer (2009). Brewer's notion of "dialectical activities" gives considerable substance to Foot's grammar as applied to human beings.

For helpful feedback on this chapter, I thank Anne Baril, Daniel Groll, and Richard Kim.

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Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism and the Evolutionary Objection: Rethinking the Relevance of Empirical Science

Parisa Moosavi

1 Introduction

As a modern attempt to naturalize ethics using ideas from Aristotle's teleological metaphysics, neo-Aristotelian naturalism has received a lot of critical attention in recent years. Proponents of this view, most notably Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse, argue for a continuity between the moral and the natural realm. Their central claim is that moral goodness is an instance of what they call *natural goodness*, a kind of goodness supposedly also found in nature in the biological realm of plants and non-human animals. They argue that the goodness of moral virtue in humans is akin to the goodness of deep roots in an oak tree. In both cases what is good enables the kind of organism in question to *flourish*.

A paradigmatic account of natural goodness is given by Philippa Foot (NG). Foot describes evaluations of natural goodness as a kind of evaluation that applies to living things and their parts and characteristics.

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J. Hacker-Wright (ed.), *Philippa Foot on Goodness and Virtue*, Philosophers in Depth,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91256-1_9

These are evaluations that we make when we say, for instance, that sturdy and deep roots are good in an oak, or pliability is good in a reed. Foot's account of these evaluations relies on Michael Thompson's work on representation of life.

According to Thompson (2008), there is a distinctive *form* of thought that applies to the domain of life and is manifested in the logical form of representations of life. He defines a *life-form* as the sort of thing that can be the subject of descriptions that have this special logical form. These are the kind of generic descriptions that we encounter in a nature documentary or a field guide, saying, e.g., that "bobcats breed in the spring" or that "the red squirrel has four front teeth". Thompson calls these descriptions *Aristotelian categoricals* and the thoughts expressed in them *natural-historical judgments*. He argues that these judgments have a form of generality that is distinct from other forms such as universal or statistical generality. Natural-historical judgments can be true despite having exceptions or instances that do not match the general description expressed in the judgment. For example, the second natural-historical judgment above can be true despite there being red squirrels that do not have four front teeth. Moreover, what we can infer from such exceptions is that there is something wrong with the nonconforming instances. Therefore, natural-historical judgments underwrite inference to what Thompson calls *natural defect*. We can infer, for instance, that a toothless red squirrel is *defective* in that it doesn't have four front teeth. According to Thompson, for any given life-form *S*, the system of natural-historical judgments that have *S* as their subject articulates *the natural history*, or the characteristic life, of that kind of organism. This natural history then sets the standard for making evaluations of natural goodness and defect.

Foot adds a teleological dimension to Thompson's account by arguing that the relevant generic judgments are those concerning what "plays a part" in the characteristic life of a kind of organism. Take, for instance, the two judgments "the male peacock has a brightly-colored tail" and "the blue tit has a blue patch on its head". These judgments are superficially similar, but only the former underwrites inference to goodness and defect. This is because a male peacock's brightly colored tail plays a part in the characteristic life of the bird by attracting mates in a way that a blue tit's having a blue patch on its head does not (NG 30). Evaluations of natural goodness thus evaluate aspects of

an organism based on their *function* in enabling the organism to flourish, i.e., to exemplify the characteristic life cycle of its life-form. For plants and non-human animals, the life cycle roughly consists of self-maintenance and reproduction. But each form of life has its own characteristic way of achieving these ends, which determines the norms of natural goodness for the bearers of that life-form.

The aim of the neo-Aristotelian project is to extend evaluations of natural goodness to the case of human beings and to show that our judgments of goodness and badness in humans—including our judgments of moral evaluation—instantiate the same type of evaluation. Moral evaluations in particular concern goodness of the *will*. But goodness of the will is seen as an instance of natural goodness along with goodness of other human faculties like sight and memory. Practical rationality is not viewed as an abstract idea applicable to *persons* or *rational beings* as such. It is rather understood as an instance of natural goodness in the specifically human form of life, which is to say that it is tied to the conditions and characteristics of human life in a manner comparable to the norms for evaluating human sight and hearing.

Critics have responded to the neo-Aristotelian project with a great deal of skepticism. Aristotle had an essentialist, teleological conception of nature that does not seem tenable in light of modern science. The *neo-Aristotelian* account of nature is similarly teleological when it comes to living things, and seems equally out of touch with modern biology. Many critics thus appeal to empirical science and particularly evolutionary biology to argue against neo-Aristotelian naturalism. The discussion surrounding these objections, however, lacks clarity and agreement about their exact import. As I argue below, the way these objections are usually interpreted obscures the relation between two influential versions of the evolutionary objection that should be discussed together. One of my aims in this chapter is to highlight this relation, and articulate what I take to be the strongest interpretation of the evolutionary objection, i.e., a dilemma ultimately targeting the neo-Aristotelians' claim to naturalism.

Foot presents her view as “a naturalistic theory of ethics” (NG 5) and contrasts it with Moore's non-naturalism, various forms of non-cognitivism, and Kantianism. Rosalind Hursthouse similarly

characterizes her account of virtue as a form of ethical naturalism. She explicitly points out that while as an Aristotelian she aims to base ethics in considerations of human nature, it is crucial to her account that human beings are understood as “part of the natural, biological order of living things” (Hursthouse 1999, 205).¹ Yet, neither Foot nor Hursthouse consults scientific findings in delineating their account of natural goodness or human nature. In fact, they intentionally steer clear of scientific accounts, which is particularly puzzling in light of their promise of offering a naturalistic theory.

I argue that it is the neo-Aristotelians’ commitment to naturalism that has invited objections based on evolutionary biology and empirical science. In response to these objections, neo-Aristotelians rightly point out that the conception of human nature that is central to their view is not reducible to an evolutionary account of the human species (see, e.g., Hacker-Wright 2009, 315–7). But the question remains: What renders their conception of human nature naturalistic? As I will argue below, although neo-Aristotelians are right that naturalism does not require adopting a conception of human nature that comes from biology, it does require showing a continuity between the human domain and a domain that is best investigated via biological science. Thus, neo-Aristotelians cannot offer an adequate response to the evolutionary objection without acknowledging that empirical science is relevant to assessing some of their central commitments regarding living things.

I also argue that the way most critics appeal to empirical science and the picture they draw of evolutionary biology involves assumptions that have been seriously challenged in the last twenty years. Recent work in philosophy of biology on the concept of an organism and its place in evolutionary and developmental biology has been overlooked by neo-Aristotelians and their critics alike. I argue that this ongoing conversation in philosophy of biology is relevant to assessing the evolutionary objection, and can help move the debate forward.

¹She says, for instance, that if humans are understood as creatures with an immortal soul or as persons or rational agents, it will not be clear that they are a *natural* kind of thing.

2 An Evolutionary-Inspired Dilemma

Exploring the critical literature on neo-Aristotelian naturalism, we can recognize two lines of objection that appeal to evolutionary biology or some other empirical science. The first line of objection appeals to an evolutionary understanding of human nature to question whether substantial virtues like justice and benevolence are instances of natural goodness in human beings (see Millgram 2009; Andreou 2006; Woodcock 2006). The second line of objection appeals to an evolutionary account of the concept of biological function to undermine the “flourishing-based” concept of function that underlies the neo-Aristotelian concept of natural goodness (see Fitzpatrick 2000). Most critics only focus on one of these objections, and neo-Aristotelians in their responses deal with them separately. But I will argue that these objections share a basic structure and ultimately raise the same problem—a problem that is best understood as a dilemma.

The dilemma can be articulated by identifying two desiderata for the neo-Aristotelian project of naturalizing ethics. The central claim of Neo-Aristotelian naturalism is that moral virtue is an instance of natural goodness in human beings, where natural goodness is a sort of goodness found in nature among living things. There are two parts to this claim that are both essential for naturalization to succeed: that moral virtue is an instance of what they call “natural goodness” in humans, and that the latter is in fact part of the natural world. Thus, we can interpret neo-Aristotelian naturalism as offering the following argument for naturalizing moral virtue.

Simple Naturalizing Argument:

1. Norms of natural goodness are natural.
2. Norms of moral goodness are instances of norms of natural goodness in human beings.

C. Therefore, norms of moral goodness are natural.

Once we understand the neo-Aristotelian project in this way, it becomes apparent that there is a tension between the two premises of

the argument. Natural goodness should be defined such that norms of natural goodness are natural norms, but also such that they coincide with norms of moral goodness in the human case. Each of these requirements pulls in a different direction. Let's call the first one *the requirement of naturalistic credentials* and the second one *the requirement of extensional adequacy*. Even without a full grasp on what it takes to fulfill each of these requirements, we can see that they are difficult to meet at the same time. A straightforward way to meet the requirement of naturalistic credentials would be to define natural goodness in terms of biological function or adaptiveness in a strictly evolutionary sense, since evolutionary function is uncontroversially an aspect of the natural world. But it would be hard to expect such evolutionary norms to coincide with our considered judgment about moral virtue and have extensional adequacy. On the other hand, an easy way to meet the requirement of extensional adequacy would be to stipulate norms of natural goodness such that they coincide with our considered judgment about moral norms. But then it is far from clear that such stipulated norms would be natural. Thus, neo-Aristotelians seem to be facing a difficult choice between abandoning metaethical naturalism and contradicting our considered moral judgment. This is how the tension between the two desiderata of neo-Aristotelian naturalism seems to give rise to a dilemma.

Although the two lines of evolutionary objection in the literature are not usually presented in this way, I suggest that they both raise instances of this dilemma. The first objection, which is often called the Pollyanna Problem, focuses on natural goodness in human beings. Millgram (2009), Andreou (2006), and other critics who raise this objection appeal to a scientific understanding of human nature to argue that it is naively optimistic or "Polyannish" to assume that the extension of natural goodness in humans coincides with our considered judgment about moral virtue. The second objection does not share this focus on human beings but has a similar structure. It relies on an understanding of natural goodness in terms of evolutionary functions to question whether the extension of natural goodness in general coincides with our considered judgment about a living thing's flourishing.

Fitzpatrick (2000) who raises this objection primarily focuses on natural goodness in non-humans. Since his argument appeals to Richard Dawkins' account of evolution in *The Selfish Gene* (1976), I will call the problem he raises the Selfish Gene Problem.

Despite the similar structure of the two objections, they are often seen as posing very different questions (see, e.g., how they are treated separately in Lott 2012a, b). The Pollyanna Problem is interpreted as granting the neo-Aristotelian account of natural goodness and only questioning the attempt to show that moral goodness is an instance of natural goodness. The Selfish Gene Problem, on the other hand, is interpreted as questioning the neo-Aristotelian account of natural goodness in its own right. In the following sections, I argue that both of these characterizations are inaccurate. The Pollyanna Problem cannot be interpreted as granting the neo-Aristotelian account of natural goodness, because the critics' apparent misrepresentation of the neo-Aristotelian account has to be seen in the context of their attempt to start from a properly naturalistic account of natural goodness. Nor can the Selfish Gene criticism of natural goodness be understood apart from the supposed relation of natural goodness to moral goodness. Instead, both objections are instances of the dilemma articulated above. They start from a scientifically respectable interpretation of natural goodness to raise problems having to do with extensional adequacy. But what is ultimately at issue in both cases is the question of naturalistic credentials—a question that is seldom explicitly discussed.

3 The Pollyanna Problem

Millgram (2009), Andreou (2006), Woodcock (2006), and Odenbaugh (2017) raise the Pollyanna Problem, which concerns evaluations of natural goodness in human beings. These critics appeal to evolutionary psychology or other empirical sciences for insight into what would be naturally good in the life of humans, and then point to the objectionable implications of understanding morality in those terms as a *reductio* of neo-Aristotelian naturalism.

What happens if we consult a scientific understanding of human nature and try to derive moral virtues from such an understanding? Critics give many examples of problematic results that could follow. Instead of virtues like justice and benevolence, morally objectionable traits like infanticide, rape, and xenophobia may turn out to belong in the life of the human species. Millgram cites empirical research suggesting that “humans value occupying dominant positions in hierarchies to a degree not compatible with justice of any kind”, or that “human males are fine-tuned by natural selection to rape women in a suitable range of circumstances” (561–2). Andreou (2006) similarly argues that sociobiologists seek and find plausible survival-and-reproduction-related functions not only for “nice” phenomena, like maternal love, but also for “nasty” phenomena like sex-selective infanticide by mothers. Woodcock (2006) adds that models of human cooperation reveal that altruistic behavior in humans only exists within significant limits and with considerable side effects. He claims that the most effective mechanisms to prevent free-riders from invading groups of altruists involve xenophobic dispositions and forms of prejudice against people outside one’s interacting group, which are morally objectionable.²

In short, the objection is that given what evolutionary science tells us about human nature, natural goodness in humans does not coincide with our considered judgment about moral virtue. Neo-Aristotelian naturalism thus seems to naturalize moral virtue only at the expense of a significant revision of our substantial conception of virtue—a revision that neither neo-Aristotelians nor their opponents are willing to embrace. To put this in terms of an objection to the Simple Naturalizing Argument, the idea is that understanding natural goodness in terms of evolutionary adaptiveness secures the requirement of naturalistic credentials, but empirical research suggests that it fails at the requirement of extensional adequacy.

One could respond to this objection by questioning the validity of the empirical research cited by critics. Does evolutionary psychology

²The empirical research cited by these authors includes Frank (1985), Thornhill and Palmer (2000), Hrdy (1999), Hirshleifer and Rasmusen (1989), and Wilson and Dugatkin (1997).

really show rape and infanticide to be adaptive for human beings? Some of the empirical claims made above are in fact called into question by scholars from various disciplines (see Lloyd 2001; Travis 2003; Kitcher and Vickers 2003). However, this line of response is not fully effective. Even if the cited research fails to show human nature to be at odds with virtues like justice and benevolence, it seems extremely unlikely that better empirical research would deliver results that are in line with our considered moral judgment. Note that our considered moral judgment is formed independently of this kind of empirical research. In fact, the mere possibility that scientific findings *could* refute our conception of virtue seems implausible. As Thompson says, consulting a “biologistic” conception of human nature would be to give “a wrong position to natural facts in the formation of ethical judgment, to turn ethics into a sub-discipline of biology, and thus to deny what is legitimately called the ‘autonomy of ethics’” (Thompson 2004, 62). We take the value of justice and benevolence to be independent of the evolutionary benefits they may or may not confer. A view that leaves it up to biology to decide what is morally good already fails to capture this second-order moral judgment, and it is hard to imagine it would coincide with our first-order moral judgments about substantial virtues.

This is why neo-Aristotelians do not respond to the Pollyanna Problem by questioning the validity of the empirical research cited but rather by rejecting its relevance to understanding human natural goodness. Two recent advocates of neo-Aristotelian naturalism, Micah Lott (2012b) and John Hacker-Wright (2009) have argued that our understanding of what is naturally good in the life of humans cannot come from empirical science. Lott, who offers a more elaborate argument, appeals to the place of practical reason in human life to make his case. He argues that natural goodness concerns the *characteristic* way of living and achieving natural ends in a given life-form, and importantly, the human characteristic way of living and achieving natural ends is the way of practical reason. Thus, a proper understanding of human natural goodness involves an understanding of practical reason. But an understanding of practical reason does not come from empirical science. It involves understanding what makes an action rationally justified or unjustified, which is outside the scope of empirical science.

Such an understanding belongs to the realm of the practically wise person, i.e., someone with a substantive grasp on reasons and a proper sensitivity to various ends and values. Thus, according to Lott, the empirical findings of evolutionary psychology do not give us an account of human natural goodness, and cannot be used to derive conclusions about moral virtue (Lott 2012b, 417–8).

This response helps with extensional adequacy of human natural goodness. If our conception of what is naturally good in human life is formed through practical reason, the result is likely to be in line with our considered judgment about moral virtues, which is also acquired through practical reason.³ But if the neo-Aristotelian account of human natural goodness is informed by an understanding of practical reason, it is no longer obvious that it is a naturalistic account. Note that the norms of practical reason aren't any more obviously natural than the norms of moral goodness. Because of this, neo-Aristotelians owe their opponents a defense, or at least a clarification, of their claim to naturalism.

However, Lott does not interpret the Pollyanna problem as a problem of naturalistic credentials. He rather treats it as an epistemological challenge. He tries to show that although empirical science does not give us knowledge of the human life-form, we have other means of acquiring such knowledge. According to Lott, aspects of the human life-form that are not investigated by empirical science can be known through acquiring virtue, supposedly because a virtuous person possesses practical knowledge (see Lott 2012b, 423). However, this focus on epistemology is misguided. The question raised by the Pollyanna Problem is not whether one can have knowledge of what neo-Aristotelians are calling "natural goodness", but whether the object of such knowledge is an aspect of the natural world. The critics who raise the Pollyanna Problem are not moral skeptics. Of course if the norms of natural goodness in human life are stipulated such that they coincide with moral virtue, the

³Note that on the neo-Aristotelian conception of practical reason, rationality and morality are not at odds but on the same footing. Practical reason involves not just self-interested considerations but moral considerations as well.

critics would not deny that a virtuous person has knowledge of these norms.⁴ But the question remains whether these norms are natural, especially given that our knowledge of them is not empirical knowledge.

In short, the neo-Aristotelian response to Pollyanna, which involves rejecting the relevance of empirical findings, addresses the problem of extensional adequacy, but falls prey to the problem of naturalistic credentials.

4 Naturalness as Continuity with Nature

The lesson to draw from the Pollyanna objection is that neo-Aristotelian naturalism cannot be interpreted as deriving moral virtues from a scientific, virtue-neutral, account of human nature.⁵ But if what we take to be naturally good in human life is already informed by an understanding of moral virtue, the question remains why tying moral goodness to natural goodness is supposed to *naturalize* it. Why are the norms of natural goodness in human life considered to be natural in the first place?

Here I want to suggest a strategy for addressing the question of naturalistic credentials that has not been explicitly explored. The idea, which I take to be at the core of Foot's appeal to the concept of natural goodness, is to show that the human life-form and the norms of natural goodness that it underwrites are *continuous* with the rest of nature. In other words, there is a continuity between natural goodness in human beings and natural goodness in non-human animals and plants, such that if the latter is natural so is the former. I take this to be what Foot has in mind when she suggests that moral evaluations "share a basic logical structure and status" with evaluations of plants and animals (NG 27).⁶ Thus, the basis for naturalization is not having a value-neutral

⁴Note that if the critics *were* moral skeptics, Lott's argument which starts from the assumption that there are in fact virtuous people would not convince them.

⁵See Lott (2012a, 420) for a rejection of a "two-stage" reading of neo-Aristotelian naturalism.

⁶It's important to note that although there is a *logical* continuity between the human and non-human case in that they are life-forms and have a natural history, there is also an important difference resulting from the fact that the human life-form is *inter alia* characterized by practical reason. Because practical reason has practical authority, it also belongs to the human life-form

conception of human life-form, but rather a continuity between the human life-form and other life-forms, which are supposedly value-laden in the same way. The norms of natural goodness in human life are natural because they are of the same kind as natural norms in non-human life-forms.

There are two important claims being made here. One says that there is continuity between natural goodness in humans and natural goodness in non-humans, and the other says that the latter is natural. Integrating these claims into the Simple Naturalizing Argument gives us the following, more refined version.

Refined Naturalizing Argument:

1. Norms of natural goodness in non-human life-forms are natural.
2. If norms of natural goodness in non-human life-forms are natural, then norms of natural goodness in the human life-form are also natural.
3. Norms of moral goodness are norms of natural goodness in the human life-form.

C. Therefore, norms of moral goodness are natural.

Note that the last premise of the argument has not changed. It still involves what I characterized as the requirement of extensional adequacy. We saw that neo-Aristotelians secure this requirement by arguing that knowing what is naturally good in human life involves acquiring

that its bearers characteristically have a sound grasp on practical reason. Thus, there is an important sense in which knowledge of the human life-form has to “come from the inside”. As Hacker-Wright (2013) puts it, human natural goodness depends on our “rational self-interpretation” (92). This difference between humans and non-humans raises an important question about whether the noted logical continuity is enough to meet what I have called *the continuity requirement*. As Lott (2014) articulates the issue, neo-Aristotelians need to show that their account of practical reason relies on the specifically human life-form and not on some more abstract category like “person” or “rational agent”. In order to do this, neo-Aristotelians have to explain in what way other aspects of the human life-form relate to practical reason and play a constitutive role. This is a question that needs to be addressed before the neo-Aristotelian project can fully succeed, but it doesn’t directly relate to the evolutionary challenge and I must leave it aside here. See Hacker-Wright (2013) for an attempt to address this question.

moral virtue. But now we have two other requirements to worry about. Let's call the one expressed in the first premise *the naturalistic base requirement* and the one expressed in the second premise *the continuity requirement*.

As it turns out, the two new requirements present a challenge comparable to the dilemma we faced earlier between naturalistic credentials and extensional adequacy. The norms of natural goodness in non-human life should be characterized such that they are natural, but also such that they are continuous with the norms of natural goodness in human life—i.e., norms that include moral norms. It seems that a version of the old dilemma has reappeared. We can meet the naturalistic base requirement by characterizing non-human natural goodness in terms of biological function or adaptiveness. But there would be a question whether such evolutionary norms can be seen as continuous with the relevant set of norms in human life. On the other hand, we can stipulate norms of natural goodness in non-human life such that the continuity requirement is met, but it would not be clear whether such stipulated norms are natural.

Interestingly, this brings us to the second version of the evolutionary objection, which primarily focuses on natural goodness in non-human life-forms. Fitzpatrick (2000) offers an evolutionary account of biological function to argue that biological functions do not coincide with organismic flourishing or welfare. I will argue that this objection should be understood as raising the question of continuity while the requirement of naturalistic base is met. In the next section, I first present the objection as an instance of the dilemma between naturalistic base and continuity, and then assess the neo-Aristotelians' response.

5 The Selfish Gene Problem

The objection that I am calling the Selfish Gene Problem is posed as a general problem for the neo-Aristotelian account of natural goodness without particularly focusing on the case of human beings. We saw that Foot characterizes natural goodness in terms of a concept of function that is based on a trait's characteristic contribution to the organism's

flourishing, where flourishing is understood in natural-historical terms. On Foot's account, when we say deep roots are naturally good in an oak, we are evaluating the roots in relation to their function in enabling the oak to flourish as an oak, i.e., to live a characteristic oak life. It is this flourishing-based account of function that is the focus of Fitzpatrick's objection. Fitzpatrick's core idea is that we need to view living things in light of their being products of evolution in order to get a grasp on their functional aspects. He gives an evolutionary account of biological function in terms of gene replication, and argues that the neo-Aristotelians' flourishing-based account of function should be rejected. This objection is often taken to be very different from the Pollyanna Problem and attacking natural goodness independently of its relation to moral goodness. But here I argue that it is ultimately raising the same dilemma except at a different level.

Fitzpatrick (2000) appeals to a *genocentric* understanding of evolution to develop his evolutionary account of biological function. This view of evolution, which Fitzpatrick adopts from philosophers of biology like Dawkins (1983), and Sterelny and Kitcher (1988) puts genes at the center of the main processes of evolutionary change. Natural selection is seen as resulting from genes increasing their frequency in the gene pool by exerting phenotypic effects in organisms such that these effects ultimately serve to promote the propagation of the genes. Based on this understanding of natural selection, Fitzpatrick argues that the ultimate function that natural selection has devised for organisms and their parts and features is to increase the frequency of their genes. According to Fitzpatrick's account of biological function, for an entity to have a biological function is for it to play a non-accidental role in promoting the "ultimate biological end" of replication of its genes (Fitzpatrick, 103–4).

Fitzpatrick argues that once we understand biological functions in this way, we will see that they do not always promote the welfare of an organism. There is no reason to think that gene replication, which is a blind evolutionary force, always promotes organismic welfare, at least according to our intuitive conception of what an organism's welfare consists in. Fitzpatrick gives examples of traits that are biologically functional for the members of a species but nonetheless do not

seem to promote their welfare. Male elephant seals, for instance, fight with each other in order to gain exclusive control of females for mating, which sometimes results in their injury or even death. Although these fights are effective in replicating their genes and are thereby in line with their proper biological functioning, they are not conducive to their welfare—given what we ordinarily think of as well-being for a sentient animal. What Fitzpatrick concludes from his discussion is that the neo-Aristotelian account of function, which he calls a “welfare-based” account, is false (Fitzpatrick, §3).

Although Fitzpatrick raises this objection in terms of the concept of welfare, it would be more appropriate to formulate it in terms of the neo-Aristotelian concept of flourishing, which consists in the organism’s exemplifying the characteristic life of its life-form. While Fitzpatrick’s appeal to “our ordinary, if somewhat fuzzy, conception of organismic welfare” (Fitzpatrick, 69) makes it easier to find cases where biological function proves detrimental to welfare, the natural-historical conception of flourishing that is central to the neo-Aristotelian project does not have to square with our intuitions about welfare.⁷ Nonetheless, we can see that Fitzpatrick’s criticism of a welfare-based account of function ultimately threatens a *flourishing*-based account as well. If his conception of biological function is correct, then biological functions do not concern flourishing any more that they concern welfare, even though they may happen to coincide with flourishing in many cases. Unless we define flourishing in ultimately genetic terms, there is no reason to suppose that the functions of gene-replicating entities will necessarily line up with what promotes the organism’s flourishing. And of course we cannot define flourishing in genetic terms without violating the continuity requirement.⁸ The concept of flourishing is the basis for

⁷Note, for instance, that it’s not at all obvious that the violent fights of elephant seals are detrimental to their flourishing in the sense of living the characteristic life of their life-form.

⁸Fitzpatrick gives the impression that the problem with defining welfare in terms of gene replication is that it would be “a radical departure from intuitive notions of organismic welfare or well-being” (Fitzpatrick, 68). But it’s important to clarify that it is not our intuitions regarding the flourishing of animals like elephant seals that keep us from defining flourishing in genetic terms. The reason has to do with the continuity requirement.

evaluations of natural goodness, and we need these evaluations to be continuous across the human and non-human domain. But evaluations of natural goodness in *humans* are tied with moral virtue, and understanding *those* in genetic terms would violate extensional adequacy. This is why neo-Aristotelians define flourishing in terms of natural history and not in relation to gene replication.

The Selfish Gene Problem thus targets the tension between the requirements of continuity and naturalistic base. If we understand natural goodness in non-humans in terms of biological functions, naturalistic base will be uncontroversially secured. But if, as Fitzpatrick argues, biological functions do not concern any suitable conception of flourishing, the continuity requirement will be compromised. The structure of the Selfish Gene Problem is therefore similar to the Pollyanna Problem. It relies on a scientific account of natural goodness to question whether it can be tied to flourishing and ultimately moral virtue.

In response to Fitzpatrick's objection, neo-Aristotelians reject the idea that their claims about natural goodness have anything to do with Fitzpatrick's biological functions. They argue that they are giving an account of a *different* type of function that is not supposed to coincide with the type that interests evolutionary biologists. Hacker-Wright (2009) and Lott (2012a) have both responded to Fitzpatrick along these lines, bringing out the fact that Foot herself explicitly says that the type of function she has in mind is distinct from a biological adaptation (see NG 32).

Lott defends the neo-Aristotelian account of function *qua* an account of function, arguing that it meets the desiderata of a successful account of function. One of Fitzpatrick's charges against the flourishing-based account is that because it ignores the history of a trait, it cannot make sense of the distinction between a genuine end served by a function and an accidental benefit (Fitzpatrick, 185–207). But Lott rightly argues that although the flourishing-based account does not draw this distinction based on evolutionary history, it does draw the distinction on another basis, namely the characteristic life cycle of the life-form (Lott 2012a, 367–74). In other words, not just anything that contributes to an organism's natural ends is considered functional on the neo-Aristotelian account. A feature or behavior is considered functional if and only if it plays a part in the characteristic life cycle of the organism's life-form.

However, showing that the flourishing-based account gives a conception of function that is distinct from the evolutionary conception of function is not sufficient to solve the Selfish Gene Problem. It only addresses one horn of the dilemma, i.e., the problem of continuity. Surely if natural goodness for plants and animals is characterized in terms of an account of function that is defined based on a suitable conception of flourishing, the continuity across the human and non-human natural goodness is preserved. But are these supposedly flourishing-based functions *natural*? Although Fitzpatrick does not explicitly discuss the naturalistic base requirement, it is clear that trying to understand natural goodness within a naturalistic framework is in the background of his appeal to evolutionary functions.

What does it take for an account of function to be naturalistic? In the philosophical literature on the concept of function in biology, naturalizing functions is often taken to involve identifying the necessary and sufficient conditions for functional ascription in reductive terms that are uncontroversially naturalistic.⁹ Etiological theories of biological function identify these conditions in terms of the causal history of a trait (see Wright 1973; Millikan 1989; Neander 1991). Fitzpatrick's account similarly specifies these conditions in reductive causal terms, particularly in terms of contribution to gene replication.¹⁰ In rejecting the flourishing-based account of function, Fitzpatrick seems to assume that specifying the ascription conditions in reductive terms is required for having a naturalistic account of function.¹¹ However, neo-Aristotelians characterize conditions for functional ascription in terms of the concept of flourishing while admitting that what counts as flourishing of an organism

⁹Regardless of whether or not these accounts are taken to offer a reduction of the concept of function, the conditions they specify for function ascription are reductive in the sense that they can be understood without making any reference to the concept of function.

¹⁰Note that Fitzpatrick denies that his account of function is a standard etiological theory (Fitzpatrick, 229–46).

¹¹Another biologically inclined critic, Odenbaugh (2017) seems to make the same assumption when he claims that the etiological account of function is “the only good theory we have of normative natural functions”. In fact, he goes as far as claiming that because the neo-Aristotelian account of function is not reducible to our best scientific accounts of functions it is not a naturalistic theory, but a form of vitalism.

or characteristic of its life-form is itself understood in functional terms.¹² In other words, neo-Aristotelians are aware that they cannot specify the conditions for functional ascription in non-circular reductive terms (see Lott 2012a, 371–2), and yet they take flourishing-based functions to be natural.

But how can neo-Aristotelians offer a non-reductive naturalization of flourishing-based functions? Note that as long as we are dealing with the requirement of naturalistic base, we are only concerned with the functional aspects of plants and non-human animals, i.e., creatures that we can plausibly take to be part of the natural world. Because of this, the question is not whether the flourishing-based functions in question are natural or *non*-natural, but whether they exist—independently of us—at all. What threatens the requirement of naturalistic base is not the idea that the flourishing of an oak or flourishing-based functions of its roots are somehow non-natural. It is rather the question of whether, as a matter of fact, the oak *has* a flourishing to begin with. Thus, what it takes to naturalize flourishing and flourishing-based functions is showing that they actually exist in the uncontroversially natural, non-human, domain.

It may be thought that the picture neo-Aristotelians draw of the norms of natural goodness in the life of plants and animals is just too plausible to deny. Foot says, for instance, that “nobody would ... take it as other than a plain matter of fact that there is something wrong with the hearing of a gull that cannot distinguish the cry of its own chick, as with the sight of an owl that cannot see in the dark” (NG 24). However, a critic like Fitzpatrick argues that such appearances are explained away by evolutionary biology, which supposedly reveals that these organisms are nothing but gene-replicating machines without a flourishing characteristic of their life-form.¹³ The upshot of the Selfish Gene objection

¹²Note that an organism's flourishing is given in a system of natural-historical judgments that express the characteristic features that “play a part” in the life of that kind of organism.

¹³Another way to explain away the evaluations of natural goodness, particularly in the case of sentient animals, would be to allow that they have a *welfare*, but only one that is entirely rooted in their desires and their ability to feel pleasure and pain. Note that *this* concept of welfare doesn't depend on an organism's life-form, but is rather based on the individual's own psychology. So it is different from the neo-Aristotelian concept of flourishing and thus is not suitable for naturalizing moral virtue.

is that flourishing-based functions have no place in our best account of plants and animals. If this is correct, then even though we sometimes make evaluations of parts and aspects of plants and animals, such evaluations are only correct when they line up with evolutionary adaptations.

In short, the neo-Aristotelian response to the Selfish Gene Problem meets the continuity requirement by arguing that the flourishing-based conception of function is distinct from the evolutionary conception. But in order to address the problem of naturalistic base, neo-Aristotelians need to show that flourishing-based functions are *necessary* for understanding non-human living things and cannot be dispensed with in light of a scientific account of living things. In the next section, I discuss what I take to be the best strategy for making such an argument.

6 The Argument from Representation of Life

How can neo-Aristotelians argue that the flourishing-based conception of function is necessary for understanding plants and animals? Thompson offers a transcendental argument for the life-form concept that has served as the foundation of the neo-Aristotelian account of natural goodness. In his work on representation of life, Thompson argues that the life-form concept, together with its implications of goodness and defect, is necessary for representing a living thing *as living*. Given that flourishing-based functions are defined in terms of the life-form concept, this transcendental argument is most relevant to the question at hand. If the life-form concept is necessary for understanding living things, so is the flourishing-based conception of function.

Thompson argues that apprehending something as *living* requires viewing some of its parts as *organs* like legs and wings, and some of its activities and processes as *vital operations* like eating and breathing. But what counts as a leg or what counts as eating differs from one kind of organism to another. In fact, the same physical entity or process can amount to different organs or vital operations in different life-forms. For instance, the process of cell division amounts to reproduction in bacteria but constitutes growth in humans. According to Thompson, there is nothing “in the organism considered in its particularity or as

occupying a certain region of space” which determines that an organ is there or a vital operation is happening. “That they are there or happening, and thus that we have an organism at all, presupposes the existence of a certain ‘wider context’”, which Thompson takes to be the context of a life-form concept (Thompson 2008, 56). Thus, he argues that apprehending something *as living* requires presupposing a life-form concept and its corresponding natural history. Moreover, a life-form concept brings with it not just the context required for recognizing organs and operations, but also the related norms of natural goodness and flourishing-based function. For instance, when we recognize an individual living thing as a bat, we already commit ourselves to assessing it against the norms that are implicit in our conception of the bat life-form. No doubt, our conception might be incomplete and some of the natural-historical judgments that we make may be false. We may initially make the natural-historical judgment that “bats are blind” but later find out that “bats can see”. But according to Thompson, however we may revise our conception, it remains the case that presupposing *some* conception of the life-form and taking *some* natural-historical judgments to be true is necessary for identifying the bat as a living organism. Thus, to the extent that we do represent and identify living things as living, we are committed to there being norms of natural goodness and flourishing-based function that apply to them.

The problem with this argument is that, much like Foot’s intuitively plausible remarks, it relies on commonsense descriptions of living things rather than state-of-the-art science. Thompson may be right that we ordinarily make natural-historical judgments when we apprehend living things. But it is not clear that the framework of natural-historical judgments and the concept of life-form that they underwrite provide the best conceptual tool for understanding the objects we perceive. Thompson allows that we may revise our conception of a life-form in light of empirical observations.¹⁴ But he takes the logical structure of our representations—the special logical form of natural-historical judgments—to remain intact. In other words, he thinks *what* a

¹⁴See Thompson’s (2004) vivid discussion of how empirical observations guide us in acquiring knowledge of a novel type of jellyfish.

characteristic bat life consists in is subject to revision, but *that* there is a characteristic bat life that is expressible in the form of natural-historical judgments is not. However, it's not clear why this aspect of our folk understanding of living things cannot be empirically questioned. Why should we assume that individual bats are best understood in relation to *characteristic* norms that group them together? Thompson draws on the fact that the logical form of natural-historical judgments is distinct from other forms of generality, and that we seem to use these judgments exclusively in relation to living things. Yet, this is not enough to show that we can take any aspect of these judgments for granted. Science often dispenses with our folk understanding of things by offering theories that are superior and explain the relevant phenomena better. This is clear in the case of modern physics, which has replaced our naïve conception of the physical world. There is an extensive literature on our intuitive explanations of motion that suggests they are fundamentally different from Newtonian explanations (Nersessian and Resnick 1989; McCloskey 1983). We seem to commonly apply a model resembling Aristotelian physics, according to which continuous motion requires the sustained force of an internal or external cause, unlike the state of rest, which doesn't require any causal explanation. In contrast, Newtonian physics maintains that a moving object continues to move until acted upon by some external force. It contradicts the commonsense intuition by suggesting that motion is a state and only changes of state (e.g., accelerated motion) require explanation. The folk view may work fine when we do not need to make accurate predictions, but it loses ground to modern science when prediction and accuracy become important. The natural-historical conceptual framework similarly belongs to our folk understanding of the world and could be replaced by mature scientific theories, which is what the Selfish Gene Objection suggests.

That being said, if it turns out that the representation of living things in modern biology also presupposes the life-form concept, then the argument from representation of life will have some teeth. In fact, Lott and Hacker-Wright have both tried to make such an argument, claiming that even a science like evolutionary biology has to presuppose the life-form concept. As I will argue below, however, their defense of this claim does not add much to Thompson's transcendental argument.

There are two considerations that they offer to defend the claim that evolutionary biology presupposes the life-form concept. The first is that living things are the subject matter of evolutionary biology. The second is that some of the explanatory concepts of evolutionary biology presuppose the life-form concept. Let's call these *the argument from subject matter* and the *argument from explanatory role*. In the remainder of this section I examine these arguments in turn.

The argument from subject matter appeals to the fact that biology is the study of living things. Lott and Hacker-Wright argue that since biology is *about* living things, biologists are already committed to the life-form concept that is involved in recognizing living things in the first place. Lott says, for instance, that, "to so much as have a topic for evolutionary explanation, we must rely on Thompson-Foot judgments of life form" (Lott 2012a, 375). Hacker-Wright similarly claims that a life-form conception "is always in play when we make a judgment of an organism", regardless of whether we are doing armchair speculation or evolutionary biology (Hacker-Wright 2009, 316).

However, this argument is far too quick. Our initial characterization of the subject matter of a science is merely a starting point. The question is whether the ultimate scientific account of the subject matter under study remains faithful to our initial characterization. Take organic chemistry—the study of organic compounds, which were initially taken to be compounds found in living organisms. The division between organic and inorganic chemistry was motivated by the fact that compounds derived from plants and animal sources seemed to have distinctive features such as being less stable and more prone to decomposition. These differences were thought to be explained by the vital force theory, i.e., the idea that a vital force existed within organic material. However, it turned out that the very compounds that were the focus of organic chemistry were also obtainable from non-living sources. Organic compounds were thus redefined as compounds that contain a significant amount of carbon, even those with a non-biological origin.¹⁵

¹⁵See Klein (2005) for an account of the shifting ontology of chemistry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Consequently, modern organic chemistry does not support the vital force theory or any other theory regarding what makes living things distinctive. As far as organic chemistry is concerned there is no distinction between living and non-living things.

Thus, the mere consideration that the subject matter of evolutionary biology is pre-scientifically characterized in natural-historical terms does not lend any support to the life-form concept. It is not at all obvious that the scientific account of this subject matter is best characterized in a way that presupposes the life-form concept. In fact, the Modern Synthesis theory of evolution, which is at the core of Fitzpatrick and Dawkins' genocentrism, does not characterize evolution in terms of living organisms at all. It rather defines evolution as change in gene frequencies within a population of genes over time (Dobzhansky 1937, 12). Thus, as many historians and philosophers of biology have noted, there is a shift in the subject of evolutionary explanation and the ontology of biology from organisms in Darwin's theory to genes and populations in Modern Synthesis.¹⁶

One may think the concept of a gene itself somehow presupposes the concept of an organism, which in turn presupposes a life-form concept. This brings us to the second argument found in Lott and Hacker-Wright's remarks, namely that some of the explanatory concepts of evolutionary biology rely on the life-form concept. More specifically, Lott suggests that representing something as a *gene*, or an activity as *reproducing*, requires the context of a life-form in the same way that representing something as an organ or as a vital operation does (Lott 2012a, 375).¹⁷ If this is correct, not only does evolutionary biology focus on a subject matter that is initially characterized by appeal to life-forms, its theoretical account and explanation of this subject matter is also committed to the life-form concept.

If successful, the argument from explanatory role shows that life-forms are explanatorily indispensable to evolutionary biology, and therefore, that evolutionary biology vindicates the natural-historical

¹⁶See Daniel Nicholson's remarks on the disappearance of the organism in evolutionary theory (Nicholson 2014, 1–2).

¹⁷Hacker-Wright made similar remarks about the concept of gene in personal communication.

conceptual framework. However, the central premise in this argument is that the conception of gene or reproduction in evolutionary biology presupposes the life-form concept, and this is not sufficiently argued for. Lott's idea seems to be that the life-form concept *must* be in the background of evolutionary concepts for the same reason that it is in the background of everyday descriptions of living things—namely that natural-historical judgments are involved in identifying the domain of life. But note that the conception of gene in evolutionary theory does not have to be the same as the folk conception of gene. Although the folk conception may presuppose the life-form concept, it's not clear that the scientific conception of gene has any such presuppositions. If it turns out, for instance, that evolutionary biology defines genes in molecular terms by reference to their replicability and their immediate function in protein construction, no reference to the life-form of the organism seems necessary. Thus, insofar as Lott and Hacker-Wright assume that the scientific conception of gene must be the same as the folk conception, or that it *must* somehow presuppose the life-form concept simply because it concerns the domain of life, their argument from explanatory role does not add much to their argument from subject matter.

What is missing in Lott and Hacker-Wright's argument is looking at the conception of gene in evolutionary biology and asking whether its explanatory role requires presupposing the life-form concept. This is not at all a trivial question, and it is not my aim here to argue against it. I am merely arguing that the issue is not to be decided *a priori* without consulting evolutionary biology. At least *prima facie*, Modern Synthesis biology does not characterize genes by reference to organisms, let alone life-forms. It is rather organisms that are characterized in terms of genes. As Dawkins' description illustrates, organisms are taken to be nothing but "survival machines—robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes" (Dawkins 1976, xxi). Thus, it is not immediately obvious that the life-form concept plays any explanatory role in Modern Synthesis evolutionary biology.

Neo-Aristotelians may respond that if Dawkins' reductive account is an accurate portrayal of evolutionary biology, it just shows that evolutionary biology is not relevant to the study of living things *as living*. Evolutionary biology has very specific explanatory aims and it may turn

out that it doesn't need to take account of all aspects of living things to meet these specific aims. Just as the lack of a distinction between living and non-living things in organic chemistry doesn't refute Thompson's account, the reductionism of evolutionary biology doesn't have to threaten this account either. Thus, neo-Aristotelians may drop the argument from explanatory role but insist that any *relevant* field of science that studies the realm of living things *as living* would inevitably depend on the natural-historical framework.

However, this is again a claim that begs the question against the critic. It's true that no branch of science captures all aspects of reality. But this doesn't make folk biology and the natural-historical framework that it underwrites immune to refutation from empirical sciences. Although it may be argued that there are aspects of reality that are not knowable via the methodology of empirical science, there is no reason to think that the domain of life is one of them, particularly when it comes to plants and non-human animals. Note that folk biology does not have any privileged position with respect to accounting for what makes living things distinctive. Natural-historical judgments are not any more geared toward representing living things *as living* than are the claims of evolutionary biology.¹⁸ The only difference is that the latter have superior epistemological credentials due to the systematic rigor of scientific practice. Thus, even if one is to argue that Dawkins' reductive account fails to capture parts of reality, such an argument needs to be made either by appeal to other branches of biological science such as ecology or ethology, or based on considerations internal to evolutionary biology itself.

Moreover, even if it turns out that the implicit presuppositions of evolutionary biology or other biological sciences favor a non-reductive account of the organism, it doesn't immediately follow that the natural-historical conceptual framework is vindicated—just as it doesn't follow that the vital force theory is vindicated. Thompson's natural-historical account is just one non-reductive theory of the organism. If we find that biological sciences are implicitly committed to some irreducible

¹⁸When we make a judgment like "cats have four legs" we aren't primarily concerned with identifying what makes cats *living* but are simply trying to understand the kind of thing in front of us.

conception of the organism as an entity that is explanatorily prior to its genes, there is a further question what this conception consists in and whether it lends any support to Thompson's theory in particular.

To sum up, the best strategy for solving the problem of naturalistic base is to argue that the life-form concept plays an indispensable explanatory role in a biological science. But the first step in making such an argument is acknowledging that the content of empirical science is *relevant* to answering this question. Such an argument cannot assume that any aspect of our folk biology is immune to refutation. Thus, taking the content of empirical science seriously means being willing to defer to a scientific account of the organism, even if it potentially results in a revision of the natural-historical picture.

7 Making Peace with the Relevance of Empirical Science

Neo-Aristotelians have kept their account of natural goodness at a safe distance from the science of biology, and even when they make claims about the presuppositions of evolutionary biology, they treat the question as an *a priori* matter. In this final section, I discuss some of the reasons neo-Aristotelians might think they should keep biology at arm's length, and offer some thoughts to counter these reasons.

The most obvious reason for neo-Aristotelians to avoid engaging with evolutionary biology would be assuming that the science is not on their side. Critics of neo-Aristotelian naturalism appeal to a genocentric, arguably reductionist, account of evolution that has been very influential in philosophy of biology since the rise of Modern Synthesis in the twentieth century. If this account of evolution is accurate, the prospects of arguing for a suitable account of natural goodness by consulting evolutionary biology would be dim. As I mentioned earlier, the concept of an organism as an irreducible entity does not seem to have a place in Modern Synthesis. Genes are seen as the sole units of inheritance and selection, and even the organismic process of development is considered to be a mere execution of a genetic program (see, e.g., Williams 1966; Monod 1971).

However, what both neo-Aristotelians and their critics seem to overlook is that Modern Synthesis has been seriously challenged from various fronts in recent years. Empirical advances in the understanding of development (Oyama 2000; Oyama et al. 2001), evolutionary novelty and selection (West-Eberhard 2003, 2005), and epigenetic inheritance mechanisms (Jablonka 1995, 2005) have revealed many theoretical shortcomings of the genocentric approach. Some biologists and philosophers of biology have called for “the return of the organism” (Nicholson 2014), suggesting a very different view of evolution. On this *organocentric* view, organisms are the primary agents of evolutionary change, and the main processes of evolution are consequences of the distinctive capacities of whole organisms such as their plasticity and robustness (see Walsh 2015; Pigliucci and Müller 2010; Huneman 2010). This alternative approach to understanding evolution lends itself well to a neo-Aristotelian argument for a holistic concept of organism. Of course, effectively making such an argument requires a good examination of the relevant work in evolutionary developmental biology.¹⁹ Moreover, as I pointed out earlier, there would be a further question what this holistic conception of the organism consists in and whether Thompson’s natural-historical account does justice to it. But there is reason to think that the most empirically adequate account of evolution and development may in fact yield a conception of organism that can lead to a suitable account of natural goodness.

One may object that there is a more principled reason against relying on the science of biology that has to do with autonomy of ethics. On the neo-Aristotelian view, the concept of a living organism is the basis for all evaluations of natural goodness including evaluations of moral goodness in humans. The concern is that by making the appropriate concept of organism contingent upon the facts of biology, the kind of necessity that is appropriate to moral goodness will be lost. In other words, even if biologists and philosophers of biology were

¹⁹See, e.g., how Laubichler and Wagner (2000) argue that taking the concept of organism to be ontologically prior to its functional structures can solve certain problems of mathematical models in biology with character identification.

to decide that the neo-Aristotelian life-form concept is necessary for explaining biological facts, the mere possibility that empirical findings *could* reveal things to be otherwise seems damaging to the autonomy of ethics. As Thompson might say, consulting biology to answer the question would be giving a wrong position to biological facts and turning ethics into a sub-discipline of biology.

However, my suggestion here is not that we should consult biology for an account of what flourishing and moral goodness in humans consists in. The question is whether the concept of organism that yields the best understanding of living things—including plants and non-human animals—is suitable for grounding the norms of flourishing and moral goodness in humans. What I am suggesting is that biology is the relevant field to look for the appropriate concept of organism. If biology shows that our most empirically adequate concept of organism is not suitable for grounding the norms of natural goodness, it is not our conception of human goodness, but the continuity between humans and non-humans that faces a challenge. Thus, the kind of relationship with science that I am advocating does not threaten the autonomy of ethics. We do not look to justify our substantial moral virtues like justice and benevolence “from outside” via virtue-neutral biological facts. It is part of the neo-Aristotelian account of virtue that the justification for substantial virtues comes from practical reason and not through biology. It is rather the justification for the neo-Aristotelian *metaethical* position of naturalism that has to come in part from biological facts, which is not surprising given that it is a naturalist position with commitments about biological entities.

In summary, I have argued that the evolutionary objection to neo-Aristotelian naturalism ultimately raises a question of naturalistic credentials for this view. As a naturalist account of virtue that relies on there being a continuity between humans and non-humans, neo-Aristotelian naturalism has a set of commitments about the life of plants and non-human animals that are best investigated by empirical science. I have argued that the reason the current responses to both versions of the evolutionary objection fail is that neo-Aristotelians distance their view from empirical science in a way that is unnecessary and

unjustified. Thus, in order to move forward in this debate, I propose that neo-Aristotelian naturalism should own its empirical commitments and rethink its relationship with biology.

Acknowledgements I am very grateful to Sergio Tenenbaum, Denis Walsh, Philip Clark, and John Hacker-Wright for extensive comments on earlier drafts of this article. I would like to also thank Andrew Sepielli and audiences at *The Ethics of Nature—The Nature of Ethics* conference at the University of Manchester, the 2015 meeting of the Canadian Philosophical Association in Ottawa, the 2nd annual roundtable in philosophy of science at the University of Toronto, and the 2016 meeting of the Pacific APA in San Francisco for their helpful feedback.

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