Natural Normativity

An Aristotelian Theory of Practical Reason

Paal Fredrik Skjørten Kvarberg

Veiledet av Richard Sørli og Hallvard Fossheim

Naturlig Normativitet

En Aristoteliansk Teori om Praktisk Fornuft

Abstract

Normativity permeate our lives in the shape of reasons. This is especially salient in the practical sphere. We judge an action to be done if there are reasons that count in its favor, and when we think about how to live our deliberations are guided by reasons. Despite the central role normativity occupy in our lives, the nature of normativity is not well understood. The area of philosophy concerned with fundamental questions about normativity is riddled with controversial debates about the meaning, metaphysics and epistemology of normative reasons. My aim in this thesis is to make contributions to an Aristotelian way of thinking about the normativity of practical reasons that promises to solve some of these puzzles.

Contemporary Aristotelians advocate an understanding of normativity on which normative reasons are grounded in nature. On this view, the nature of a form of life, a species for instance, is normative for individuals that instantiate that form of life. On this Aristotelian theory of normativity, the goodness of some individual is determined by natural features of the life-form to which the individual belongs, and what is good for members of that life-form. However, Aristotelians disagree about how goodness and the Good for some life-form relates to its natural features, especially in the case of human beings. The worry is that a tight relation between normativity and nature will lead to a deformation of practical thought, whereas a loose relation will lose sight of the grounding of normativity in nature. On the one hand, Aristotelians want to say that nature is normative, but on the other they want to retain the authority of our conception of nature over and against nature itself detached from our conception of it. This is the 'Dilemma of Natural Normativity'.

My solution to the dilemma consists in the introduction of a set of distinctions and conceptual revisions. This new framework makes way for a new view that steers between the two horns of the dilemma. Contrary to most Aristotelians, I argue that there is an objectively existing current of natural normativity grounded in the teleological joints of nature. Specifically, the grounding is a naturalistic type-physicalist reductive identity relation between normative properties and complexes of integrated well functioning within different forms of life. However, the pitfalls associated with reductionism are avoided by careful navigation of the normative sphere on the basis of the new conceptual framework. I argue that the new Aristotelianism is respectful of the culturally mediated ways of human beings while retaining the claim to the objective existence of a pervasive natural normative pattern along the functional joints of nature. My conclusion is that the reductive identification can accommodate all essential appearances associated with practical reasons naturalistically.

Sammendrag

Våre liv gjennomsyres av normativitet. Vi dømmer handlinger og oppfatninger hos andre og hos oss selv på bakgrunn av normative begreper som bra og dårlig, rett og galt. Vi handler i samsvar med normative grunner, normativitet veileder vår tenkning vår såfremt vår tenkning er rasjonell. Til tross for at normativitet spiller en sentral rolle i våre liv vet vi lite om normativitet. Området i filosofien som dreier seg om fundamentale spørsmål knyttet til normativitet kjennetegnes av kontroversielle debatter omkring betydningen, metafysikken og epistemologien til normative grunner. Mitt mål er å videreutvikle en Aristoteliansk måte å tenke om normativiteten på som som gir gode svar på flere av disse spørsmålene.

Samtidige Aristotelikere forfekter en forståelse av normativitet som er grunngitt i naturen. Ifølge dette synet utøver livsformen til en gitt skapning normativ autoritet ovenfor skapningen. Et individ er en god skapning av sitt slag i kraft av naturlige fakta om arten individet tilhører. Ifølge denne Aristotelianske teorien om normativitet er godheten til et individ gitt av naturlige egenskaper ved livsformen som individet tar del i, og av hva som er godt for skapninger som tilhører den livsformen generelt. Aristotelikere er uenige om hvordan godhet og det gode for en livsform relaterer til naturlige egenskaper ved livsformen, især hos mennesker. Bekymringen er at et stramt forhold mellom normativitet og naturen vil forkludre praktisk tenkning, mens et løst forhold vil miste normativitetens grunngivning i naturen. På den ene siden vil Aristotelikere si at naturen er normativ, men på den andre siden vil de beholde autoriteten til vår oppfatning av naturen. Dette er dilemmaet ved Naturlig Normativitet.

Mitt bidrag består i innføringen av et sett distinksjoner som åpner opp for en subtil Aristotelianisme som styrer mellom begge hornene i dilemmaet. Ifølge den nye Aristoteliske teorien om praktisk fornuft er naturlig normativitet forankret i naturen gjennom en reduktiv identitetsforbindelse til funksjonelle strukturer hos en livsform. Likevel manifesterer naturlig normativitet seg i kulturelt formidlede sosial praksiser. Dermed respekterer teorien menneskets måter å være i verden på samtidig som den beholder den objektive eksistensen til et gjennomgående naturlig normativt mønster langs naturens funksjonelle ledd.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Introduction

According to Aristotle, the human being is a rational animal. This means that creatures like ourselves can stand back from our instincts, intuitions, and desires to a reflective point of view. Within this space of reflection we may assess the strength of normative reasons for belief or action. A normative reason is a fact that counts in favor of something. The fact that I long for a cup of coffee is, it seems, a reason for me to have a cup of coffee. Likewise, the fact that I have promised my friend to help appears to be a reason for me to help him. In rational deliberations we aptly weigh the normative force of reasons, and it is in virtue of our capacity to represent and act on reasons that we are rational animals.

It appears that the desire for a cup of coffee adequately explains why I have a reason to make one. It is plain that I ought to help my friend, because I promised to help. However, what if my friend needs help on a Friday night when I want to do something else? Ought I to help or to do what I really want? And, more importantly, what makes it the case that I ought to choose one action over the other? A theory that seeks to explain how these questions can be answered is a theory of practical reason. In what follows, my aim is to articulate a theory of that sort which can explain the normative authority of practical reasons naturalistically.

To this end I will engage abstract metaethical questions about the metaphysics, epistemology and semantics of normativity. These questions have traditionally been asked and answered within the field of philosophy called metaethics or value theory. As is customary in this field, my discussion will revolve at a high level of abstraction. That is my excuse for not pursuing the issues that arise throughout the thesis with the same rigour and exhaustiveness as is customary within more pointed discussions. My aim is primarily to develop and advocate the main contours of a naturalistic kind of Aristotelianism about normative reasons. Not to defend concrete semantic, epistemic, ethical or metaphysical claims.

II

For a long time most philosophers thought that the normative force of reasons for action were best explained by their satisfaction of desires. On this view, I ought to hold my

promise and help my friend if I care about my friendship more than I desire to do something else. This view is called the *Humean Theory of Reasons*.[1]

On an alternative view, reasons are *sui generis*. That is to say that reasons inhabit a logical space that is distinct from the natural world of objects, causes, space and time. On this view, the normative force of reasons is explained by irreducible normative facts. For instance, many philosophers believe that everyone ought to hold promises because the institution of promise-keeping is a great good for everyone, and it is unfair to make an exception for oneself. Hence, it is wrong to break promises, and this is an irreducible normative fact that we can discover by reflecting on our normative concepts the same way we discover mathematical truths by reflecting on mathematical concepts. This line of thinking has seen a great resurgence lately, and it can usefully be thought of as a version of a *neo-Kantian Theory of Reasons*.[2]

Proponents of the Humean Theory of Reasons have found it necessary to deflate the pretensions of practical reason in order to accommodate reasons to a scientific worldview. To them, the natural world is the only reality there is, and it is exhausted by the natural kinds posited by the natural sciences. Proponents of the Neo-Kantian Theory of Reasons, on the other hand, believe that reality encompasses a wider spectrum of objective existence than the causal-mechanical array of natural kinds described by natural sciences.

There are strengths and weaknesses associated with both theories. The Humean Theory of Reasons is attractive because it meshes nicely with a broadly naturalistic worldview. However, to achieve this harmony, Humeans deflate the moral pretensions of practical reason. Since reasons are authoritative for us in virtue of our wants and desires, we don't have any moral reasons to help someone in need unless we desire to help them. This means that moral criticism is a mere projection of attitudes without any rationally compelling force. If reason is instrumental in this sense, there is no objective reason why the Holocaust was wrong; we just happen to disapprove of it. Similarly, it follows that there is no sense to the idea that moral disputes can be rationally resolved. Morality is placed outside the scope of reason.

By contrast, neo-Kantians insist on a substantive conception of reason. On their view, there are objective, irreducible normative facts, in virtue of which we have normative reasons

---

[1] This view is associated with noncognitivists such as A. J. Ayer (1936) Richard Hare (1952, 1981), Simon Blackburn (1984, 1998) and Allan Gibbard (1990, 2003), error theorists, e.g. J. L. Mackie (1977), Richard Joyce (2001) and Jonas Olson (2014), and subjectivists like Bernard Williams (1985), Michael Smith (1994), and Mark Schroeder (2007). On this view all practical reasons are instrumental reasons.

[2] I am primarily thinking here of the non-naturalist moral realism associated with Russ Shafer-Landau (2003), T. M. Scanlon (1998, 2014) and Derek Parfit (2011), but I also have in mind so-called soft-naturalists like Charles Taylor (1985c), John McDowell (1985, 1991, 1995, 1998), David Wiggins (1987) and Hilary Putnam (2002, 2004).

to do and believe certain things. For them, the Nazis were wrong to enforce the Holocaust because they had objective moral reasons to respect the lives of the victims of that event. The challenge for this approach is to explain the nature and existence of normative facts, and our knowledge of them, in an intelligible way. The greatest weakness of the view is the fact that it doesn't seem like this is possible to do within the confines of a fully naturalistic worldview.

The weaknesses associated with both views are damning. Any adequate theory of practical reason ought to be able to accommodate at least four appearances associated with practical reasons.[3]

(i) Practical reasons are *action guiding*. In our deliberations we take reasons to count in favor of some end or action. They help us come to the best conclusions about practical matters, and they do this because they are normatively authoritative from the first-personal point of view.[4]

(ii) Some practical reasons are *objective*. It is possible for there to be a reason for me to do something even though I am not aware of it. For instance, the fact that it is raining is a reason for me to bring an umbrella, regardless of whether or not I have looked out the window and noticed that it is raining. Furthermore, at least some practical reasons are not dependent on attitudes, thoughts or desires.

(iii) Some practical reasons are *universal*. The fact that Sarah needs help is a reason for both me and my friend to help her. The fact that my friend is a musician is not an excuse for him not to help, we both have a reason to help Sarah regardless of individual differences like this. Reasons are agent neutral.

(iv) A theory of practical reasons ought to be *conservative* (iv). A theory that is radically revisionary is not a theory of something we recognize as normative reasons. A good theory of reasons must respect the contents of our commonsense thinking about reasons for action.

A theory that cannot accommodate these normative appearances will be explaining something else than normative reasons. It is an essential *practical desiderata* for a theory of

---

[3] I call these the 'normative appearances'. The question of what the right appearances are for a theory of practical reason is a matter of great controversy. Unfortunately, it would be the subject of another thesis to defend the set of appearances I have spelled out here. However, I do believe that the set of desiderata is representative of a somewhat broad consensus amongst metaethicists. To get a representative sense of the appearances metaethicists seek to explain, see Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), Finlay, (2007), Schroeder (2007), Scanlon (2014) and Roojen (2016).

[4] Neo-Kantians believe that any adequate theory of practical reason must accommodate moral reasons with categorical normative authority. I have consciously omitted this appearance from the list because the intuition is not widely shared and because I don't believe that it can be accommodated on a naturalistic worldview. neo-Kantians will see this as question-begging.

practical reason that it accommodates the normative appearances. Furthermore, it is an essential *theoretical desiderata* for a theory of practical reason that it explains the nature of normative reasons *naturalistically*.[5]

To explicate a concept naturalistically is to explicate its meaning in terms of well understood scientific theories and concepts.[6] The meaning of the concept of a practical reason is given by the normative appearances outlined above, and one of these appearances is objectivity. I adopt an ontological realist conception of the objectivity of reasons in this essay.[7] Consequently, the truth conditions for the existence of practical reasons is determined by correspondence with objective reality. On this ontological interpretation, the objective truth of a theory of reasons is vindicated naturalistically if the existence of reasons best explains the appearances, and is consistent with a naturalistic worldview.

The idea of objectively existing normative reasons within the structures of the natural world is in need of elucidation. A naturalistic explanation of the existence of practical reasons explains how they relate to the natural kinds described by our best science. If the relation is robust and intelligible, the mystery surrounding normativity is dispelled. A good explanation also indicates how we may acquire robust knowledge of practical reasons by further empirical investigations. Bad naturalistic explanations elucidate phenomena at the cost of the appearances, they don't explain, they *explain away*. This surely seems to be the case with the Humean Theory of Reasons, and it is a common criticism of naturalistic theories in general. However, an adequate naturalistic explanation saves the appearances by grounding them in natural kinds and account for our knowledge of them causal-mechanically through observation.

III

_____

[5] By naturalism I intend the externalist naturalism of W. V. Quine (1953, 1960, 1969a, 1969b). I intend the theory of practical reason I defend to be analogous to Quine's naturalized epistemology in many respects.

[6] A way to think about philosophical naturalism is in terms of vocabularies. Naturalists think that our least problematic vocabulary is that of science. To better understand other more problematic vocabularites, like modal vocabulary, phenomenal vocabulary, intentional vocabulary, mental vocabulary or in this case normative vocabulary, they believe that these vocabularies should be related to the base vocabulary of science. Reductive naturalists think that the relation must be identity, whereas nonreductive naturalists believe other relations suffice. Naturalists also disagree about what the range of the base vocabulary of science should be. Should social sciences be included? Should it be only fundamental physics, or all natural sciences? I shall return to these questions in chapter 3.

[7] This interpretation is very controversial and the assumption that it is true for the purposes of this thesis begs the question against many contrary views about the semantics of normative reasons. However, my aim in this thesis is not to debate the semantics of normative reasons.

In addition to Humean and neo-Kantian views, there is a third less widely endorsed classical alternative. According to the worldview of the ancient Greeks, nature itself is normative. The greeks thought that natural beings were teleologically structured towards natural ends. Of course, we cannot believe that all natural things are best explained teleologically today. For instance, we now know that the motions of the planets are best explained mechanically. However, we still think of living beings in teleological terms: As a functional system engaged in purposive activities. The greeks thought there was an intimate relationship between the teleological and the normative in living beings. To Aristotle, it was obvious that having a well-functioning body and achieving one's goals were important goods in a normative sense. He conceived of goodness as analogous to health, and he held that virtue is the mark of a healthy soul. For him, there is no distinction between physiological and psychological health, and good traits such as friendliness, honesty and justice. Despite the unmodern appearances associated with classical thinking, I want to argue that a return to the Aristotelian way of thinking about normativity is the best way forward. Specifically, I want to argue that this line of thinking is the key to saving the four essential normative appearances associated with practical reason in a naturalistic explanation.

Today, there is an increasing number of philosophers who want to revive this ancient conception of virtue, reason and normativity. Theories of this kind are often subsumed under the label *neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism*.[8] On this view, the normative force of reasons is explained by the concept of '*the good*'. A kind of living being S has a reason to do X iff doing X promotes what is good for S's. What is good for a kind is derived from a conception of its nature. For humankind, the good is to live a good life, which for Aristotelians invariably involves living in accordance with the virtues. The possession of the virtues in humans explains their sensibility and responsiveness to practical reasons, including moral reasons.

In this thesis I evaluate the neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalist program of explaining practical reasons by their promotion of the good. My focus will be on a variety of a more or less unified theory of neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism associated with Elizabeth Anscombe, Michael Thompson and Philippa Foot. Anscombe conceived of the idea of a neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism in her essay "Modern Moral Philosophy" (1958). This idea was grasped and developed by Foot in a series of lectures and articles throughout the 80s and 90s, culminating in her book *Natural Goodness* (2001). The most original and distinctive aspect

---

[8] For expressions of neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism see Nussbaum, (1987), Hurka (1993), Foot (2001), Hursthouse (1999, part 3), Bloomfield (2001), Casebeer (2003).

of Foot's development of the view, however, owes to Thompson. Inspired by Anscombe's work in action theory,[9] Thompson contributed to the foundations of the view through work on the logic and metaphysics of basic practical concepts. Especially on the concept of a *life-form* and generic judgments pertaining directly to a life-form (1995, 2004, 2008). I see their work as contributions to a unified theory, sometimes called Aristotelian Naturalism.[10]

Aristotelian Naturalism can usefully be structured according to three distinct levels of analysis. The most abstract level is the logico/metaphysical level, at which central concepts and categories are delineated and their logic explained. At a lower level of abstraction, we have the local strata of analysis. This stratum concerns the patterns of natural normativity in a particular life-form. At the most concrete level of analysis we have the substantive stratum of the theory. This level concerns substantive questions about what it means to be a good instance of a kind and what is good for particular life-forms.

At the logical stratum of Aristotelian Naturalism, Thompson has argued that all descriptions of living beings have implicit normative content. Building on this claim, Foot has developed a theory of natural goodness, according to which evaluative concepts like 'good' and 'bad' track life-form relative natural normativity. The fundamental intuition driving this idea is that it is good for a living being to be healthy and bad for it to be sick, and that there is no sharp distinction between physiological and psychological well-being. This is especially salient in the case of non-human animals. We intuitively judge a tiger in a cage, or a dog with one of its legs injured, to be in a bad state. Likewise with plants: We intuitively judge a red pine tree with shallow roots desperately clinging to the eroded soil of a rocky cliff as being in a bad state. During a storm, for instance, this pine seems more likely to blow over than nearby pines whose roots go deep, into fertile soil. It seems right to assess the state of these living beings in normative language, using concepts like 'good, 'better', 'worse' and 'bad'.[11] Furthermore, it seems that normative judgments of this kind don't presuppose an ethical theory or any prior knowledge of ethical concepts. It appears that the goodness and badness of an organism is related to natural features of the kind, or 'life-form' it is. If this is so, then

---

[9] See Anscombe's *Intention*, (1957).

[10] I also see Rosalind Hursthouse as an important contributor to the Aristotelian Naturalist project (1999). I am going to mention her views occasionally, but my main focus will be with Foot and Thompson.

[11] Of course, scientists would most probably not make use of normative vocabulary like this, and if they did, they would most probably intend their statements in a non-moral sense. The Ethical Naturalist suggestion, however, is not that current science should describe living beings this way, but that the logic of this kind of description can be systematized in a theory that makes the truth conditions of descriptive statements of this type determinate, transparent and empirically tractable.

evaluative judgments of plants and animals are true in virtue of natural facts, and should be no more mysterious than judgments of mental or physical illness.

From this logical idea of life-form relative natural goodness, Aristotelian Naturalists seek to develop a conception of what is good for members of a life-form, and what it means to be good *qua* member of the life-form. On the basis of a conception of this kind it is possible to say something systematic about what practical reasons members of a life-form have. After a successful hunt, the fox has a practical reason to bury excess food. What explains the normative force of this practical reason? It is explained by the fact that it is good for foxes to have stores of food about. Why is it good for foxes to have food about? Because this allows the fox to eat on days when the hunt has been unsuccessful, etc.

The central claim of Aristotelian Naturalism is that all practical reasons in all kinds of living beings is explained according to this general schema of natural normativity. Importantly, this includes human beings, and this means that practical rationality for us concerns the human good. At the local level of analysis, neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalists often disagree about what shape the patterns of natural normativity take for human beings. Foot believes that the human good consists in the good life well lived, and that the best life is lived in accordance with reason. Hence, human beings have practical reason to adopt the virtues, and the virtuous person is sensible and responsive to both self-regarding prudential reasons and other-regarding moral reasons. At the substantive level of analysis, Foot's theory endorses something like the traditional table of Aristotelian cardinal virtues as an apt characterization of the excellent practical reasoner and good human being.

Even though I think Aristotelian Naturalism is the most promising view about practical reasons, it is underdeveloped and ambiguous in crucial ways. A number of critical reviews and articles have pointed out numerous worries that together constitutes a dilemma for Aristotelian Naturalism.[12] In brief, the dilemma threatens to drive Aristotelian Naturalism into an unattractive reductionism or to collapse the view into an intuitionist neo-Kantianism. On the reductionist horn of the dilemma, the worry is that the relation between normativity and nature is too tight for the complex dimensions of practical thought to have a say. The worry is that the resulting view would imply a crude deformation of practical thought. On the nonreductionist horn of the dilemma, on the other hand, the worry is that the dependence of

---

[12] See MacIntyre (2002), Murphy (2003), Copp and Sobel (2004), Lenman (2005), Chrisoula (2006), Millum (2006), Woodcock (2006, 2015) and Odenbaugh (2017). I present these worries in section (2.4.).

practical reasons on self-conceptions and social practices implies a threat to the objectivity of normative truths.

My main contribution consists in a rational reconstruction at the logico/metaphysical stratum of Aristotelian Naturalism that steers between the reductionist and nonreductionist horn of the dilemma. The solution is to make a distinction in the concept of nature and to expand the life-form concept. According this new conceptual framework, the good is conceived to be relative to multiple life-form categories of life and practice divided into first and second nature. The sum of all life-forms attributable to an individual is the identity of that individual. The theory is of a modular form, every individual can be evaluated relative to particular life-forms or complex sets of life-forms. First nature life-forms and the corresponding natural normativity is fully objective, whereas the normativity of second nature life-forms is derivative and dependent on the natural goodness of first nature. At the local and substantive strata, this theory can explain what traits and ends are good in human lives objectively. It can also explain the significance of goodness which is tied to parochial cultural expressions of universal human goods, and explain the badness of practices grounded in delusions about the good life. I call this new conception *Naturalistic Aristotelianism*. This theory postulates a new pattern of pervasive life-form relative natural normativity that tracks the teleological joints of nature. My claim is that the existence of natural normativity explains the normative appearances associated with living beings and the conceptual structure of our best understanding of life. Moreover, since there are good reasons for believing that the Aristotelian Theory of Reasons is a better alternative than Humean and Kantian views, I claim that the natural normativity of Naturalistic Aristotelianism is the best explanation of the normative appearances and that an inference to its objective existence is warranted.[13]

IV

Let me end this introduction with an overview of the thesis. The first chapter is about the Aristotelian Naturalist conception of the logic of life. I focus on Thompson's theory according to which the best understanding of life is mediated by concepts directly about a life-form whose sense is historical and normative. In the second chapter, I present Foot's further development of the interplay of these concepts. At the logico/metaphysical stratum of the theory, Foot thinks that the normative significance of functional traits in living beings is

---

[13] Of course, the warrant of this inference crucially depend on the feasibility of the background assumptions about normative appearances and theoretical desiderata associated with naturalistic explanation.

explained by their satisfaction of natural ends. At the local level, Foot thinks that the pattern of natural normativity in human nature is inevitably connected with their rationality, and this constitutes a break in the pattern of natural normativity of mere plant and animal life-forms. At the substantive level, Foot argues that the good for human beings is to lead a life in accordance with the virtues. At the end of this chapter I present a devestating *internal critique*[14] of Aristotelian Naturalism.

The critique of Aristotelian Naturalism presents a dilemma for the view, either the view is reductionist or nonreductionist. In the third chapter I consider two *external critiques,*[15] one for each horn. On the basis of the desiderata for a good theory of practical reason, I conclude that the reductionist horn is most viable. After this, I go on to revise the central concepts at the logico/metaphysical stratum of Aristotelian Naturalism to ameliorate the worries noted in the external critique of the reductionist horn. In the fourth chapter I follow through with a reduction of the central normative descriptive judgment type on the view. I also rebut misconceptions associated with reductive naturalism about normativity. In the fifth and final chapter I address issues at the local and substantive level of analysis. First, at the local stratum I sketch a conception of practical retionality in human beings. Thereafter, I move on to the substantive level and indicate how the rationality of the Aristotelian cardinal virtues can be vindicated. In the end I conclude that the essential appearances are accounted for on the new theory and that an inference to the objective existence of natural normativity is warranted.

---

[14] Internal critique consists in arguments where all premises would be adopted by the target of criticism.

[15] These are external in the sense that they invoke premises that the target for criticism would not accept. However, both critiques relate to the practical and theoretical desiderata from this introduction (II above).

1.   The Logic Of Life

The central claim of Aristotelian Naturalism is that the domain of life is permeated by a life-form-relative pattern of natural normativity. The aim of my thesis is to give good reasons to believe that this is true. However, the road from appearance to reality is long. In this chapter, I want to begin by arguing that our *representations* of living beings are structured normatively. I want to follow a train of thought, according to which our best understanding of living beings is mediated by concepts whose logical structure is normative. This logical point about our representation of living beings as inextricably normative is most thoroughly defended by Thompson in his book *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (2008).[16] In his view, to grasp a being as living, presupposes a normative and historical understanding of that type of being.[17] In brief, his argument is that the contents of our representations of living beings is logically dependent on a class of judgments called natural-historical judgments. The logical structure of this judgment class is irreducibly normative. Hence, the contents of all representations of living beings is inextricably normative.

In the first section I present Thompson's logical framework for thinking about life (1.1.). In the second section I follow his argument that all vital concepts are inextricably interconnected, and in particular dependent on natural-historical judgments (1.2.). In the third and last section I demonstrate the normativity, and irreducibility of natural-historical judgments (1.3.).

1.1.   The Logic of the Representation of Life

On the worldview of the ancient Greeks, all things were modeled on the animals. The Stoics conceived of the world as an animal and Aristotle thought that inanimate objects like rocks strived towards their natural place. In the Enlightenment, this enchanted worldview was challenged. On the conception of the world championed by Newton and Hume, objects were

---

[16] Early presentations of Thompson's idea can be found in the essays "The Representation of Life" (1995) and "Apprehending Human Form" (2004).

[17] His argument is merely about our understanding of life. It might turn out that our understanding of living beings, our representations of life, misconstrues their true nature. Hence, the mere fact that our representations of living beings is inextricably normative does not by itself establish that there is a normative dimension in living beings objectively. This requires a further inference. It will be the purpose of the following chapters to give reasons to believe that an inference to the existence of a life-form relative pattern of natural normativity best explains our normative representations of living beings. In this chapter I am only going to follow Thompson's argument that seeks to establish that our representations of living beings are inextricably normative.

exhaustively explained by efficient causes. The explanatory power of the teleological 'in order to' or 'function' was thought to be redundant. On the new mechanical worldview, all things were modeled on inanimate physical objects, including animals. Descartes thought animals were complicated machines propelled here and there by mechanical forces. Later on, the psychological behaviorists would apply the same thinking to human beings, conceiving of them as things whose behavioural output was a product of lawful mechanical conditioning. Both extremes are misguided. It's no good thinking about stones as if they're animals, and it's no good thinking about animals as if they're stones. The best explanation of the nature of physical objects is by their causal-mechanical properties, and the best explanation of living beings will include teleological characterizations of their functional traits and purposive propensities.

This understanding of living beings makes them out to be something different than mere non-living beings. When we understand a being *as living*, we understand it as engaged, vital, self-sustaining, energetic, goal-directed, appetitive, engaged, etc.[18] Our understanding of life is mediated by vital concepts. Corresponding to the difference in understanding we have of living beings as opposed to mere things, the vital concepts have a logic that differs in important respects from the empiricist logic of mechanical objects. Thompson has developed a theory that aims to explain the logic of these concepts. That is, a logic of our representation of life. It aims to illustrate the logical structure of categories, particulars and properties, and their semantic interrelations and dependencies as these pertain to the domain of life. As such, we may say that Thompson's aim is to establish an Aristotelian 'metaphysics of life', akin to the ordering of nature in a 'great chain of being'.[19] Thompson's method is not an empirical investigation, it is a Fregean logical investigation to our concepts of life.[20]

The holist and teleological explication of vital concepts follow a peculiar logic that is *irreducible* to familiar mechanistic explanations. Furthermore, their meaning is not determined by direct association with experience like some observation concepts are. This makes vital concepts special, and it is the business of Aristotelian Naturalism to account for how their meaning is determined, and how the different judgment-types involving vital concepts relate

---

[18] Objects or properties of objects that are living in this sense is what I intend by the term 'vital' in the following. By the term 'vital', I simply mean associated with life. I don't intend the 1700-1800th century doctrine that there is a special material substrate in virtue of which living things are alive.

[19] Life and Action, 3.

[20] Ibid, 13.

to each other. According to Thompson, judgments about living beings fall into three broad categories.

(i) The first class of judgment is *life-form attributions*. These judgments classify individuals in categories. In the case of representations of life, this consists in attributing a life-form category to a living individual. For instance, judging that an individual furry animal is a sheep and not something else. Life-form attributions assume the form 'X is a member of the life-form S', or simply 'X is S'.[21] More familiarly, these judgments take the form of 'this little creature is a frog'. In this context, the concept of a life-form is intended to play a similar function as that of the concept of 'a species', but at this level of abstraction it is not necessary to assume any position on the correct taxinomical principles for the categorization of living beings. For this reason, I'll use the concept of a 'life-form' for this type of category, the concept of a life-form is intended in a non-determinate sense, noncommittal with respect to any particular taxa.[22]

(ii) The second class of judgments are *natural-historical judgments*. These are general judgments expressing propositions about the life-form itself, as opposed to particular individuals. Natural-historical judgments address properties that characteristically hold for members of a life-form. They address activities members of the life-form characteristically do at various stages in the life-cycle of the life-form. Most of us are familiar with this class of judgments as they are exemplified in televised nature-documentaries. Here is an example: "Grizzly bears hibernate for 5–7 months each year. During this time, female grizzly bears give birth to their offspring, who then consume milk from their mother and gain strength for the remainder of the hibernation period." Peculiarly, natural-historical judgments are often expressed in the present tense. Their temporal indicators are not indexed to particular times or places; rather they are indexed to 'phases' in the life-cycle of the life-form. In McTaggarts' sense, they express a B series. The canonical form of the natural-historical judgment is 'the S is/does/has F' or 'S's are/do/have F', where F is a functional predicate denoting a vital trait. As such, the logical form of natural-historical judgments is subject to multiple interpretations. An exhaustive set of true ordered natural-historical judgments about a life-form constitutes

---

[21] Thompson, 2004, 2.

[22] Thompson varies between 'kind', 'species' and 'life-form', but he makes clear that it is intended to be non-determinate in the same sense as metaphysical concepts like 'object', 'property', and 'relation' (Thompson, 2004, 16). Foot uses the concept 'species' for this purpose in her book *Natural Goodness*, but she makes clear in a later interview that she does not intend the species concept in it's determinate scientific sense (Foot, 2009, 98). Thompson does note that one of these general categorization concepts can be further specified with a view to 'empirical employment', that is, scientific purposes, but he does not go on to do so himself (2008, 59).

the *natural history* of that life-form. The natural history of a life-form exhausts the meaning or content of the category, it is the sum of knowledge about the extension of living beings of that kind. As will be apparent in the following, getting clear on the right interpretation of this judgment type is crucial for the prospects of Aristotelian Naturalism.

(iii)　　The third class of judgments are *vital descriptions*. These are concrete descriptions of individuals, or traits of individuals. They are tensed and specific. Here is an example: 'This red-tailed hawk is currently engaged in a hunt'. Vital descriptions generally follow the form 'this S is/has/does G'.[23] The judgments directly relate to experience; they are the 'observation sentences' of Aristotelian Naturalism.[24] Vital descriptions enable us to learn from experience and to revise our theory in light of new evidence. Within Aristotelian Naturalism, vital descriptions are less theoretical than natural-historical judgments. Note also that the relationship between vital descriptions and natural-historical judgments mirrors the type-token distinction. Natural-historical judgments are type-statements about life-forms, whereas vital descriptions are token-statements about particular individual members of life-forms.

In the following sections I aim to explain the logical relations between these judgment classes. A central claim is that vital descriptions and natural-historical judgments of particular life-forms are 'thoroughly reciprocally mutually interdependent'.[25] As Thompson puts it "these concepts, the vital categories, together form a sort of solid block, and we run into a kind of circle in attempting to elucidate any of them".[26] This means that no judgment class can be fully reduced to another; and in particular, that the natural-historical judgments cannot be reduced to vital descriptions. Furthermore, this means that the teleologically determined contents of vital predicates are logically dependent on natural-historical judgments. Another central claim is that the best understanding of natural-historical judgments is normative. If both claims are true, vital predicates have normative content.

---

[23] Thompson, 2004, 5.

[24] On standard empirical theories, observation sentences are basic semantic units that directly relate to experience. It is through these judgment-types that one may test predictions and it is from generalizations and extensions of the meaning of observation sentences that one may grasp the more theoretical concepts in a theory.

[25] Thompson, 2004, 5.

[26] Life and Action, 47.

1.2. Vital Historicism

As already emphasized, Aristotelian Naturalism is a holist doctrine in which the central classes of vital concepts are mutually interdependent and irreducible. This initial characterization is, however, somewhat misleading. The three sets of vital concepts are not perfectly explicable in terms of each other; that is to say, there are logical asymmetries within Aristotelian Naturalism. In particular, the identity criteria for all vital predicates is given by the function of the trait denoted by the predicate. That is, all vital predicates are determined teleologically. The hard question in need of an answer, then, is how to pick out the function of a trait[27] from all the causal effects associated with it? For instance, the heart produces various causal outputs, one of them is a thumping sound, another is pumping blood. Big belt-buckles in old western films have various useful causal effects. They keep pants from falling down, and sometimes, they deflect bullets in gunfights. Intuitively, we would like to say that the function of the heart is pumping blood, and that the function of belt-buckles is to keep pants in their place. Though the deflection of bullets is very useful, it is a mere accident of the belt-buckle that it does this, and the same goes for the thumping sound the heart makes. But is there a principled way of differantiating function from accident? This is the question various function-ascription accounts attempts to answer.

Thompson's account is etiological. Since Thompson's theory is about vital predicates, artifacts like the belt-buckle are not addressed. It could, however, be extended to make sense of artifacts as well. On this account, to determine the function of an object, one must look to the history of the type of system to which the object is a part. If the object has causal effects playing an important part in the system,[28] those effects are good contenders for being the function of the object. In the heart case, the thumping sound does not play an important part in the life of the organism to which it belongs, whereas the pumping of blood is vitally important. Therefore the function of the heart is pumping blood, not making a thumping sound.

---

[27] Living beings are distinguished from other beings in that they have traits. These notions, vital part and vital operation, are teleological notions. Traits are identified in virtue of their function, and vital operations are distinguished on the basis of the purposes they are directed towards. In the following I will be concerned to explicate the teleological nature of these notions, but for brevity of exposition I am going to concentrate on traits and the discernment of function. Nothing much hangs on this, the problematic feature is the teleological nature of vital properties, the account I give for function-ascription can easily explain other teleological notions like purposes.

[28] More about this later on.

This approach implies that it is impossible to discern the function of a particular trait without also investigating the history of that type of vital part or operation. Moreover it entails that it's impossible to discern whether a being is living or not without knowing its history. In fact, the historical conception is motivated and supported by an argument of Thompson's intended to demonstrate the inadequacy of its mechanist, ahistorical rival. The mechanistic conception of vital properties sees vital organs as natural kinds individuated on the basis of essential intrinsic properties. Intrinsic properties are properties an object has that do not depend on the existence and arrangement of other objects.[29] The paradigm cases of intrinsic properties are the microproperties investigated by particle physics such as the atoms of the periodic table whose identity criteria is the number of protons in the nucleus. On the reductionist view, traits resemble chemical compounds in that tokens are discernible as instances of the type on the basis of their internal material composition and structure.

Taking its cue from the premise that the concept of a living being is explicated teleologically, Thompson's argument asserts that it is impossible to determine the function of a vital part, or the purpose of a vital operation solely on the basis of properties intrinsic to the organism. The claim then, is that to determine the proper functioning of an organ, one must examine the wider context of the organism within which the organ belongs.

Thompson seeks to prove this claim by means of two examples, in which two individuals with identical intrinsic properties realize different functions within a larger system. Because vital objects are individuated on the basis of vital, functional properties, and because the two intrinsically identical individuals realize different functions, they are best characterized as different types.[30]

The first example concerns 'mitosis' in amoeba and humans. Mitosis is the process in which a cell splits and duplicates itself. Thompson boldly asserts that, considered initself, the physical process of mitosis is exactly identical in amoebas and humans; but, that in the case of the amoeba it will be a process of reproduction, whereas in the case of humans it will be a part of growth or self-maintenance.[31]

The second example is of two individual plants within the same life-form, with the same parents and therefore the same DNA, growing up in different contexts: One in the Arctic, and

---

[29] Godfrey-Smith, 2014, 111.

[30] Foot and Crary fixate on these 'tame' counterexamples when discussing Vital Historicism (Natural Goodness, 28-9, Crary, 2009, 6).

[31] Life and Action, 55.

the other in Brazil. In this case Thompson confidently asserts that: "the 'phenotypical' differences would then arise solely from the differences in soil and climate. Though physically identical the seeds and the genes will necessarily attract quite different descriptions."[32]

These examples are supposed to make evident that two objects that is seemingly identical when scrutunized individually, can realize two different processes when the wider context is taken into account.[33] Hence, vital individuals are best characterized by extrinsic properties, like, for instance, natural-historical judgments. The argument is a standard variety of a multiple realization argument. If sound and valid it shows that biological taxa cannot be organized on the basis of intrinsic properties, like some physical categories are.

1.3.   Vital Rationalism

The difficulties of discerning the functional nature of vital individuals on the basis of their intrinsic properties lends credence to Thompson's etiological account. The account emphasizes the necessity of considering the natural history of a life-form in order to discern the functions of its traits. In particular, Thompson emphasizes the importance of natural-historical judgments and their peculiar logic for attributing the correct vital predicates to describe the functional nature of vital traits.

Remember the above specification of natural-historical judgments. These judgments attribute predicates to the life-form directly, not to concrete individuals. Here is some of Thompson's examples: "The horse is a four legged animal,"[34] "Man has 32 teeth",[35] "When springtime comes, and the snow begins to melt, the female bobcat gives birth to two to four cubs."[36] Obviously, no particular bobcat gave birth to two to four cubs, particular bobcats give birth to particular quantities of cubs. The bobcat life-form, however, *characteristically* gives birth to two to four cubs. But what exactly is meant by "characteristically" in this context?

This type of judgment is familiar and intelligible, but resists reductive empirical explanations. It's not reducible to universal generalizations. All men does hot have 32 teeth,

---

[32] Life and Action, 56, footnote 3.

[33] As Thompson puts it: "The distinction between the two cases of mitosis is not to be discovered by a more careful scrutiny of the particular cells at issue—any more than, as Frege said, the closest chemical and microscopic investigation of certain ink markings will teach us whether the arithmetical formulae they realize are true" (Ibid).

[34] Life and Action, 73.

[35] Ibid, 69.

[36] Life and Action, 63.

all female bobcats does not have two to four cubs, and a horse may lose a leg, and still be a horse. It's not reducible to statistical generalizations either. Though more than 99% of horses have four legs, there is no corresponding fact in the case of human teeth. Human beings that have 32 teeth may be a small minority and it would still be a true natural-historical judgment that 'man has 32 teeth'— or so the argument goes. A more plausible interpretation prevalent in special sciences is universal generalization with a ceteris paribus clause. Ceteris paribus clauses are so called 'if, then' statements following this schema: for all Sx, if… then…, where the first empty space is filled in by qualifiers and the second by a predicate. Plausible qualifiers for the horse case may be something like: all horses that are healthy with no birth-defects and who have not come across any serious accidents, have four legs. In the human teeth case, it might read: all humans with normal teeth development, and who have not suffered any accidents relating to their teeth, etc., have 32 teeth. Notice that the qualifiers presuppose a natural history of horses and humans. The way to specify what 'accident' or 'normal development' is, is by reference to natural-historical judgments pertaining to the life-form. Hence, the ceteris paribus strategy is circular.[37]

After exhausting these familiar alternatives for a reductive empirical explanation of natural-historical judgments, Thompson considers a normative approach. Following a line of thought that traces back to Frege, Thompson suggests that we may read the horse judgment normatively, as 'a properly constituted horse has four legs'.[38] As it stands, however, this normative judgment is ambiguous. The normativity it expresses can be understood in at least two ways: either intrinsically, as coming from within, or extrinsically, as coming from without. An example of extrinsic normativity is the familiar instrumental normativity that reasons have relative to someone's desires. On this Humean instrumentalist account of normative reasons, the normative judgment of the horse is explained like this: 'Because Sally wants to ride a horse, the horse ought to be properly constituted and that includes the horse having four legs.' The extrinsic judgment is true relative to Sally's desires, and this means that it would change in accordance with her desires too. If Sally didn't care for riding horses, and actually hated all horses, she might have a desire for all horses to be deformed, having only three legs. The judgment 'a properly constituted horse has three legs' would come out true. This instrumental extrinsic normativity expresses a readily intelligible interpretation, but

[37] Ibid, 68-72.

[38] Ibid, 75.

distorts the meaning of the natural-historical judgments completely.[39] The normative interpretation of natural-historical judgments that preserve their meaning is rather an interpretation expressing intrinsic normativity. On an intrinsic interpretation, the operative normative concept expresses a reason that an instance of the life-form has for itself.[40] It is something about horses or rather, the horse life-form, that explains why individual horses ought to have four legs. An intrinsic explanation of the operative normative concept might be 'All horses ought to be properly constituted in *virtue of* their horse-nature'.[41] It remains mysterious, however, how a life-form (in this case 'horse nature') explains normative reasons for individual horses. For this reason, Thompson does not consider the normative interpretation to be *explanatory*. He does, however, affirm that the normative interpretation best captures the meaning of natural-historical judgments, implying that there is a normative dimension to natural-historical judgments.

This leaves natural-historical judgments in a tight corner. Since they are given a normative interpretation, they raise suspicions in many quarters, but they are not further explained to relieve suspicion. Thompson expressly denies all wildly implausible explanations of their normative structure, such as explanations involving a divine designer or a normative interpretation of natural selection. He says nothing positive, however, about the way we are to make sense of the normativity contained within the judgment form. He declares the appearances of natural-historical judgments to be '*bene fundata*',[42] i.e. brute and inexplicable. It is with our immediate grasp of natural-historical judgments that explanations of our understanding of life must come to an end.

Even though natural-historical judgments are inexplicable, Thompson assures us that this does not imply that they are 'cut off from the facts'.[43] We judge the truth or falsity of natural-historical judgments by considering empirical evidence relating to members of the life-form—that is, a set of vital descriptions. It is not immediately clear, however, how we ought to consider the empirical evidence in order to uncover true natural-historical

---

[39] Ibid.

[40] As Kant glossed it, the self-organizing being has to be a natural end that relates to itself as both cause and effect. (2000, 5:373).

[41] Life and Action, 75.

[42] Ibid, 76.

[43] Ibid, 72.

judgments.[44] This doesn't mean that the normative is thereby proved to be irreducible in principle: we simply haven't found out how to explain it yet.[45] More importantly, even if we cannot explain in detail how the normative reading is grounded in the facts, the normative reading is *not unintelligible* to us.[46] Thompson aims to show that we readily understand how to interpret the life-cycles of living beings as yielding natural-historical judgments in this normative sense, even though we cannot explain their meaning reductively.[47] That is why we intuitively judge the normative construals to be the best interpretations of natural-historical sentences. And if we do understand, isn't it wrongheaded to ask for further explanation?

According to Thompson's argument, it demonstrably is. Since Aristotelian Naturalism implies that natural-historical judgments are logically prior to the other vital judgment-types, it's impossible to identify a vital property by a vital description without first having characterized the property as the specific type it is by a natural-historical judgment. This amounts to a transcendental argument which in effect asserts that: since we understand vital properties, we must also necessarily grasp natural-historical judgments.

The Kantian transcendental argument nicely complements the intelligibility of natural-historical judgments to the understanding. In order to account for our access to these representations, Thompson speculates that there is a capacity characteristic of a certain kind of intellect to perform a synthesis of experience and concept.[48] That judgment type is best characterized as intuitively intelligible to us in virtue of innate structures. It is akin to metaphysical concepts like space, time, property, object, and causality, in this respect.[49]

---

[44] The situation I think, parallells Hume's discussion of causality and laws of nature. We cannot directly perceive necessity or law-likeness, and it is not fully clear how we can derive valid generalizations from determinate datasets, yet scientific frameworks in which laws of nature figure prominently are very successful.

[45] It may turn out that debates in the philosophy of intuition may yield an empirically tractable explanaiton.

[46] Thompson admits that he hasn't said enough for us to isolate Aristotelian categoricals in speech, or articulate the truth conditions of particular Aristotelian categorical judgments. As he puts it, '*it is a subclass of judgment marked off from others by content and not by form*'. (2008, 77).

[47] The case, again, parallells discussions of consciousness.

[48] Life and Action, 77.

[49] Thompson, 2004.

2.   The Order Of Natural Normativity

In the preceding chapter I followed Thompson's work on the logic of vital concepts, the set of concepts through which our understanding of life is mediated. I have indicated that an adequate understanding of life is teleological and historical. Adequate explanations of living beings involve functional predications of traits associated with the life-form that a being bears. Moreover, the ascription of functions or purposes to traits presupposes knowledge of the natural history of the life-form. To understand the nature of a trait is to know its place in the life-cycle of the life-form. Knowledge of the natural history of a life-form includes general information about the life-form such as physiological facts and its characteristic interaction with its environment over time.

Without understanding the natural history of a life-form, particular instances of it are unintelligible. Natural history, and the natural-historical judgments out of which it is composed, is therefore essential to our understanding of life. The logical structure of natural-historical judgments is not, however, reducible to familiar empiricist judgments. Rather, natural-historical judgments are explanatory, normative, and irreducible. What is the best explanation of this irreducibility? Either these judgments are irreducible because the normative predications are mere projections, a quirk of the human mind spreading itself onto living beings. Or these judgments are irreducible because they track life-form relative natural normativity whose patterns follow subtle historical-teleological aspects of living kinds, and therefore irreducible to savage empirical judgments. The reason why reduction distorts it's meaning is because reduction explains away the normative meaning contained within the judgment which is explanatory.[50] How are we to decide whether natural-historical judgments are descriptions of objective features of reality or mere projection? We must investigate Aristotelian Naturalism more closely to see whether the patterns of natural normativity according to that theory contradict our considered normative beliefs. We must also investigate the conceptual apparatus of Aristotelian Naturalism to see whether there is reason to believe that the central concepts of the theory track objective normative structures, or merely our

---

[50] To get a better grip on what this means, consider the analogous case of behaviorist explanation. Say, we want to understand why some person loves another. The behaviourist goes ahead to explain the bahaviour by conditioning. Perhaps collecting data about the history of the individual and his encounters, making a statistical model including relevant inputs etc. The explanation might be good and true, however, we might want to know what evaluative attitutes the person in love has towards the other. An explanation of those attitutes might involve propositional contents about what features of the other person the one in love appreciates. The contents of the latter explanation cannot be exhausted by the former, yet the latter is explanatory in ways the former is not. Hence, the latter is explanatory as well as the former, and both explanations ought to respect each other.

own attitudes. At the fine grained levels of the local and substantive strata of the theory which deals with human beings, our intuitions about normative reasons are clearer, at this level we should be able to impart well-informed judgment regarding the truth of Aristotelian Naturalism.

In this chapter I shall investigate this thought as it manifests in Foot's *Natural Goodness* (2001). Following Thompson's suggestion,[51] I distinguish three strata of the analysis of natural normativity. I begin with the logical stratum of natural normativity. I then address the attribution of this logical order of normativity to particular life-forms. Thompson calls this level of analysis the local level of analysis. My concern will be with the specifically human life-form in this section. The third and final stratum of Aristotelian Naturalism concerns a specific interpretation of practical reason in the human life-form. The question I address in this section is, What kind of reasons are recognized by someone who possesses an excellent capacity for practical reasoning? After I have went through the three strata of Aristotelian Naturalism and explained Foot's views on the patters of normativity on each strata, I turn to criticism of the view.

2.1. Natural Normativity at the Logical Level of Analysis

According to Aristotelian Naturalism, natural historical judgments are the key to understanding natural normativity. Natural-historical judgments about a life-form express a normative understanding of the life-form. When we say: "the bonobo is a peaceful primate", there is an implicit normative sense underlying the natural-historical judgment. This gives rise to a *natural standard* according to which all individuals of the life-form may be evaluated. All vital descriptions of individuals are thus logically dependent on natural-historical judgments for their cognitive intelligibility. By the same token they inherit normative content. An individual bonobo that deviates from the natural standard is thereby defective relative to that standard, and individuals that exemplify the natural standard to perfection are prime specimens of their kind. This evaluative meaning is not given by an 'extra' act of judgment. The patterns of normativity are ingrained in our language whether we consciously intend it or not. Consequently, it is not possible to divorce the normative evaluative meaning of descriptive statements from their purely non-normative 'descriptive' meaning. This accounts

---

[51] See Thompson, 2008b.

for why it is so hard to tell someone that they have a chronic illness. The very content of the message is what is bad. Likewise in the case where a marathon-runner comes in last; it's not possible to deliver the message in a way that removes the implicit normative content.

In *Natural Goodness,* Foot further develops the idea of life-form relative natural normativity.[52] She argues that normatively salient natural-historical judgments in a natural history track the teleological structure of the life-cycle of the life-form.[53] In particular, she suggests that evaluative concepts like 'good', 'bad', 'pathological', 'defective' and 'excellent' track natural normativity, and may be ascribed objectively. These normatively laden descriptions have application conditions conceptually tied to categories in the same way attributive adjectives like 'small', 'big', 'smart', or 'quick' do.[54] These adjectives are scaling, and the correct attribution of any given adjective to an individual is determined on the basis of the individual's life-form. For example: We may rightly say that an individual turtle is quick if it is going about at a faster pace than its peers. Similarly, a rabbit going about somewhat slower than other rabbits may rightly be judged to be slow. One might even make both of these judgments in the same breath, judging the turtle quick and the rabbit slow, even if the rabbit could outrun the turtle many times over. This is because the logic of evaluative judgments pertaining to members of a life-form makes implicit reference to facts of the kind in general. The nature of this implicit logical structure of particular and general description is normative. It is in terms of this logic that we may judge it better to have good health, friends and family, a fulfilling job and a safe place to live, all else being equal, than to be diseased, alone, working a degrading job, and living in a place that's not safe.

In addition to the concept of natural goodness; and its spectrum of evaluative notions, there is another central nonevaluative 'noun' concept of good in Foot's theory: the concept of 'Good for'.[55] This concept roughly corresponds to the Aristotelian idea of a *telos*, and related teleological notions like ends and purposes. Just like the functioning of some artifact is evaluated by considering whether it promotes its purpose or end, the application conditions of evaluative concepts to traits are determined by considering the role of the trait in promoting the Good for the life-form in its characteristic life-cycle. This means that only

---

[52] Notice here that a Kantian conception of normativity diverges from Foot's thought. Kantians believe that all rational agents regardless of their nature ought to act in accordance with the categorical imperative.

[53] Thompson briefly mentions the more determinate teleological interpretation of Aristotelian categoricals and notes that it bears some promise, but prefers a less determinate interpretation himself (2008, 77, footnote 12).

[54] See Geach, 1956.

[55] I signal this concept with an uppercase to differantiate it from the evaluative sense of good.

those judgments that 'play a part in the life-cycle' of the life-form, in the sense of mattering to the satisfaction of the Good for the life-form express true natural normativity.

To clarify this point, it is helpful to look at one of Foot's examples. The sentence, 'the blue tit has a round blue patch on its head', resembles, 'The male peacock has a brighly coloured tail'. But there is a crucial difference here: The colour of the tail of the male peacock is necessary in order for the peacock to get a mate, whereas the blue patch on the blue tit plays no important role. Hence, it would be wrong to consider the absence of a blue patch on the head of a particular blue tit to be a defect, whereas it ought to be considered bad for the male peacock to lack a brightly coloured tail.[56]

Following this schema, it is possible to explain the evaluative status of any particular vital description of some S by considering how the trait described relates to the Good for S's. Foot thinks about natural normativity along an axis of *natural goodness and badness*. In her thinking, vital descriptions of individuals implicitly relate to a natural normative spectrum where the goodness of the trait described is proportionate to the reliability of that trait in promoting the Good for the life-form.[57] Hence, it is a great Good for the male peacock to have a brightly coloured tail, but it is not of any importance that the blue tit has a blue patch on its head. These judgments about the goodness or badness of some trait are called 'Aristotelian categoricals'. These judgments do not just characterize the natural history of a life-form; they articulate normative significance. Aristotelian categoricals are teleological ascriptions that shed light on the relations of dependence between traits and ends in the life-cycle of a life-form.

Natural goodness can be attributed to individuals as well as traits. The natural goodness of some S is determined on the basis of the proper functioning of all traits that are necessary for S's to reliably achieve what is Good for the S. Notice that the space between the two concepts of good opens the possibility of some S being good, but not necessarily obtaining what is Good for S's generally. As Foot points out, it is possible for a deer to be unlucky and run into a trap, regardless of its being healthy, fast and good in all respects. Aristotelian categoricals articulate the relations of dependence between traits and the good within the life-cycle of a life-form. These relations are promotion or dependence relations. Foot calls the latter judgment type Aristotelian necessities. They are necessary in the sense that without the trait, it is very unlikely that the S will obtain the Good. Furthermore, all Aristotelian

---

[56] Natural Goodness, 30, Voorhoeve, 2008, 97.

[57] Natural Goodness, 34, 42.

categoricals are context-sensitive, the relations of dependence between a trait and an end are sensitive to a particular natural habitat.[58]

The teleological understanding of life-forms sets up a framework for normative evaluation according to which all particulars may be evaluated relative to their life-form. If all the concepts employed can be explained naturalistically, then Aristotelian Naturalism could be made an objective science of natural normativity. As Foot suggests, this is already the case when it comes to plants and animals. She boldly asserts that intelligent Martians without our concepts, could learn the logic of life, articulate natural histories and grasp Aristotelian categoricals on the basis of the cold objective facts alone.[59]

Foot is confident that Aristotelian categoricals of plants and animals can be ascribed objectively. She does not, however, give a detailed explication of her intended interpretation of teleological concepts. Foot is very clear that her notion of function is not that of the evolutionary 'selected effects account'.[60] She writes: "To say that some feature of a living thing is an adaptation is to place it in the history of a species. To say that it has a function is to say that it has a certain place in the life of individuals that belong to that species at a certain time."[61] This means that we must interpret the natural history of a life-form in order to determine the correctness of Aristotelian categoricals. On Foot's account, however, 'natural history' is not historical in the sense of going way back, it is the life-cycle of present instantiations that matter.[62] The same is true for the concept of a final end on her account. We do not look to evolution to determine the final ends of a life-form, it is sufficient to inspect the life-form closely here and now, in its current manifestation.

---

[58] Natural Goodness, 34

[59] Natural Goodness, 36. Similarly, Rosalind Hursthouse confidently asserts that insofar the disciplines of botany, zoology, and ethology are considered scientific, Aristotelian Naturalism if developed to a full blown empirical theory could claim equal scientific status On Virtue Ethics, 203.

[60] This is the dominant theory of function-ascription in the philosophy of biology.

[61] Natural Goodness, 32n.

[62] It is a commonplace in philosophy of biology that there is at least two different important 'why questions' one may ask about any biological trait. One such why question asks why a property came to be the way it is. Another asks why a property is the way it is, and not some other way. As Philip Kitcher (1984) has noted, there are two main different types of explanations one may give to these different why questions. To answer the first why question, one should give a 'historical explanation'. Historical explanations are concerned with a retrospective causal history which explains the development of traits. Evolutionary explanations of adaptations, for instance, belong in this category. The other type of explanation is what Kitcher calls 'structural explanations'. Within this explanation type one finds what Kitcher calls 'functional explanations'. Structural functional explanations are not so much concerned with the mechanical origins of traits. These explanations focus on the functional role that a trait plays in the life of an organism, or in a particular process or system at a particular time.

To say that Aristotelian categoricals are warranted by an interpretation of the present manifestation of the natural history of a life-form implies that ascriptions are validated within a hermeneutical circle. The natural history of a life-form consists in natural-historical judgments whose full significance is best explicated through Aristotelian categorical teleological ascriptions. Aristotelian categoricals articulate the relations of dependence between traits in the life-cycle of instantiations of the life-form. The truth of this judgment type is warranted by a proper interpretation of natural history, hence there is no way out of the circle. The circle is not, however, vicious. Though the attempt to get at a better interpretation presupposes the validity, or proximate validity of the prior interpretation of the life-form, the overall conception of the natural history of the life-form is not 'cut off from the facts'. Observation plays an important role; the point is only that the observation of living beings does not come unmediated by prior understanding. Moreover any given conception of the natural history of a life-form arises from interpretations of experiences associated with the life-form.[63]

Plants and animals do not consciously represent the ends for which they act, but this does not mean that they don't have ends. It is wildly implausible that migratory birds, for instance, know why they migrate. It may nevertheless be a true Aristotelian categorical of migratory birds that they do this to reproduce at their ancient breeding grounds, and that reproduction is an end for the actions and practices in which migratory birds are engaged. Reproduction, then, is an end for at least some migratory birds on this understanding of the concept.[64] Moreover, reproduction is a final end, since it is an end that serves no further end for the migratory bird. It is an end that may explain other ends, but is not itself explained by any other end, therefore it is self-contained and final. In Foot's own application of these folk-teleological notions to plants and animals, she writes: "The way an organism *should be* is determined by what is needed for development, self, maintenance, and reproduction: in most species involving defence, and in some the rearing of the young."[65]

---

[63] For more on the circular determination of Aristotelian categoricals within Aristotelian naturalism, see Crary, 2009, 25-8, Lott, 2012, 20-22. For a general presentation of the hermeneutical circle and method of interpretation, see Taylor, 1985b.

[64] This is one of Foot's examples (Natural Goodness, 31).

[65] Natural Goodness, 33. Following the same train of thought, Hursthouse ascribes the following final ends to plants and animals: (i) individual survival, (ii) the continuance of the species, and (iii) the individuals characteristic pleasure or enjoyment/freedom from pain. She adds a fourth for social life-forms, which is (iv) the good functioning of the group (*On Virtue Ethics*, 200-1).

2.2. Natural Normativity at the Local Level of Analysis

In this section, I move from the logical to the local level of analysis. My aim is to shed light on Foot's conception of the natural history of human nature.[66] Human beings are animals. This makes us part of the natural world and subject to the order of natural normativity. The pattern of natural normativity characteristic of humankind is tied up to the biological cycles of human lives. If the argument for the existence of natural normativity is sound, it appears that one would have to deny that human beings are animals in order to deny that natural-historical judgments of human beings carry implicit normative content.

Animals act for the end of survival and reproduction. The Good for human beings is, however, far more complicated then that.[67] In Foot's view, a proper natural history of humankind will emphasize the fact that we are rational animals. It is a true natural-historical judgment that 'humans act on the basis of reasons'. We may stand back from mere desires and inclinations to a standpoint of rational reflection. This important trait of human nature implies a dramatic shift in the patterns of natural normativity in humankind. It suggests that an important Good, perhaps the most important Good for human beings is that we act in accordance with reason. As Foot puts it: "While animals go for the good that they see, human beings go for what they see as good".[68] On Aristotelian Naturalism, the Good for human beings is dependent on what human beings have reason to believe is Good.

This is a subtle and complex point, let me elaborate. On one view, it is bad for a person to eat his vegetables if he has a distaste for vegetables. On another view, it is Good for a person to eat his vegetables despite his distaste because he might acquire a taste for them so that he will eat vegetables in the future and enjoy better health as a result of it. On the first view, the practical deliberations of this person only include reasons deriving from his present nature, including his desires, interests and conceptions of the Good. On the latter view, his practical deliberations ought to acknowledge the normative authority of 'second order desires', that is, desires about what it would be best to desire.[69] The latter view is what Foot means to assert in affirming that human beings are rational creatures. The invocation of

---

[66] For ease of exposition I am going to make use of conventional terms in discussions of the species homo-sapiens. By 'human nature' or 'humankind' I mean the human life-form, by 'person' I mean individual human.

[67] Natural Goodness, 43.

[68] Natural Goodness, 56.

[69] Frankfurt, 1971.

second order desires inevitably involves reflection on what a Good human life would be like where the Good of this life is disconnected from one's own parochial present desires. It depends rather on an interpretation of human nature, and what the ideal human life would be like. Contrary to mere animals, human beings are guided by what they have most reason to believe is the Good for them.

On Foot's view, judgments about what human beings ought to be like, is adequately characterized by her account of the determination of natural goodness. Exactly like we judge plants and animals to be good or bad specimens of their kinds according to the well-functioning of the important traits in their lives, one may judge natural goodness in human beings according to a similar natural history of humankind. The understanding exemplified in a capacity for judging the goodness of humans well is what one might call practical wisdom, and it is an essential part of the capacity for practical reasoning in human beings.

On Foot's view, the exercise of practical reason is a trait on a par with our other traits. Practical reason manifests materially in the shape of the virtues. A virtue is a complex psychological disposition that enables its possessor to see and understand what reason require in a particular situation, and to be suitably motivated to act in accordance with reason in a given domain. So understood the concept of virtue is vacuous. The real question then is: What character traits are virtues? Since a virtue enables persons to understand and act appropriately within a particular domain, what we should ask to determine the identity of the virtues is: what type of conduct is ideal for human persons in that domain?

Writers within the virtue ethical tradition disagree on what psychological traits the virtues are. Thinkers as diverse as Aristotle and Nietzsche agree that practical reason manifests in the shape of virtues and that they are demarcated by their being rationally warranted. They nevertheless have divergent views on what the true virtues are.

For a conception of practical reason in the manifestation of a set of virtues to be vindicated, that set of virtues must be shown to enable their possessor to have an adequate understanding of the natural history of human nature and the normative dimension of human life. Aristotle's disagreement with Nietzsche is about how we should understand human nature, where the full range of human capacities, peculiarities, needs and concerns are important elements in deciding who is right. This debate moves at the substantive level of analysis of natural normativity in human nature. It is also at this level Socrates debates Thrasymachus, Gleucon, Adeimantius and Callicles on the rationality of justice. In this debate, the normative framework of natural normativity is already presupposed. None of the

participants questions the normativity of rationality. They all agree that human beings are essentially rational creatures whose telos is determined by reason. Therefore, this debate moves on the substantive level of analysis, where the question is: what character traits are virtues, and thereby part of practical reason? Blackburn gives a dramatic but precise characterization of the tall order Socrates is to satisfy in a debate like this:

> …the holy grail of moral philosophy, the knock-down argument that people who are nasty and unpleasant and motivated by the wrong things are above all unreasonable: that they can be proved to be wrong by the pure sword of reason. They aren't just selfish or thoughtless or malignant or imprudent, but are reasoning badly, or out of touch with the facts.[70]

2.3. The Substantive Level of Analysis

Foot maintains that practical reason is manifested in the neo-Aristotelian list of cardinal virtues, which include: courage, temperance, justice, benevolence and practical wisdom. These virtues disposes their possessor to value friendship, promise-keeping, the well-being of others among other things. On this basis, Foot suggests that we may concoct a conception of the human Good for the virtuous person:

> The suggestion then is, that humanity's good can be thought of as happiness, and yet in such a way that combining it with wickedness is a priori ruled out…In my own terminology 'happiness' is here understood as the enjoyment of good things, meaning enjoyment in pursuing and attaining right ends.[71]

By 'right ends', Foot means those ends which the virtuous person values on the basis of the other-regarding virtues. On Aristotelian Naturalism, the sub-section of natural normativity concerned with 'morality' (understood in a narrow sense), is restricted to the goodness or badness of the human will,[72] or rather the psychological dispositions of the

---

[70] Blackburn, 1984, 222.

[71] Natural Goodness, 96-7.

[72] Ibid, 39, 66.

agent. 'Pursuing and attaining right ends' means acting on moral reasons. The moral person sees the suffering of others as a reason to help, and cares for the well-functioning of civil society.

Contrary to neo-Kantian Theories of Reasons, breaking a promise is permissible, if there is a more important Good served by an alternative course of action. And contrary to the Humean Theory of Reasons, a consideration grounded in a strong desire is not a good reason for action unless it promotes the Good for the person. For possessors of justice, a promise to a friend is a strong normative reason for them to keep the promise, regardless of present desires. For them, keeping promises is a great Good.[73]

How do we know whether Foot's theory of reasons is correct? We must ask whether Foot's conception adequately characterizes the human Good. Humeans will deny this. According to Humeans, the Good is simply whatever they desire or feel is Good. How can Foot argue convincingly against Humeans on the substantive level of analysis? Is there a way to resolve disagreement in these fundamental interpretations of the human Good?

Foot believes there is. To illustrate it, she reiterates an argument originally formulated by Warren Quinn.[74] On a Humean Theory of Reasons, the normative rationality of practical reasons is explained by desires. Desires are brute. They are not subject to rational scrutiny; they belong to a space of causality, not of reasons. Humean instrumental rationality is thus insensitive to ends, since any desire constitutes an end. Now, Quinn's argument trades on the possibility of an agent having a desire, the satisfaction of which implies shameful actions. Someone may desire a romantic fling, and if there is next-to-no chance of getting cought, this desire entails for that someone that she ought to cheat on her partner.[75] The example shows that the Humean Theory of Reasons impels rational persons to do shameful acts if the right conditions apply. On Quinn's view, this result undermines the normative status of the Humean theory of instrumental rationality.

He views the Humean Theory of Reasons as a conception on which instrumental rationality is the master virtue, according to which persons are to lead their lives. Quinn's argument draws on the seeming implausibility of perfectly rational persons engaging in

---

[73] Sensible Humean Theories of Reasons often include an idealization element. They often say: a consideration is a reason for some person to do X iff that reason promotes what that person would desire if she had full information and were maximally rational. It is not obvious that promise-keeping is irrational on this conception of practical reason. Unfortunately a discussion of sensible Humeanism is beyond the scope of this essay.

[74] See *Morality and Action* (1993), especially "Rationality and the Human Good" and "Putting Rationality in its Place". Thomas Scanlon pressed the same line of argument in *What We Owe to Each Other* (1998).

[75] Quinn, 1993, 217.

shameful activities. Moreover, Quinn strengthens his case by also evoking cases where the Humean Theory of Reasons allows for an agent having 'nasty desires' or doing 'petty' deeds, like stealing pencils from the office. On Foot's view, it is incompatible with any adequate conception of human nature that rational persons who deliberate well act on base desires like these. Remember, this was one of the desiderata I mentioned at the outset. As she puts it:

> Seeing his will as defective, we *therefore* say that he is doing what he has reason not to do. Being unable to fit the supposed 'reason' into some preconceived present desire-based theory of reasons for action, we do not query whether it really is a foolish way to behave, but rather hang on to the evaluation and shape our theory of reasons accordingly.[76]

2.4. Critique of Aristotelian Naturalism

Aristotelian Naturalism is open to many objections. In this section I consider three internal criticisms, one for each stratum of the theory. I begin at the substantive level and work my way up to the local and logical strata. In this chapter my aim is merely to present Aristotelian Naturalism as this theory is conceived by Thompson and Foot and to present some of the objections that has been leveled to the theory. In the next chapter I reveal my own attitudes towards Aristotelian Naturalism and these objections.

The first internal critique is an objection against Foot's 'reversal' of the direction of justification of morality and rationality. Foot confidently asserts that human beings who are unresponsive to considerations of justice are defective. Quinn, on the other hand, explicitly concedes that his argument can be received in two different ways:

> First, of course, there is the moral I prefer: that a neo-Humean conception of rationality and the good should be given up in the face of the objectivity of the moral and a proper respect for human life and practical reason. But other responses are possible. One is to retain the neo-Humean accounts but give up the idea that the powerful moral terms we have been employing can be used objectively.[77]

---

[76] Natural Goodness, 63.

[77] Quinn, 1993, 227.

It seems obvious that neo-Humeans or immoralists generally would choose this second interpretation. However, Foot overlooks this fact.[78] The second interpretation also best accommodates the clearest and most widely endorsed conception of rationality. Hence, for anyone not already convinced that the cardinal virtues characterizes good practical reasoning, Foot's argument is bound to fail. For this reason, Hursthouse concedes that there is next to nothing Aristotelian Naturalists can say to convince the moral sceptic, immoralist or drug baron that the life of virtue is the rational life, because these characters are non-responsive to moral reasons whose normative authority depends on a predisposition to value justice.[79]

Foot suggested a reversal of the interplay of Aristotelian categoricals within her theory. At the logical stratum, the determination of the goodness of some functional trait was in terms of that trait reliably promoting the final end, or the Good for its possessor. With this reversal, the Good for human beings is to be reoriented in light of what characteristically good human beings are like.

To illustrate this point, Foot tells the story of the terrible Wests. The Wests were murderers and sexual abusers. They thought themselves that it was Good for them to go about in their vicious ways. To this example, Foot asks whether we say that it would be a benefit to the Wests if someone helped them go on with their vicious ways. Foot flatly denies this, and considers this to be additional evidence why the Good for human beings ought to be determined by their natural goodness. This means, for Foot, that the Good for human beings is to go on in the characteristically good human way.[80] But why is this reversal any bit more plausible then the alternative construal? Unfortunately I don't see how Foot's arguments are compelling for someone with a contrary opinion.

The second objection to Aristotelian Naturalism, this time at the substantive statum of the theory, is due to John McDowell. In his view, rational animals like ourselves may question the normative authority of nature, and this means that natural goodness cannot play the authoritative role it does in Foot's scheme. McDowell illustrates this difficulty with a story of a rational wolf:

---

[78] Natural Goodness, 62-3.

[79] On Virtue Ethics, 229-30.

[80] Lott, forthcoming, 14.

With the onset of reason, then, the nature of the species abdicates from a previously unquestionable authority over the behaviour of the individual animal… It would not be surprising if the deliberating wolf thought reason requires him to transcend his wolfish nature in pursuit of his individual interest, exploiting the less intelligent wolves who continue to let their lives be structured by what wolves need… Of course, he may be quite wrong in thinking that his project is workable, or in thinking that it will be satisfactory to him, wolf that he is. But perhaps he is not wrong; and if he is, we cannot show him he is by reaffirming the facts about what wolves need.[81]

A way to think about this objection is as a rejection of the normative authority of 'natural goodness'. When the rational wolf 'stands back', it may come to a number of different conclusions about what is Good for it, and it may disregard what characteristically good wolves do.[82] The same is true for human beings. Why should an individual care about 'characteristic goodness' if she can see another way of satisfying what she conceives to be good?

McDowell is sympathetic to the Aristotelian Naturalist project, but for him to acknowledge the normativity of nature, it is important for him first to 'rectify a constriction' of the concept of nature.[83] In the first instance, this involves a rejection that the Good for rational beings is determined by their life-form relative natural goodness. When rational beings 'stand back' to a reflective point of view, they may mold their nature according to reason, instead of obeying it.[84] In McDowell's view, our given nature, is not authoritative in regards to reason, it is the other way round. Of course, human nature does constrain the space of possibility in which reason may work, but practical reasons are *sui generis*, they are not determined by nature. This conception of the normativity of nature is aptly characterized by this ancient metaphor:

My practical rationality is seen as a skill or expertise which gets to work on the circumstances of my life, including of course the rest of my human nature, and makes

---

[81] McDowell, 1995, 154-5.

[82] See also On Virtue Ethics, 221.

[83] McDowell, 1995, 149.

[84] Hursthouse follows McDowell on this point, On Virtue Ethics, 225-6, see also Lott, 2014, 774.

something of it, in the way that a craftsperson makes an object from raw materials. Human nature does not have to be seen as wholly plastic and transformable into anything at all; after all, a good craftsperson will respect the potentials of the materials.[85]

This normatively inert conception of nature upon which reason works is what McDowell calls 'first nature'. It is the nature of our natural endowments, traits, and capacities for which we are not responsible. First nature matters because it constraints the space of possible action and informs considerations about "what human beings need in order to do well, in a sense of 'doing well' that is not just Aristotle's 'acting in accordance with the virtues'".[86] However, the Good of doing well in this sense is eclipsed by the good of acting according to the virtues, and this is a matter of second nature. Second nature is practical reason manifested in character and personality. It is in virtue of second nature that a moral consideration may constitute a practical reason for us. A person brought up well by good parents will have a character and an ethical outlook according to which virtue is good and vice bad. But this is not something one learns from nature, it comes from acculturation. This acculturation process or its 'objective validity', cannot be discovered or vindicated by the natural sciences. The discourse in which the validity of second nature can be debated only makes sense internal to the ethical outlook in which that second nature means something to the participants. A person may stand back from first nature, but if a person stands back from second nature, to a point of complete detachment, nothing of value will be intelligible or sensible to her.[87] Only the constraining needs of first nature are left to delimit the space of possible Goods. In this respect, McDowell's thinking on nature and the Good resemble Rawls's thinking on justice and the Good: 'First nature draws the limit, second nature shows the point'.

McDowell's rectification of the concept of nature consists in retrieving the importance of second nature. A proper ethical naturalism derives a conception of the Good from an inclusive conception of nature. On the inclusive conception of human nature, our self-interpretations are constitutive of a way of life that is paramount to the Good for us. This implies that investigations of natural goodness in human nature ought to be a matter of

---

[85] Annas, 2005, 22.

[86] McDowell, 1995, 172.

[87] See Taylor (1985a), (1985b) and (1985c), See also McDowell (1985) and (1995).

historical self-interpretation.[88] Most neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalists follow this inclusive 'hermentutical' line.[89]

The final objection is a more general objection directed at the logical stratum of the theory. The objection is voiced by many, but the most forceful articulation is due to David Copp and David Sobel.[90]

Their line of argumentation begins with the interpretation of *Natural Goodness* in which it is understood in the non-inclusive 'first nature' sense. On this interpretation, Copp and Sobel worry that the theory comes dangerously close to a 'difference is defect' view.[91] In particular, the worry is that Aristotelian Naturalism may be used to justify discrimination against cultural, sexual and ethnic minorities, and give rise to unreasonable moralizing attitudes.

The worrying appearance is deflected by considering Aristotelian Naturalism's underlying Vital Rationalism, and in particular the interpretive method of investigation one is to follow to infer the truth-value of natural-historical judgments and Aristotelian categoricals according to that doctrine. The 'chauvinist worry' is a direct consequence of an interpretation of natural-historical sentences as expressing 'the characteristic way of going on' of some life-form. This is not, however, a view Aristotelian Naturalists subscribe to. As I have emphasized, natural-historical judgments are normative interpretations of a life-form. They are not merely characteristic in the statistical average sense: they articulate normativity. To get natural-historical judgments right is to grasp the patterns of natural normativity in the life-cycle of the life-form. If the worry is to cut any ice, it must be plausible, or at least possible, that true natural-historical judgments can yield intuitively repulsive normative conclusions.

However, this premise is actually a priori false. This is because, on Aristotelian Naturalism, the truth conditions of natural-historical judgments are determined on the basis of what we consider to be the best normative interpretation of a life-form. If true natural-historical judgments are normative, then seemingly normativity must come in when we

---

[88] See Taylor (1985c) for a detailed exemplar of how such a cultural/historical interpretation of human nature can be accomplished.

[89] Though Thompson's official posture is one of agnosticism, he is sympathetic to the hermentutical conception of nature advocated by McDowell, (Life and Action, 31). Hursthouse explicitly follows McDowell's lead (On Virtue Ethics, 165, 221). Other neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalists who assents to this view include (Nussbaum, 1995), (Hacker-Wright, 2008), and (Lott, 2012).

[90] In a critical review essay in which they evaluate Aristotelian Naturalism in it's manifestation in *Natural Goodness*, and *On Virtue Ethics* (Copp and Sobel, 2004).

[91] Copp and Sobel, 2004, 538, see also Lenman 2005, 45.

determine whether any of them are true. Hence, we must take into account what we believe to be the best normative understanding of a life-form when we device a natural history for it.

This invites a new concern. If the mode of investigation to the normativity of a life-form is identical to the justification of it, the claim to objective discovery is threatened. A condition for robust realism about some property is that the property is 'cosmocentric'.[92] This is an anti-antropocentric thesis supposed to combat intrumentalism and subjectivism. The essence of this idea it that the warrant for objectivity require that we are in an suitable epistemic relation to the properties whose truth is in question. A relation in which it is possible, even in idealized conditions, to be in error. The objective truth of our representations do not depend on our method of verifying them. A concise way of specifying this idea is by requiring the extension of some predicate P to be explicable in a biconditional analysis where the right hand side makes no reference to subjective responses or particular instruments used to discover objects with the properties in question. Rather, the right hand side of the biconditional should state essential mind-independent facts about instances of the property in question that those instances must possess in order to count as being part of the extension of the property.[93] These facts must be such that the epistemological project of discovering instances of the property is an a posteriori enterprise in which one could be wrong, regardless of epistemic access, and is thereby not just a matter of satisfying the right conditions of investigation.[94]

If the very idea of a normative natural history of a life-form is insulated from any conceivable normative objection on the grounds that a valid normative objection implies that the natural history must be rewritten, then we have reason to believe that the contents of natural histories are unconstrained by facts, and that they are rather a projection of our

---

[92] In my exposition of this idea I follow (Pettit, 1991). The idea is common in debates of realism and objectivity, and it often invoked in metaethical debates. Shafer-Landau articulates is like this: "Moral truth (or fact) is objective in the sense required by morality when it is "stance-independent," when, that is, it would hold independently of all our evaluative attitudes, taken collectively, whether we have them now or would have them on reflection under ideal conditions." (Landau 2003, 15). Sharon Street puts the thesis like this: "The defining claim of realism about value, as I will be understanding it, is that there are at least some evaluative facts or truths that hold independently of all our evaluative attitudes." (2006, 110).

[93] These remarks are inspired by Wright (1988, 20).

[94] To further clarify this idea one might imagine a far away extraterrestrial civilization with wholly alien sensibilities perhapt consisting in wholly different sensory modalities then the ones we find in humans and animals on earth. Likewise their scientific instruments are different but sophisticated, and their theories are structured in other ways then ours. Our question then should be, will there be a principled way for those creatures to determine the extension of our predicate? What is more, is it likely that they will independently come up with a predicate with the same extension as ours for use in their representations of the world? If no; the predicate is antropocentric, if yes; the predicate is cosmocentric, and mose likely cut nature at it's joints.

normative thinking and attitudes. Copp, Sobel, and others have complained that this makes the view viciously circular and uninformative.[95] The worry is that the theory merely gives a deliberation procedure to stabilize and reflect on the intuitions we already have and expresses these in a systematic fashion. If that is the case, as it surely seems to be if the theory is insulated from any conceivable objection on intuitive grounds, then intuitions are doing all the normative explanatory work. Consequently, the whole theoretical schema of Aristotelian Naturalism is made redundant for ethical deliberation. If this conclusion is accepted, Aristotelian Naturalism ceases to be a distinct theory of normativity, and the prospects for developing a novel theory that is superiour to Humean or Neo-Kantian theories vanishes.

2.5.   Tentative Conclusions

In this chapter I have examined Aristotelian Naturalism. As we have seen, Aristotelian Naturalism is made up of some very attractive ideas. These include the grammatical idea that 'good' is a life-form relative attributive adjective and the further idea that goodness grounds a life-form relative natural normativity that permeate the domain of life. That the generality of the conception of natural normativity as permeating non-ethical life-forms as well as underlying human ethical life, bolsters the objective pretensions of practical reasons. It may be counterintuitive to say that plants have reasons to grow towards the sun, however, this line of thinking shows how it is possible to conceive of practical reasons as objectively existing natural phenomena tracking the teleological joints of nature, as opposed to being mere reflections of our own attitudes.

However, even though the structure of our representations of natural normativity seems to latch onto metaphysical reality, we lack independent standards of verification to validate them. Thompson's conception of natural-historical judgments as *bene fundata*, i.e. brute and inexplicable is not reassuring. Foot's folk-teleological Aristotelian categoricals may seem to be constrained by nature in determinate ways, but there is an unbearable tension there. Hursthouse is keenly aware of this tension, and aptly characterizes it in *On Virtue Ethics*:

> Ethical Naturalism hopes to validate beliefs about which character traits are
> virtues by appeal to human nature, and this may seem a vain hope. For either we

---

[95] Murphy, (2003), Copp and Sobel (2004, 534-5, 540), (Woodcock, 2015), (Fletcher, 2016, 84-85).

speak from the neitral point of view, using a scientific account of human nature—in which case we won't get very far—or we speak from within an aquired ethical outlook —in which case we will not validate our ethical beliefs, but merely re-express them.[96]

Insofar as Aristotelian categoricals are constrained by nature determinatively, there is a deep worry that they will ascribe normative properties in ways that contradict the normative appearances.[97] As Thompson puts it, there is a worry that the theory implies "an alarming and idiotic moral conservatism.",[98] on which, "say, usury and contraception is 'wrong' because 'unnatural'."[99] And insofar as this worry is ameliorated by reconceiving the normativity of nature as more inclusive, and the investigation of natural normativity as dependent on interpretation informed by normative considerations, there is a worry that we merely project normativity onto nature, instead of deriving normativity from it. I call this the 'Dilemma of Natural Normativity'.

---

[96] On Virtue Ethics, 193.

[97] These were: Objectivity, Universality, Practicality and Conservatism, see II in the introduction.

[98] Thompson, 2013, 702.

[99] Life and Action, 31.

3.   A Third Sort Of Naturalism

The overall project of Aristotelian Naturalism is to ground a life-form relative conception of natural normativity in nature. Thompson convincingly argues that our representation of life is mediated by normative concepts that play an explanatory role in our understanding of nature. However, the further development of Aristotelian Naturalism stumbles upon many problems. Some of these problems can be avoided by adopting a less ambitious construal of the theory, but there are grave troubles plaguing the alternative construal too. The predicament assumes the shape of a dilemma: Either normativity is derived from a determinate conception of the teleological structures in nature, in which case Aristotelian Naturalism may appear to contradict normative appearances; or normativity is derived from an inclusive conception of nature dependent on self-interpretations, in which case Aristotelian Naturalism may appear to project moral appearances onto nature instead of deriving normativity from it. This is the Dilemma of Natural Normativity.

We may call the first horn of the dilemma *Reductionism*, since on that horn the Good is reductively identified with some teleological structure in nature. We may call the second horn *Nonreductionism*, because on that horn, the Good is mind-dependent in the sense that it is dependent on self-interpretation and therefore nonreducible. Contemporary Aristotelians tend to opt for nonreductionism. Their argumentative strategy typically involves transcendental arguments concerning the indispensibility of taking normative reasons as authoritative in practical deliberation,[100] or the incoherence, impossibility, or futility of the very idea of absolute objectivity.[101]

In this chapter I endeavor to resolve the Dilemma of Natural Normativity. The solution I propose goes against the stream of most contemporary neo-Aristotelian thinking. I believe that the obstacles to the Reductionist horn of the dilemma can be overcome if the right revisions to Aristotelian Naturalism are made. In brief, my plan is to radically revise the life-form concept and to make a distinction in the identity of all living beings similar to, but not identical, to McDowell's distinction in terms of first and second nature mentioned earlier on. Employing these distinctions, in conjunction with other minor revisions, a new Aristotelianism may embrace the Reductionist horn of the dilemma, whilst avoiding the worst objections to it. I call this new conception *Naturalistic Aristotelianism.*

---

[100] Taylor, 1995c and 2003.

[101] See McDowell, 1985, 1995, Putnam, 2002, 2004.

First however, I consider the Dilemma of Natural Normativity in some more detail. In this section I consider external criticisms against both reductionism and nonreductionism. That is, I consider worries and arguments against these views dependent on premises that proponents of neither view accepts. To settle on a conclusion, I regard the desiderata from the introduction to be authoritative: 'An adequate theory of practical reason saves the normative appearances through a naturalistic explanation' (3.1.). Contrary to received wisdom, I conclude that there is a way between the horns of the dilemma that emphasizes the importance of a reductive identification, without throwing overboard all that ethics has become through centuries of reflective ethical discourse. In the second section, I reconceptualize the idea of a life-form (3.2.) In the third and final section I suggest a distinction between first and second nature, and investigate their theoretical differences (3.3.).

3.1. The Dilemma of Natural Normativity

On the basis of my reading of the literature concerning the normativity of nature, these four worries constitute the main reasons why reductionism is conceived to be wrongheaded:

(i)   On a reductionist construal of Aristotelian Naturalism, the relata of the Aristotelian categoricals that articulate normative significance would have to be reduced to determinate, empirically tractable concepts. If that reduction is carried through, Aristotelian Naturalism is committed to a comprehensive range of normative predictions. It seems probable that some predictions would contradict our considered normative convictions, regardless of how the identity conditions for the relata of Aristotelian categoricals are spelled out. This concern about the normative consequences of endorsing a determinate decision procedure for determining the truth value of evaluative judgments constitutes a deep worry for reductionism.[102]

(ii)   A second concern is that a determinate rule for the derivation of evaluative truth from nature will do violence to ethical thought. It appears that ethical inquiry without recourse to the interpretation of human self-understanding inevitably bypasses important dimensions of ethical thought. It may seem like this will amount to something like a 'vulgar scientistic' dissolution of ethical thought, or a 'crude empiricist' or biologistic mode of

---

[102] This worry is the most common response to Aristotelian Naturalism, MacIntyre, (2002), Lenman, (2005), Millum, (2006), Odenbaugh, (2017).

thinking that inevitably leads to an 'evolutionary ethics', or something equally unattractive and inhumane.[103]

(iii)   A third worry concerns authenticity and individuality. On Aristotelian Naturalism, individuals are evaluated on the basis of their life-form. On many modern views, however, the most important thing about persons is what makes them special, not what is shared. The very idea of considering individuals on the basis of categories appears to contradict some of our deepest intuitions about authenticity and individuality. A theory that contradicts these values would be deeply alienating.

(iv)   The final concern is that Aristotelian Naturalism entails suppression of freedom. The worry finds an extreme expression in the existentialism of freedom famously articulated by Sartre in the quote: "existence precedes essence". By this Sarte meant to affirm the plasticity of human nature and the possibility every human being has to create herself according to her own radically free will. Aristotelian Naturalism asserts that individuals have a first nature that sets constraints on what they are or could be, and even what they should do, and how they should be like. According to Platonists, neo-Kantians and existentialists, first nature cannot be normative like this. According to them, man is a self-interpreting animal.[104] First nature draws some limits, but second nature shows the point.

The four concerns constitute deep reasons to embrace the nonreductionist horn of the dilemma.[105] However, there are great obstacles to this horn as well. I shall present one: the problem of *Nonreductive Ethical Supervenience*. All Aristotelian Naturalists, reductionist and nonreductionist alike, aims to ground normativity in nature. If the relation is not identity, however, it is unclear whether the grounding relation can preserve the causal efficacy of normative properties. Since the aim of this thesis is to explain normativity naturalistically, this ambiguity must be dispelled. Normative properties must be shown to be causally efficacious.

To establish that our best understanding of life is normative, and to establish that we ought to be ontologically committed to a pervasive objective natural normativity, are two different things. Humeans might accept that the best conception of living beings is normative, yet hold that we project the normative aspect of our representations onto living beings for

---

[103] These descriptons are from Life and Action, 31. See Kitcher (1999), Millum (2006) and Odenbaugh for more on this.

[104] Taylor, 1985a, 45. This is also the point of McDowell's story of the rational wolf, see (2.4).

[105] These are appearances I believe motivate nonreductionist naturalists to reject reductionism. I discuss each worry in more detail throughout the thesis.

them to be intelligible to us. The strongest argument for this anti-realist conclusion is based on parsimony considerations. Hume's original version of the argument will do fine for our purposes:

> Take any action allow'd to be vicious: Willful murder, for instance. Examine it in all its lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call vice. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other fact of the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, toward the action.[106]

The gist of the argument is that properties that don't make a causal difference is dispensible in our understanding of the world. Hence, in order for the idea of natural normativity to warrant ontological commitment, it must make a causal difference. Otherwise, it's a mere epiphenomena, on the same footing as supernatural properties like witches and gods. Hence normative properties must be causally efficacious in order for us to have a good reason to believe that they exist objectively.

Jeagwon Kim has given a forceful argument demonstrating that nonreductionist supervenience relations cannot preserve the causal efficacy of nonreductive properties.[107] Kim's original argument was given in the context of the philosophy of mind, but I believe that the argument is valid in this context too.

The main premise is the principle of the 'causal closure of the physical domain'. This principle states that all physical effects have sufficient physical causes.[108] This principle is

---

[106] *Treatise Of Human Nature*, 468-69. Variations of this argument have been propounded by many subjectivists. Olson attributes a version of the argument to Bertrand Russell on the basis of a 1922 lecture entitled 'Is there an Absolute Good'. R. M. Hare articulated a veriety of the same argument which J. L. Mackie quotes the full length of approvingly (1977, 21). The argument was also taken up and redressed by Gilbert Harman (1977, 3-10).

[107] Sometimes referred to as the 'exclusion problem', or 'the supervenience argument'. The argument was first presented (Kim, 1992). Since then it has been further elaborated. Kim has modified it a number of times to account for criticism. I rely on a presentation given in the book *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough* (2005).

[108] The phrase 'all physical effects have sufficient causes' is meant to be read as ruling out overdetermination. If effect e has a sufficient cause c, then by occams razor other possible effect are ruled out if there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant other causes. Many nonreductionists reject this assumption in the argument. Unfortunately I cannot give a compelling argument to believe that it is true here.

taken to be a robust empirical hypothesis supported by conservation laws like the second law of thermodynamics, and the extraordinarily precise predictions of modern physics.

In order for a nonreductive normative property N to enjoy substantial existence and a prospective career in naturalistic explanations, it must supervene on physical properties and have causal powers. In order for N to have causal powers it must be possible for N to cause either an effect on a nonreductive property, say N*, or a physical property, say P*. The principle of the causal closure of the physical domain immediately rules out N causing P*, since the principle states that all physical effects have sufficient physical causes. We must therefore account for how N can bring about N* in order for us to retain N in a naturalistic ontology.

Suppose N is realized by physical state P, that N is not identical to P, and that N has the causal power to bring about N* which is realized by P*.

N —> N*

↑   ↑

P   P*
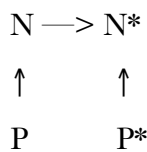
The devastating question then, is: if N causes N*, what brings about P*? Neither N nor N* can bring about P*, this is ruled out by the causal closure of the physical domain. There is no downward causation. It seems that if N brings about N*, then the physical realizer of N, namely P, must cause P*.

N —> N*

↑   ↑

P —> P*
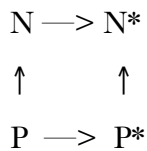
Now, if this is the case, P* is sufficient to bring about N*, in virtue of being its realizer. If that is the case, N* now has two causes: a normative cause N, and a physical realizer cause P*. Since both of these causes are sufficient in and of themselves, we have a case of overdetermination.

At this point of the argument, another premise is necessary, the principle of causal exclusion: 'If an event e has a sufficient cause c at t, no event at t distinct from c can be a cause of e'.[109] Now, there might be some genuine cases of causal overdetermination, but to

---

[109] An exception is the (perhaps) possible case of genuine causal overdetermination. It should also be mentioned that this principle can be broadened to similar relations like constitutivity or counterfactual dependence.

think that all instances of normative causation are genuine cases of overdetermination is far-fetched.[110] Therefore one of the causes must be excluded.

If P* is excluded as the cause of N*, then N* is without a physical realizer supervenience base. That would contradict the principle of physical supervenience. Therefore, P* must be kept as a cause of N*, and consequently N can be excluded as the cause of N*. The emerging picture then, is a picture of supervenient normative properties as epiphenomenal.

$$N \qquad N*$$
$$\uparrow \qquad \uparrow$$
$$P \longrightarrow P*$$
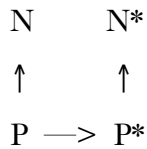
Since naturalism cannot support the existence of epiphenomenal properties, this view threatens eliminativism. In order to keep normative properties in our ontology, we must reject nonreductive physicalism and opt for reductive physicalism.[111] More specifically, Aristotelian Naturalism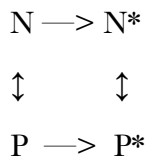 should endorse a type physicalist view of reduction in which normative property types are identical to physical realizer types in the same way as 'heat is mean molecular energy'.[112] If that view is adopted, then N is causally efficacious in virtue of being a physical property P with P's causal efficacies.

$$N \longrightarrow N*$$
$$\updownarrow \qquad \updownarrow$$
$$P \longrightarrow P*$$

The worrysome implication of this view is that all properties not readily identifiable with some homogeneous 'type' of physical property cannot have a metaphysically respectable 'kind' of causal power. The result is that all 'multiply realizable' functional properties will have to be reductively identified with disjunctive physical properties, which will then blow up the property to these different pieces, in which case the property itself cannot have a homogeneous causal core. In such cases, the property should be eliminated.

---

[110] If all cases of normative causation are overdetermined, a normative property N must necessarily by accompanied by a physical state P, and this means that N and P are coextensive. According to a widely endorsed ontological principle, sometimes called 'Hume's dictum', distinct necessary coextensive properties are 'queer' (Olson, 2014, 92). Their relation to each other, 'cry out for explanation'. It surely seems as if it would be much more natural to say that if a property is necessarily coextensive with another, that is because it is the *same* property.

[111] There are many variants of reduction. Kim seems somewhat torn as to what kind to go for, therefore the following view of reduction I advocate is not attributable to Kim.

[112] These identities are the kind of substantive a posteriori identities made famous by Soul Kripke in *Naming and Necessity*.

It has been argued that considerations like these lead straight to the elimination of all mental states. What is more, it has been argued that the exclusion argument generalizes to all apparently nonreductive properties.[113] At this juncture it is important to note that the causal homogeneity of a property is a matter of degree proportionate to the granularity of the property. Properties like 'gold' are instantiated by objects at the fine grained level of atoms. Here, the difference between the instantiations of gold are minuscular. More course-grained properties, on the other hand, can be instantiated by objects differing more widely in their spatiotemporal constitution and causal efficacies, without that jettisoning the metaphysical status of the property. The very identity criteria of course-grained properties are wider. Instantiations of the property 'star' can vary in size and to a certain degree their physical constitution without that jettisoning the causal core of the concept. Certainly, different instantiations of stars have slightly differing causal powers, from a cosmic perspective. But relative to the coarse-grained granularity level of the property, the differences are so slight that the property still carries metaphysical significance.

With the idea of a reasonable degree of causal homogeneity proportionate to granularity, the worry about the disjunctive nature of 'multiply realizable'[114] functional properties can be explained away in most important cases. Most important for the purposes of this essay is that sensations, emotions, certain perceptual states, and dispositions to act, characterized at a specific level of granularity, are identifiable with physical states at a corresponding level of granularity.[115]

Another worry about type physicalism is that the identification of some macroproperty with a combination of microproperties implies the elimination of the macroproperty in favor of the combination of microphysical properties from parsimony considerations; e.g., if a normative property N is identical to a physical state P, why keep both N and P in the ontology? Why not say instead that P causes P*, and eliminate all normative properties from our ontology based on parsimony considerations? Why not eliminate all macroproperties

---

[113] See Block, 2003.

[114] With granularity in view, it becomes evident that most, if not all, biological functional properties are not multiply realizable in any respect different then all slightly coarse-grain properties are. Proponents of multiple realizability would have to concede that all other properties than the different compounds of the elementary table are multiply realizable, which of course rids the concept of any significance. Unfortunately I cannot argue the point in any detail here, but see Bechtel and Mundale (1999).

[115] I will take up this issue in chapter 5.

from our ontology? Why not go all the way to eliminating all objects and properties that are not quarks and bosons and compositions of these microphysical types?[116]

P —> P*

The eliminativist idea that a single, unitary, austere, full representation of the world in terms of a desert landscape ontology of microproperties and their compositions is, arguably, not sustainable.[117] Changing concepts for the purpose at hand is like using different maps to navigate the same terrain. When in London, different maps will be helpful depending on one's preferred logistical choice. For tourists navigating by foot, a map highlighting museums and impressive buildings is probably best. Students cycling around might want a cleaner map showing major streets and smaller crannies and trails where one gets by with a bike, but not by car. Those traveling by car only need to have the roads and streets pinned down. All these maps may be reduced to an austere microphysical object map, robbed of all street-names and predicates. Therefore we can say that the maps are objectively true, at the same time as they are modified by our concerns to be explanatory in the relevant senses.[118] Objectivity does not preclude that one shall be involved in various conceptualizations of the same content, both in terms of concepts denoting micro and macroproperties.[119] Identification, according to a reasonable naturalism does not imply elimination.

On my view, the problem of Nonreductive Ethical Supervenience shows that the nonreductionist horn of the dilemma cannot support a conception of the Good, or natural goodness as objective. Without the objectivity of the two concepts of good, there can be no objective practical reasons. If, on the other hand, it turns out that human nature includes a substantial set of traits that necessarily implies that a set of ends are objective human Goods, then an Aristotelian Theory of Reasons would have a firm and determinate grounding in nature. The objectivity of practical reasons would have been explained.[120]

---

[116] See Merricks, 2001.

[117] Various underdetermination arguments are supposed to warrant this conclusion. Putnams argument from conceptual relativity is one prominent example (2004, 39).

[118] The idea of an analogy between maps and theory is Kitcher's *Science, Truth and Democracy* (2001). See chapter 5 for a more detailed argument.

[119] This is in accord with Bernard Williams idea of an 'absolute conception of the world' (1978, 1985), and Adrian Moore's explication and further development of that view of objectivity (2007, 27, 1997).

[120] As David Lewis notes, if this can be done we could confidently assert a realism about values (1989, 134). Lewis also makes a point out of the fact that the Good in this sense would be objective in the sense J. L. Mackie intended the term (1977, 40).

Many Aristotelians see the conceived need for external grounding as wrongheaded. McDowell regards the reading of Aristotle on which this is his project as a 'historical monstrosity'. He writes: "on a better understanding of Aristotle's picture, the only standpoint at which someone can address the question of whether reasons are genuine is one that she occupies precisely because she has a specific ethical outlook."[121]

The same way nonreductionists see the conceived need for grounding to be born from unnecessary worries, I believe the resistance to the idea of grounding stems from misconceptions about the justification of reduction and the possibility of so called 'quietism' about ontology. Unfortunately, the debate over quietism and ontology is too deep for me to go into here,[122] however, the misunderstanding about reduction can be clarified fairly easily. My claim is that McDowell conflates ontological grounding with the semantic/epistemic justification of the reductive identification it presupposes. In what follows, I identify and rectify this faulty understanding of reduction.

McDowell clearly believes that there is a fallacy in the very idea of an identification between natural and normative properties.[123] This is the so called 'naturalistic fallacy' according to which it is illegitimate to identify a normative property with a natural property. The naturalistic fallacy was coined by G. E. Moore on the basis of a line of reasoning called 'the open question argument'.

According to the open question argument, the reductive identification of a normative property with a natural property is an instance of a supposed *analytic truth*.[124] For instance, utilitarians sometimes assert that 'goodness' is 'pleasure'. Now, if this is to be an analytic truth, it cannot be possible to doubt whether goodness is pleasure once these concepts are fully understood. It is possible, however, to stand back and assess whether pleasure really is good. This suggests that the proposition "'goodness' is 'pleasure'" is not an analytic truth.

---

[121] McDowell, 1994, 80. Hursthouse and Thompson follows McDowell on this point, On Virtue Ethics, 165, Life and Action, 31.

[122] However, I take the metaphysical conception I advocate to be more open about how normativity is to be conceived. Even if it turns out that quietism is warranted, and ontological explanation unnecessary, the admission of an ontological dimension to the explanation of normativity in no way undermines the viability of the theory. Though ontological anxieties are irrational, many reasonable people experience it. Even if ontology is only fruitful to calm anxious people of this sort and make them open to the idea of normative reasons, it is still worth articulating a theory of this sort.

[123] In the introduction to *Mind and World*, McDowell is explicit that it is the naturalistic fallacy he is avoiding when he seeks to locate the conceptual capacities that enables reasoning in second nature as opposed to first nature (1994, xx). He also gives a simplified version of the open question argument in (1995, 155).

[124] By analytic truth I mean the kind of truth in which the sum of the angles of a triangle in euclidean space is 180 degrees. I follow Darwall, Gibbard and Railton, (1992, 116-20) and Baldwin, (2013) in the exposition of the argument.

The open-question argument conways an important insight: Being natural is not sufficient for being good. Furthermore, it expresses our fundamental conviction that goodness needs to be action-guiding: We do not believe that something is good if we can find no reason to pursue it.[125] However, the argument is often claimed to demonstrate a far stronger conclusion, namely that something being natural is sufficient reason to think that it cannot be good.[126] This latter claim is not warranted by the argument. This interpretation of the naturalistic fallacy is itself fallacious.

What the argument does show is that the naturalistic reduction is not an analytic truth in the sense of full synonymy of meaning; but then again, no interesting truths are analytic in this sense, not even that bachelors are unmarried men.[127] Meanings generally are not platonic entities with fully determinate identity conditions. Predicates denoting natural properties generally don't enjoy the precise identity criteria of sets and numbers. If they do, it is not in virtue of agreed upon definitions. Therefore there are no analytical truths about natural kind predicates.

However, there are other reductive identity truths, what we might call synthetic identity truths. To see how a synthetic identity truth can be meaning-preserving, consider the direct reference theory of meaning. On this theory semantic and metaphysical equivalence is distinguished. We may mean different things by Superman and Clark Kent, or heat and mean molecular energy, as these terms are not synonymous; but as it turns out, their referent is the same. In ordinary discourse, concepts are thrown around in unsystematic and inconsistent ways. When these concepts are analyzed and reconstructed in terms of their referents, commonsense intuitions may be violated, but this is just because ordinary folk may not have an accurate understanding of the nature of the concepts they use. One may associate pure water with other things than H2O. However, this does not make the reductive analysis of pure water in terms of H2O fallacious. The situation is the same with the reduction of goodness to pleasure.

The reduction I propose is to be evaluated in reflective equilibrium, just like any synthetic reductive identification. The question then is: Does this identification explain the

---

[125] This point owes to Darwall, Gibbard and Railton, (1992, 118).

[126] Parfit subscribes to a view like this. He thinks that normative facts are fundamentally different from natural facts. Consequently he believes that naturalistic reduction is impossible. He calls this 'the normativity objection'. However, he admits that it would be unconcinving to naturalists. (2011, 524-6). The reason is that it is blatantly question-begging.

[127] See Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricsm" (1953).

normative appearances adequately?[128] At this point the reductionist is in the same Neurathian boat as the nonreductionist. Reductionists generally don't believe that their substantive identity claims are justified without argument. The identification is thought to be an inference to the best explanation of the continuity of the two properties in question. If our considered convictions about the nature of normativity contradicts the proposed identification, the inference is not warranted. Hence, the difference between nonreductionist coherentism and reductionist naturalistic coherentism is chiefly a difference in scope. The reductionist aims to justify a theory of normative reasons in one fell swoop, whereas nonreductionist (particularists) like McDowell reflect on the justification of normative judgments piecemeal. Perhaps the *bald naturalism* McDowell opposes is unreasonable, but the Quinean externalist naturalism on the basis of which I propose an Aristotelian reductionism is not.

Since the inference to the truth of the reductive identification is dependent on background beliefs and assumptions about the nature of reality and normativity I must illustrate that the identification I favor fits within a naturalistic worldview and accommodates the normative appearances. This includes answering the four objections to reductionism noted earlier in this section. If any of them are valid objections to the reductive view, the theory fails to explain something we may recognize as normative reasons. Inwhat follows I initiate the revisions necessary to answer the objections and at the same time allow for a naturalistic reductionism.

3.2. Life-Form and Identity

It is a common problem for all empirical theories that some instances fit worse than others in a category intended to cover a broad extension. The life-form concept intended to cover the full range of human beings is no exception. In fact, in this case the categorization may feel especially unfair. No-one wants to be 'judged', or 'put in a box'. Foot anticipated this dissatisfaction:

> There will surely be objection to the idea that a natural form of life
> characteristic of humankind could determine what you or I ought to do. What does it
> matter to me what species I belong to? Should we not protest on behalf of

---

[128] See (Brink, 2003) and (Lewis, 1989).

individuality and creativity against bringing in the human species when asking what I myself—this particular person—should do?[129]

The objection from individuality asks why individuals should take a natural standard derived from a general life-form as authoritative. Surely, there is more to every single individual than can possibly be said about a species as a whole. Why fixate on the species level? Is there a principled reason to evaluate individuals according to their species life-form instead of according to the local life-form of their linguistic community, or perhaps the more general life-form of mammals as such?

As far as I can tell, Foot is not adamant that individuals ought only to be evaluated against their species. As Foot points out, urban foxes engage in different practices, inhabit a different habitat, and have different needs, than foxes in the wild.[130] And as Hursthouse emphasizes, the leader-of-the-pack wolf serves a different function in the group than the other pack-members. If the leader displayed the same behaviour as a regular pack-member, he would be displaying a defect *qua* leader.[131] Though both authors make use of the species category as the paradigm for life-forms, they allow for contextualized conceptions of life-forms.[132]

However, an important question unaddressed by Aristotelian Naturalists is the question of multiple life-form attributions for the same individual. Here one may either suppose that every individual ought to be characterized by only one life-form, or one may opt for pluralism about life-form attributions for the same individual. I believe pluralism is the most defensible answer. A cat isn't either a cat or a housecat. It is a cat, and in addition a housecat. This pluralism opens the door to a multi-layered conception of individuals. I believe the architectonic analogy to foundations and added structures is appropriate here. At a very fundamental level, a living being is alive. At a higher level, it is a member of a species. Somewhat higher, it inhabits a natural habitat and belongs to a group. It is not obvious whether all life-forms are comparable to each other in terms of how fundamental they are, but it is not necessary to answer this question at present.

---

[129] Foot, Natural Goodness, 37, see also Copp and Sobel, 2004, 537.

[130] Voorheave, 2009, 98.

[131] On Virtue Ethics, 212.

[132] Natural Goodness, 34, On Virtue Ethics, 203.

The set of life-forms that can truthfully be attributed to an individual constitute the *identity* of the individual. Coarse-grained descriptions of individuals in terms of one or two general/fundamental life-forms we may call '*thin descriptions*'. Deeper, more particular, fine-grain descriptions in terms of many life-forms we may call '*thick descriptions*'. A thick description of persons characterize them as more then members of the species homo-sapiens. It characterize them as relatives, role-havers, activity-doers with cultures, subcultures, affiliatons, memberships, interests, religions and more besides.

The explosion of the life-form concept entails a corresponding multitude of natural-histories and Aristotelian categoricals about these life-forms. This introduces the possibility of evaluating individuals according to different levels of granularity. Peter may be evaluated coarsely: as a 21st. century middle-aged human. Or he may be described thickly: as a 34-year-old husband and father of three, living in Copenhagen, working as an engineer and who enjoys classic rock music, crime-shows and classical novels. On the basis of the thick description of Peter, we may attribute a handful of life-form categories to him. On the basis of a pool of natural historical knowledge about engineers, Danes, middle-aged fathers etc. we may establish a conception of the Good for these life-forms, and the relations of dependence within the life-cycle of the characteristic ways of leading those kinds of lives. It seems like we could get a grip on what would be Good for a person like Peter. If all goes well, thick descriptions of individuals reveal the possibility of evaluating individuals in a fine-grained manner that seems to respect the individuality of persons.

Here is how an evaluation of Peter might look like. In virtue of being a human being, we may say that it is bad for Peter that he suffers a chronic back-pain. In virtue of being a father, we may say that he is doing good, since his kids are healthy, do well in school, and have good friends. At work, Peter is respected by his peers, because he does a good job. He also plays in a band with friends from work. However, since all the others like jazz, the band seldom gets to play any rock music, so Peter is a bit alienated in that outfit, but stays on because he enjoys playing the guitar. Assuming the thick description of Peter is correct and that the right life-forms were attributed to him, he is doing well overall, but it would be even better for Peter if his bandmates came around to playing classic rock music. We could get an even better grip on Peter's situation and his relative goodness, or well-being if the initial thick description was extended. However, this quick sample-evaluation of Peter, I hope, shows that this type of evaluation is not unnatural or uncommon. On the contrary, I think it closely resembles common reasoning patterns in everyday practices of evaluative description.

Now, let us assess the objection from individuality in light of these refinements. The objection said that there is something wrong with evaluating someone like Peter according to a general life-form category. It is wrong because Peter is a whole lot more than what may be captured by a single general life-form category like his species. Hence, any evaluation of Peter solely on the basis of the natural standard for his species life-form category is bound to be alienating. The objection rightly insists that individuals are special and that wide categories, or 'boxes', distorts their identities by construing them in a 'thin' way. However, with the refined conception of identity in hand, and a granular pluralism about the attribution of life-form concepts to individuals, the objection from individuality can be answered.

To see this, consider the possibility of encapsulating the full range of the multiple layers of life-form concepts that together exhaust every ethically salient aspect of Peter's identity. Being a finite being, Peter may conceivably be adequately described by an extensive, but finite, thick description, on the basis of which an exhaustive set of life-form attributions may be given. Now, the very possibility of evaluating Peter in a way that takes into account all salient aspects of his being means that Naturalistic Aristotelianism can be used to evaluate individuals in light of their full individuality. This entails that the sense of the objection misses the mark on the refined Aristotelianism on which individuals are considered according to a wide array of life-forms. Since all salient aspects of an identity can be taken into account in the theory, there cannot be an objection to Naturalistic Aristotelianism on the basis of a distorted identity.

However, a second sense of the objection seems to pose problems for Naturalistic Aristotelianism. That is the sense in which it may seem wrong to evaluate Peter on the basis of things external to himself. It may seem illegitimate to evaluate an individual on the basis of a set of normative standards derived from a normative interpretation of the natural histories of life-forms, because these histories are generated by other beings and their histories and traits. This sense of the importance and sanctity of individuality may be associated with a kind of Romanticism according to which an individual like Peter ought only to be evaluated according to a hyper-contextualized sense of identity,[133] a sense of identity on which no life-form may be attributed to an individual in the modular, dissociated form in which it may also apply to others. On this holistic picture, the only true life-form category that applies to Peter is the 'Peter life-form'.

---

[133] For more on Romanticism and individuality, see (Taylor, 1985c chapter 20-1, 355-90).

To fully repudiate this Romanticist sense of the objection from individuality requires more argument than there is room for here. Nevertheless, I want to give two reasons for resisting the Romanticist conception. Romanticism buys individuality at a high price. The dissociation of one's identity from everyone else's entails a thoroughgoing alienation which makes impossible any comparative evaluative judgments. The thorough affirmation of individuality in this radical sense entails evaluative nihilism. For this reason, the standpoint from which the romanticist sense of the objection can be given is unstable as a moral point of view, and hence unsuitable as a basis for moral critique. The second more serious reason is that radical individuality entails a necessary loss of self-understanding. Without the possibility of thinking about oneself through meaningful concepts derived from the history of humankind, intelligible self-understanding is impossible.[134] Through what medium could that understanding take shape? If no intelligible answer can be given, I believe it is fair to say that this objection merely express a longing for an ideal of perfect evaluation that cannot be reached, similar to the Cartesian ideal of absolute certainty.

3.3. First and Second Nature

The explosion of the life-form concept and the introduction of a multi-layered concept of identity for individuals deflect the objection from individuality. However, it may seem that the revision staves off those worries only to invite epistemological and metaphysical conundrums. The explosion of the life-form concept entails that there will be a manifold of life-form concepts that are attributable to individuals. This introduces a worry about the objectivity of Naturalistic Aristotelianism. Within the multitude of life-forms, it seems plausible that one or more life-forms will be non-objective. For instance, 'socialist' seem prima facie to be an important constituent life-form for the identity of many persons. It is a life-form without which an Aristotelianism could not evaluate a broad range of persons adequately. Simultaneously, 'socialist' is a life-form that is unlike, for instance, species life-forms in many respects. Most importantly, 'socialist' does not appear to be a natural kind. The attribution-conditions of that life-form does not seem to be fully determinate, and the category does not seem to cut nature at its joints. Because the central concepts of Naturalistic Aristotelianism

---

[134] See (Taylor, 1985a, 35) for a full argument. Also, remember Thompson's argument about the contingent intelligibility of vital concepts on historical considerations from (1.2) above.

are interrelated, it follows from the truth of this plausible premise that the objectivity of the view is under threat.

In this section, I address the objectivity of the life-form concept as this is understood in Naturalistic Aristotelianism. This is the ancient question of whether life-form categories are distinctions in nature that are true, as the greeks said, in virtue of custom, convention and law, or whether they are true in virtue of the nature of things.[135] Even though some life-forms seem to be conventional kinds, there appear to be other life forms that are natural kinds. Even though there are many life-forms that do not fit either status category comfortably, there are paradigm life-forms of both types. On the one hand, there is the concept of a species, which seems to be a natural kind; on the other hand, there is the concept of a practice, which seem to be a paradigm of a conventional kind.

In the following, I investigate these paradigm case life-forms to see whether the appearances are true. First, I investigate whether the species life-form is a natural kind (3.3.1.). Secondly, I investigate whether practice life-forms are natural or conventional kinds (3.3.2.). And finally, I address the general question about the objectivity of Naturalistic Aristotelianism (3.3.3.).

3.3.1. Are Species Naural Kinds?

There is an ongoing debate in the philosophy of biology about how the species concept ought best to be construed. One suggested construal agreeable to Naturalistic Aristotelianism is the *phylogenetic* species concept.[136] The phylogenetic species concept takes as its starting point the idea of a *tree of life* that describes the evolutionary history of all living beings. The identity criteria of a species is determined by closeness of heredity in ancestor-descendant relationships. To determine what species an individual belongs to, one is to ask what its ancestors were like, and what place the individual has in the tree of life.[137]

This approach closely resembles a well-known theory according to which a set forms a species just in case they can successfully interbreed. However, the phylogenetic species concept avoids the modal problems of that view, as well as problems having to do with

---

[135] Hampshire, 1982, 145.

[136] I won't argue that this is the best concept for scientific purposes as they do in the philosophical debates about it in the philosophy of biology. Instead I argue that this species concept serve the purposes of Aristotelian Naturalism well.

[137] Godfrey-Smith, 2014, 104.

different species that may interbreed, but with infertile offspring. Since the heredity of every individual is knowable in principle it seems that there is a determinate place for every individual living being in the tree of life (see figure).
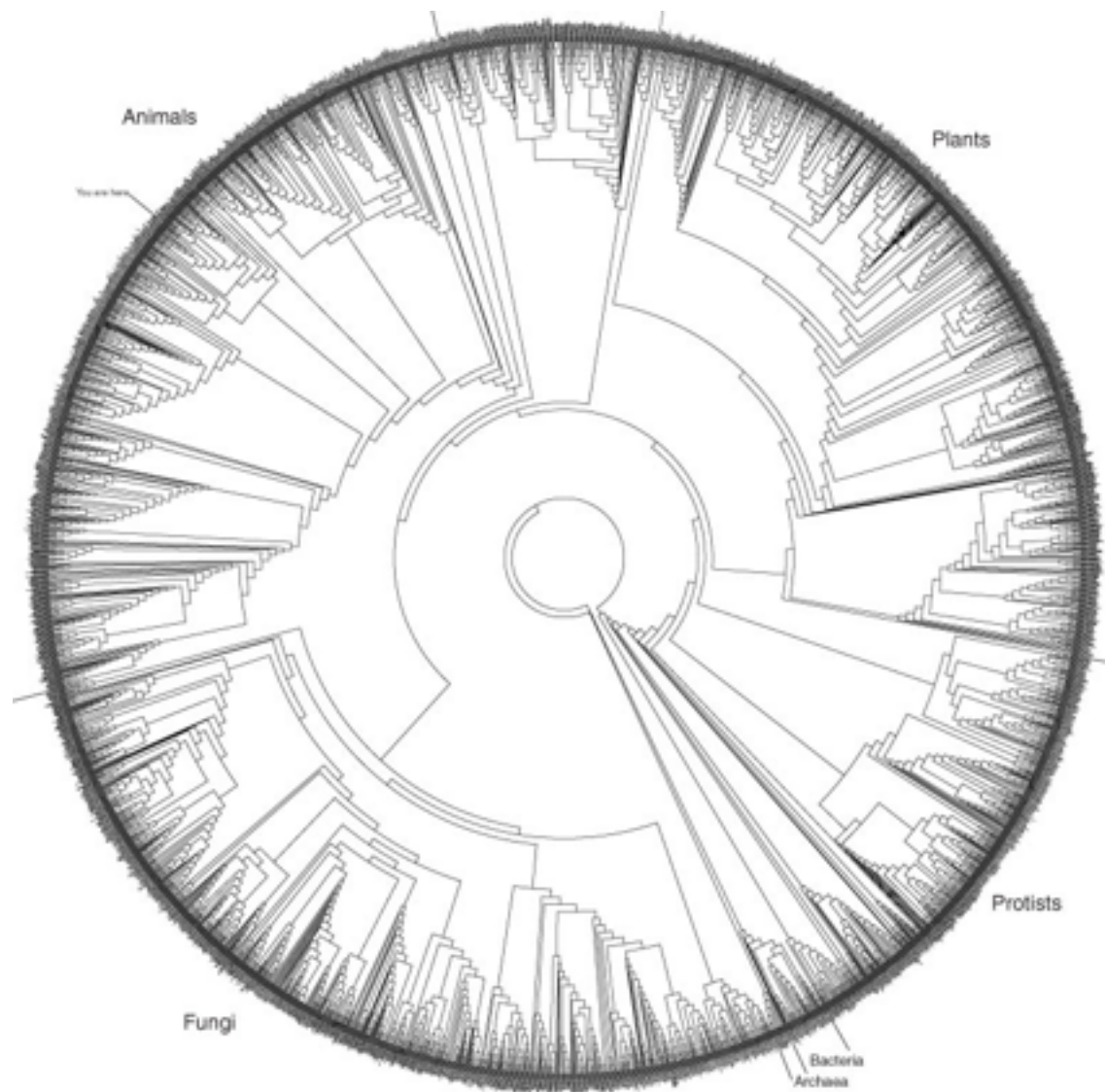
However, two worries impose themselves on this neat picture. The first worry is that species might not be natural kinds after all, since their identity criteria are extrinsic properties that aren't readily discerned from close investigation of the intrinsic properties of individuals. This thought might be worrysome to austere naturalists, but not for reasonable naturalists. Many extrinsic properties are perfectly respectable kinds that figure in biological and psychological explanations. However, there are many classes of extrinsic properties, some more dubious than others. The worry may shift its focus so as to assert that no natural kind is spatiotemporally restricted, and that species are spatiotemporally restricted kinds in virtue of their historical determination. If this is right, species are parochial kinds in nature because

they are historically linked to their ancestors, and because they are not realizable anywhere in the cosmos except where the right ancestors exists.[138]

My reply follows Philip Kitcher's suggested line, denying that species are spatiotemporally restricted classes. The phylogenetic tree is not *necessarily* parochial in the cosmos, and a particular species is not *necessarily* unique. Kitcher gives an example of a lizard species which was the result of a cross between two other species. Even if the lizard went extinct, it could re-emerge from a new cross at another time in history, at another place. Of course, the likelihood of, say, the human species re-emerging somewhere in the cosmos after a nuclear holocaust on earth with the same type of ancestry and all is slight, but it is not impossible. Fortunately, nothing more needs to be said to show that species are unrestricted classes and therefore analogous to typical natural kinds in this respect.[139] Species are historically connected, and therefore they constitute special natural kinds, but not so special that they are metaphysically suspect.

The historical nature of species implies that we ought to think about a species as a colour pallette, by which the instantiation of a species at time t1 in environment e1 may differ slightly from an instantiation of the same species at t2 in e1. This picture invites the worry that there is no clear demarcation between different species and that this makes identity criteria vague, or that the whole tree of life is conceived as one big whole with no clear divisions. If this is so, the idea that life-forms track the structures of nature is undermined.

Fortunately, there is reason to believe that there are objective structures in this vicinity. A species may be demarcated from others on the basis of 'speciation events'. Examples are events in which a descendent population becomes reproductively isolated from its ancestors, or events in which an ancestral population gives rise to two descendant populations which are reproductively isolated from each other.[140] In other words, a species becomes two when it 'branches' in the tree of life (see figure above).

I don't pretend to have demonstrated that the species concept follows objective distinctions in nature. These considerations can, however, motivate the acceptance of this proposition as an assumption in the wider context. The phylogenetic species concept employs evolutionary criteria. It is thereby rendered historical, this makes it a nice complement to the

---

[138] Hull, 1978, 349.

[139] Kitcher, 1984, 314-5

[140] Kitcher, 1984, 316.

historical aspect of natural-historical judgments.[141] Natural-historical judgments about a species also express the same slight variations in differing times and contexts as the phylogenetic species concept predicts. I conclude that the objectivity of the phylogenetic species concept is a reasonable assumption in this context and that the concept is ideally suited for the purposes of a normative-historical Aristotelianism.

3.3.2. The Concept of a Practice and Social Reality

The image I articulated of the life-forms of an individual was one of many layers, the whole set of which constituted identity. Beginning with a general life-form concept like 'species', this scheme could run deep into a manifold of life-form categories. The leader of the wolf pack is slightly different from the other wolfs in the pack, and ought to be considered in virtue of this difference. Likewise for persons: They have complex identities consisting of roles, cultural identifications, ideologies, jobs, etc. This manifold, however, seems *prima facie* to undermine the objectivity of Naturalistic Aristotelianism, since there appears to be classes of legitimate life-form attributions that may be non-objective. For ease of exposition, I focus on a single canonical class of life-form attribution that appears to contradict the objective pretensions of Naturalistic Aristotelianism: The class of life-forms that relate to the concept of a practice.

The concept of a practice may appear to invite a verbal interpretation. A practice is something a person does— not something a person *is*. This appearance is easily undermined by indicating that most verbal readings of a practice can be paraphrased to a noun reading. For example, 'John is sailing', may be paraphrased as, 'John is a sailor', but only if it is true that sailing is 'something John does'. As Aristotle puts it, 'people become builders by building and musicians by playing instruments (NE1103a34-5). There is wisdom in the old proverb, 'A man is what he does', and the interchangability of the verb and noun interpretations of the concept of a practice affirms that wisdom. It would be false to say of John that he is a sailor if he never sat foot on a sailboat in his life, and it would be false to say of John that he is a greenhorn if he went out sailing every weekend. A practice is something that is instanced by a person, and insofar as a person instantiates a practice, the practice is part of the identity of that person. Therefore, a practice may be attributable to a person as a life-form. Surface grammar indicates a connection too. We say 'it is his practice to do such and such' in a

---

[141] However, not to Foot's conception of the determination of Aristotelian categoricals.

manner reminiscent of saying 'It is his nature to do such and such'. Moreover, groups with a strict practice— such as elites in the military, great athletes, or stringent monks— may elicit an inclination in us to say that 'they are another species of men'. Just like with species life-forms, it is possible to formulate natural-historical judgments about practice life-forms, such as 'Sailors dont get seasick', 'Tibetan buddhists habitually meditate', etc.[142]

The concept of a life-form as this concept figures in Wittgenstein is more closely related to the concept of a practice than the concept of a species is. In the *Philosophical Investigations* (1951), Wittgenstein presents an argument that has been taken to demonstrate that rule-following is not a mental act of interpretation (§201). To grasp a rule is not to interpret it correctly; rather it is to take part in a 'form of life' (§241). A form of life in this sense is constituted by inarticulate meanings, underlying norms and tacit knowledge, and it is this I want to call a practice.[143] House-building, bridle-making, eating, science, buddhist traditions, political activism, etc., are all examples of practices in this sense.[144]

It is these 'conventions' that make sense of the activitites that we associate with a given practice, and the practice is not coherent without these constitutive conventions. To see this point, the oversimplified example of chess-playing may help. To attribute the practice of chess-playing to a person essentially means attributing the intention of desiring to win within the rules of the game. A person moving about pieces arbitrarily or according to a rule not recognized by any chess-playing-community is not practicing chess. Consequently, if there were no persons playing chess by the rules with the desire to win, there would be no chess.[145]

All practices have this intentional structure, but the inarticulate meanings, implicit norms and tacit knowledge are rarely as expressly codifiable as the rules of chess. Because of this intricate character of practices, it is not possible to adequately understand them in a merely mechanistic manner. Moreover, the understanding constitutive of a practice is often inarticulate. In those cases it is a tacit convention to which all participants unconsciously agree. However, these understandings can be brought out by thick descriptions involving

---

[142] Thompson indicates the possibility of assuming practices under the logical form of a life-form concept and the corresponding possibility of formulating natural-historical judgments about them, although he does this in a hesitant manner *Life and Action*, 162, 166.

[143] Rouse, 2007, 503.

[144] Rouse, 2007, 499.

[145] Taylor, 1985b, 34.

intentional vocabulary describing the underlying background of the practice for those who engage and identity with it.[146]

This entails that understanding of the concept of a practice is metaphysically and epistemologically dependent on meaning or intentionality. Arguably, this entails that practices cannot be understood from an absolute objective point of view.[147] The reason is that the constitutive meanings underlying a practice are 'underdetermined by the evidence'. Any possible amount of empirical evidence would support multiple interpretations of the underlying meanings constituting the practice. Furthermore, practices are multiply realizable. The extension of any particular practice category will be highly disjunctive, since the truth value of attributions of practice-identification to a person is independent of a determinate set of physically homogeneous truth conditions. Moreover, observation of properties associated with any given practice instance does not admit of inductive inferences to lawlike generalizations the same way observation of natural kind instances do. For these reasons, and more besides, the concept of a practice does not seem to satisfy the conditions for natural kindhood. Rather, practices are pieces of 'social reality', dependent on a way of life and a point of view. Hence, aspects of identity that invoke the concept of a practice are not objective in the sense of absolute objectivity.[148]

3.3.3. A Distinction in the Notion of Identity

In the two previous sub-sections I have shown that there are two canonical types of life-form concepts that are both equally indispensible, yet have different theoretical statuses. The first canonical life-form type was that of a species, the second was that of a practice. I argued that the former is a natural kind concept whose instances may be investigated experimentally, whereas the latter is a product of convention and must be investigated hermeneutically. This means that the suspicion voiced at the outset is confirmed. There are theoretical differences in the life-form categories essential to Naturalistic Aristotelianism.

Faced with theoretical disunity, many philosophers prefer deflationist or eliminativist solutions. The crude eliminativist 'solution' is the most thoughtless. Many philosophers with

---

[146] Geertz, 1973, 5.

[147] See Quine's *Word and Object* (1960, 27-30).

[148] See Williams 1985, chapter 8 for a thorough argument to this effect.

naturalistic inclinations despair at the prospect of a hermeneutical aspect to morality, and therefore suggest a reduction of morality to the class of properties that can be easily investigated. This is the move associated with crude variants of utilitarianism on which morality is reduced to pleasure and pain, as well as approaches that emphasize the importance of happiness in the study of morality. However, this reduction hopelessly misconstrues the sphere of morality. Charles Taylor illustrates this point brilliantly with a joke:

> A drunk was looking for his latch key late one night under a street lamp. A passer-by, trying to be helpful, asked him where he had dropped it. 'Over there' answered the drunk, pointing to a dark corner. 'Then why are you looking for it here?' 'Because there's so much more light here', replied the drunk.[149]

This joke, I hope brings out the thoughtlessness of the eliminativist conception. What is Good for a person obviously depends to a large degree on what that person herself values. Only small children and very shallow people value happiness alone in the hedonic 'pleasurable mental states' sense of that concept.[150] However, the fact that it is Good for persons to obtain what they value is plausibly a fact about the psychology of human beings. Therefore this more general fact is not itself something we contingently value.[151]

The deflationist solution is less thoughtless, but not entirely satisfying either. This approach deflates the objective pretensions of ethical theory by conceiving of ethical thought as a cultural artifact supported by convention, tradition, and good will. Even though this approach is sensible, it suffers serious internal problems if ethical theory is conceived as a serious device for practical deliberation. As Bernard Williams has pointed out, ethical thought is vulnurable to reflection on this model. This means that thoughful persons can have reason to disregard morality when it counts (1985). As Foot put the point in an early paper, morality would resemble club rules or the rules of etiquette.[152] The rules of etiquette may be part of a

---

[149] Taylor, 1982, 139-40. I have partly paraphrased for brevity.

[150] As Nietzsche puts it: "If we possess our *why* of life we can put up with almost any *how*. - Man does *not* strive for happiness; only the Englishman does that." (1990, 33).

[151] Desire satisfaction theorists about well-being (the Good) often affirm the importance of what humans see as good in their lives as an argument against Aristotelians. However, there is no reason for Aristotelians to say that subjective desire satisfaction is worthless.

[152] Foot, 1972.

culture, and thereby enjoy social reality. They may even figure in perfectly legitimate explanation of behaviour. However, no one believes that these rules are true in any deep sense. If there was but a slight reason to contradict the rules of etiquette, a sensible person would.

I steer a middle course between these two unsatisfying alternatives to the problem of theoretical disunity. My proposal is to make a twofold devision in the concept of identity that delimits two distinct classes of life-forms. I call the first class 'first nature' and the second class 'second nature'.[153]

The first nature of a being constitutes its *essence*. This means that the life-forms that are constitutive of the first nature of a being explains the very existence of that being. These are the life-forms without which a being would not exist at all; they are the bedrock life-forms of identity. However, unlike modal interpretations of essences, this Aristotelian idea of first nature as essence does not imply that all instantiations of a first nature G is alike in all respects associated with G's. As Thompson has argued, the logic of natural-historical judgments constitutive of the natural histories of life-forms is not one of necessity, but rather of normativity.[154] This means that some instantiations of G will be 'lacking' in certain respects when considered against the store of natural-historical judgments that are true of G. This does not mean that the individual is not an instantiation of G. Rather, it means that something 'went wrong' for that individual.[155]

The canonical life-form concept of first nature is that of a species. It is possible that the species concept is the only class of life-forms within first nature, but it is plausible that some life-form concepts other than the species concept will be included in the first nature of persons. Perhaps race, gender or sexual orientation are first nature life-forms, or perhaps they aren't. Discussions like these will of course be very important for substantive normative ethical theories resting on the metaethics of Naturalistic Aristotelianism, but I won't engage them here.

---

[153] The idea of drawing a distinction in human nature like this is common in philosophy. It goes at least back to the greeks who spoke about the distinctions 'in the nature of things and distinctions of convention'. The social contract tradition often begin their discussions with ideas of a state of nature. Moderns examples include William's idea of 'notional and real options' (1985, 160), Flanagan's 'natural and social traits' (1991, 41), and McDowell's first and second nature (1995).

[154] This idea is of course an extension of Thompson's thinking about the concept of a life-form. However, the idea that certain life-forms constitutes the essence of living beings and explains their existence is due to Matthew Boyle (2016). Boyle calls this type of thinking about life-forms 'Aristotelian essentialism', but that seems to me to invite misinterpretations.

[155] I'll have much more to say about this in the next section.

Second nature is constituted by a broader class of life-forms. The canonical life-form class within second nature is the intersubjectively constituted social class of life-forms I spoke about as practices. Practices are ineradicable aspects of every sensible human life. The parts of identity that are constituted by practices are sometimes taken to be essential for the explanations of many beliefs and actions. Consequently, if Naturalistic Aristotelianism articulated a conception of the Good for Sarah the socialist without mentioning the denigration of capitalism and the promotion of the well-being and liberty of the working classes, Naturalistic Aristotelianism would articulate a conception of Sarah's Good that would be alienating to her. It would be a judgment without understanding. Ideological identification is a deep aspect of identity; it says something about the innermost beliefs and convictions of a person.

Second nature life-forms are life-forms without which a being would still be itself, though slightly different. Let's consider Peter again. Peter would still be Peter even if he was convinced by his friends that jazz music actually is better than rock music. His identity would be different, but he would still be Peter. Now, try to imagine that Peter is a fox. In this case, Peter's idenity would not be different, rather Peter would be no more. Of course, there are some philosophers that think the essential aspects of persons are their mental states which for them are free floating entities disconnected from the body. On those accounts, Peter can become a fox, or a stone or house or whatever. However, there is no place for those accounts within the confines of naturalism. Therefore, I won't engage that perspective. This means that we are left with an account of personal identity on which the essence of a person is first nature.

Second nature for a being is the sum of all life-forms constitutive of identity which are nonessential for the existence of that being. This means that the set of life-forms constitutive of second nature for any given being will be very inclusive. Due to the great variety of life-forms within second nature a determinate theoretical status to all life-forms within that part of identity cannot be given here. For the purposes of sketching the general theoretical framework of Naturalistic Aristotelianism it is not, however, necessary to get fully clear on this. It is sufficient to make a sweeping generalization that isn't question-begging in any problematic sense. For this reason I'll assume that second nature life-forms are mind-dependent in one sense or another. They are intentional categories infused with functions, purposes, and meanings. They may be constituted by the intentional act of an individual, the agency of a group, or by habitual actions, inarticulate practices or ancient conventions. The

capacity for language is a characteristic of the first nature of the human life-form. The capacity for speaking Russian, English, or Norwegian, on the other hand, is characteristic of second nature life-forms.

It follows from the intentional constitution of second nature life-forms that the functions and purposes of traits associated with second nature life-forms will be given intentionally too. The contents of the nature of a life-form is given by a natural history. If the life-form is constituted intentionally, the functions and purposes of the natural history of the life-form will be given intentionally too. In other words, second nature life-forms are constructed in structurally similar ways as *artifacts*. I understand the concept of an artifact in the broad sense in which Kant thought about objects as products of art. On that conception, an object or process, is an artifact if it is produced according to the representation of a concept by an intelligent being.[156] That is, artifacts are products of intelligent design. I understand intelligent design broadly so as to encompass unconscious convention and habit. This yields the following specification of the concept of an artifact: An artifact is an object or process whose identity criteria is determined by teleological ascription, and where the function or purpose is given by an intentional system or set of systems.[157]

Construction of social roles or plans for a way of life is reminiscent of a kind of engineering. A group of travelers may come to the decision that Adam ought to be the pathfinder for the expedition, because he is most knowledgeable of the terrain. Of that social role attributable to Adam— that is; being a pathfinder— one may device the following natural-historical judgment: 'The pathfinder leads the way'. If this natural-historical judgment is true, and if Adam is the pathfinder on the expedition, it follows that Adam ought to lead the way. However, the trait of 'leading the way' is not a natural trait; it is an artificial trait. Since the 'pathfinder' role is a product of intentions, the natural-historical judgments that constitutes the natural history of that role are also, at least in part, constituted intentionally. Like a computer has different functions for which it was constructed, a second nature life-form has different functions for which it was constructed to fulfill.

The problem of theoretical disunity and the threat to the objectivity of Naturalistic Aristotelianism is answered by concession and revision. The revision consists in introducing a distinction in the multi-layered conception of identity. Any living being is to be conceived as

---

[156] Kant, Critique of Judgment, 5:365.

[157] I do not intend artificial in the sense of 'being fake'.

having a first and second nature. The concession consists in admitting that a substantial class of life-form concepts are held together by non-objective criteria. That class of life-form concepts constitutes second nature. Despite this concession, I maintain that there is a class of life-form concepts that denotes natural kinds, and that ought to be conceived as being objective in an absolute sense. This class of life-form concepts constitutes first nature. This way of construing Naturalistic Aristotelianism deflects the Objection from Individuality, retains the claim to objectivity for a substantial class of life-forms, and does justice to the truth and comprehensive range of ethical concerns that are most properly conceived as hermeneutical. Later on, I explain the interplay between first and second nature and how Foot's idea in *Natural Goodness* can be reconstructed in a way that does justice to her aspirations (5.). But first I consider the prospects for a reductive explanation of natural-historical judgments.

4.   Reduction Of Natural Normativity

In the preceding chapter, I made serious revisions to the life-form concept. Thompson's brilliant idea of the natural-historical explication of the meaning of bearing a life-form explains how one may think about living beings as natural kinds. Living beings and their traits are unintelligible except through the mediation of a life-form concept, and this makes life-form concepts indispensible in our understanding of life. Thompson believes that the concept of a life-form have "the status Kant assigned to "pure" or a priori concepts".[158] As he puts it, these concepts are "with experience, but not from it".[159]

I want to urge another understanding according to which the concept of a life-form is given content from experience of the natural world. It is a concept like any other complex empirical concept tracking either the complexity of habits and conventions of social creatures, or the shape, behaviour and other traits associated with interbreeding groups in close genetic relationships. It may very well be that we begin with an innate 'folk-life-form concept' when we first investigate different forms of life, but there is room for principled and scientific refinements of these concepts. New determinations derived *from* experience of nature.[160]

As I have argued, this attractive claim to a realist Aristotelianism on which normativity is derived *from* nature, presupposes a robust identity relation between normative concepts and natural kinds. I begin the reductive analysis with Thompson's natural-historical judgments. I follow a teleological line of thinking according to which the meaning of natural-historical judgments are most adequately explicated according to the schema Foot suggested for plants and animals involving the two concepts of good; natural goodness and the Good for. However, I argue that the Good for a living being ought not to be identified with 'final ends'. Rather, the Good ought to be identified with what I call '*integrated well-functioning*', or '*flourishing*' for short. The evaluative concept of goodness is determined in relation to the Good (4.1.). Secondly, I argue that the concept of 'function' can be further reduced to non-teleological notions by an etiological analysis of function-ascription. The analysis of function-asction I adopt for the purposes of Naturalistic Aristotelianism is a specific variant of Larry

---

[158] Life and Action, 6.

[159] Slight paraphrase, Life and Action, 20.

[160] See Quine's "Natural Kinds" (1969) for a compelling narrative about the refinement of innate folk concepts to clear determinate scientific concepts through a continuing process of empirical investigation and revision.

Wright's unifying etiological analysis of function-ascription. That variant also incorporates insights from instances of the selected effects account of function by Ruth G. Millikan (1984, 1989) and Peter Godfrey-Smith (1994). The end product is a determinate and naturalistic analysis of teleological ascriptions that harmonize with the analysis of life-forms given in the preceding section (4.2.). In the last section, I bring the pieces of Naturalistic Aristotelianism together to analyze natural-historical judgments about first and second nature. I also address the concern that the marriage of natural normativity with natural selection implies a crude deformation of practical thought (4.3.).

4.1.   Natural-Historical Judgments and Natural Normativity

Recall that natural-historical judgments are judgments directly about a life-form, not about any of its individual members in particular. These judgments are familiar to us from field guides to the flora and fauna of an environment, from televised nature documentaries, biochemical treatises, and the like.[161] They are most often of the form, the S has/does F' or 'S's are/do/have F. Here are two examples: 'Gorillas live in troops', 'The horse has four legs'. In this section I focus on first nature life-form judgments for simplicity. What differences there are for second nature life-form judgments will be addressed in the third section (4.3.).

In the first chapter, I presented Thompson's argument for the irreducibility of natural-historical judgments (1.3). It was a negative dialectical type of argument consisting in the demonstration of the explanatory inadequacy of direct reduction to universal, statistical or cetaris paribus generalizations. These reductions 'explain away', the meaning of the judgment.

Natural-historical judgments are special in that they affirm descriptions that hold true of life-forms regardless of how many instances of the life-form actually satisfy the description. Numbers don't count. It is true that the oak seed grows to become an oak, even though, statistically speaking, only a small percentile of oak seedlings is successful in this enterprise. The logic of the life-form category ought to allow for property-variation of individuals within its extension. Following Frege, Thompson considers an intrinsic normative analysis to accommodate this element. On this analysis, the judgment 'gorillas live in troops' mean

---

[161] Life and Action, 66.

something like 'properly organized gorillas live in troops'.[162] On that interpretation, the natural history of the life-form itself constitutes a natural standard for particular instantiations of the life-form according to which it is judged whether they are doing well or not relative to the standard. That is the sense in which it is intrinsic. It appears to be an adequate rendering of the meaning of natural-historical judgments to interpret them normatively as expressing a natural standard of this kind for the life-form in question.

Foot elucidates the idea of the natural standard further with the introduction of another normative concept, namely the teleological 'Good for'. To explicate the normative sense of 'properly organized gorillas live in troops' her analysis emphasizes that living in troops reliably promotes what is Good for gorillas. The teleological explanation brings out relations of dependence between traits within the life of the organism. However, the analysis isn't really explanatory yet. Even though the evaluative concept in the judgment is explained on the teleological analysis, the explanation is bought at the price of the introduction of a normative teleological concept. The evaluative adjective 'properly' is explained by the normative noun 'Good for'.[163] However, since the ascription of both natural goodness and natural ends are interpretive activities dependent on previous ascriptions and a tacitly normative understanding of the natural history of the life-form, neither concept is truly explanatory with regards to the other. Because of this circularity, Thompson takes the idea of the teleological Good for to be an explanatory dead end.[164]

However, if one of these teleological notions could be reduced to a nonteleological naturalistic notion, the circle is broken. To do this, we must isolate the correct, specific meanings of the operative normative concepts in the analysis, and to fit these to an explanation that involves more transparent reducible teleological notions.

4.1.1. The Structure of Natural Normativity

The normative interpretation of the natural-historical judgments mentioned above contains the normative notion 'properly'. We may add that on Foot's analysis it may be substituted by another evaluative notion like 'excellent' or 'natural goodess or badness'. These evaluative notions express the concept of natural goodness relating to the natural standard.

---

[162] Ibid, 73.

[163] See (2.1.) for a thorough clarification of these concepts.

[164] Life and Action, 74. This was also an argument of Copp and Sobel (2004).

The tacit normative meaning it expresses is 'how something should be' or 'the way it ought to be'. As such it appears to denote a normative sense which belongs to the deontic family of normative concepts. These are notions like 'ought', 'obligation', 'should', 'wrong' etc. These notions express a categorical type of normativity. They are like orders from headquarters. The application conditions for these concepts are not dependent on what is in the self-interest of the individual evaluated. Foot explicitly asserts that what is needed for an individual to be *as it should be,* to be naturally good, may be to the *disadvantage* of that individual.[165]

Now, recall that even though this evaluative sense of normativity was ineradicable from descriptions of living beings, it does not have *normative authority in itself* for rational beings. This was the moral we drew from the story of the rational wolf. Rational beings can stand back and ask themselves whether the Good for them is to be good in the evaluative sense. The idea that; 'the gorilla is *obligated* in virtue of its gorilla-nature to live in a troop' is both opaque, and appears off somehow. The Foot of "Moral Beliefs" (1958), would accuse the Foot of *Natural Goodness* of perpetrating a fraud in arguing that one ought to respect the demands of justice, if there is no conceivable benefit to be gotten from it, except satisfying the normative demands of the natural standards associated with 'the forms themselves'.[166]

I side with Foot from "Moral Beliefs" on this issue. The normativity that explains goodness ought to be conceived as mere self-interested prudential normativity. Therefore, the normative authority of evaluative goodness from the perspective of the individual evaluated must be merely derivative, drawn from the prudential normativity of the Good. In order for some trait to be good, it must be vindicated by the sword of instrumental rationality.

Following Foot's account of plants and animals, I will analyze natural goodness in terms of the concept of the 'Good'. The Good in this sense signifies a nonmoral *prudential* normativity associated with self-interest and benefit from the first personal point of view. What is Good for an individual creature in this sense is what would benefit that particular creature, regardless of what the evaluative natural standard derived from the nature of it's kind is. The amoralist or sceptic might respect the requirement of practical rationality aimed at the Good for himself, but not if this notion is infused with a moralized meaning.[167] Hence, it is of paramount important for Naturalistic Aristotelianism that the concept of the Good is

---

[165] Disadvantage is her word, see Natural Goodness, 33, footnote 13.

[166] Foot, 1958, 100.

[167] Williams, 1985, 32.

not moralized. By prudential normativity I intend a conception of the Good in this self-interested sense.

4.1.2. The Good as Perfection

What sense of the Good explains the goodness of the diverse traits represented in natural-historical judgments? My view is that the only way to make sense of any kind of neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism is as a sort of *perfectionism*. That is the view that it is Good to satisfy basic needs, develop core capacities, and realize individual potential.[168] I claim that perfectionism about the Good for plants, animals and human beings fits the normative appearances well. All humans have a way of living, and within our ways of life we engage in certain activities and practices while maintaining relationships, property and our bodies. The status of all these things is evaluative, we cannot help but care whether they go well or badly. On this view, the Good for us is to maintain and develop these important elements of our lives.[169]

I am quite sure that any neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism is necessarily committed to perfectionism in some sense. However, neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism is not necessarily committed to monism about the Good. There may be other components in addition to flourishing that are necessary to fully draw out the sense of prudential value of the Good implied by natural normativity. On my interpretation of Hursthouse for instance, she subscribes to a hybrid theory on which the Good for many animals consists in a combination of perfectionism and happiness.[170] For rational beings such as human beings she adds a new condition, 'doing what they can rightly see themselves as having most reason to do', and this condition trumps perfectionism and hedonism. I want to consider the first idea connected with reason, but I will do so in the next chapter (5.1.). At present, I only want to consider the perfectionism/happiness hybris theory of the Good.

---

[168] The milestone work on perfectionism in recent times is Thomas Hurka's *Perfectionism* (1993). For dissenting views, see chapter 3 of Bernard Williams *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985) and Philip Kitcher's "Essence and Perfection" (1999).

[169] From the perfectionist's perspective, humans are obsessed with recognition, love, honour, and reputation not because they care about these things in themselves. Rather, it is because external validation from those we respect gives us reason to believe ourselves to be good at what we do and who we are. Perfectionism is based on the fundamental intuition that what is really Good is to be truly excellent in this sense. Confidence about one's own goodness is the basis for self-respect, and self-respect in this sense is symptomatic of the Good life.

[170] On Virtue Ethics, 199.

Happiness is an elusive concept. I am only going to consider it in a sense in which it is understood as the enjoyment of positive mental states (affect)— that is, as a sort of hedonism. On that interpretation, I think it is incompatible with perfectionism, at least in the context of naturalism.

If mental states like pains and pleasures are thought of as part of physical reality, and in particular as part of organisms, then pleasure and pain ought to be given a functional specification. If we adopt a plausible theory on which the function of pleasure and pain for an organism is to indicate its current state.[171] Then, an excess of either pleasure or pain is going to have to be seen as bad in a perfectionist sense, since that excess is going to indicate for that organism that things are going better or worse than they really are. Furthermore, faulty feelings may give the organism the impression that something must be done that ought not to be done; or, conversely, that nothing needs to be done because everything feels OK, even though things are going badly.

If the possibility of excess or malfunction is ruled out by some conceptual concoction, hedonism is still unattractive. In such a case, one might say that pleasure is good in the cases in which pleasure and pain function perfectly. However, saying this makes the goodness of pleasure and the badness of pain a mere shadow of perfectionism. If pleasure is only good in those cases in which pleasure accurately represents the bodily state of an organism, and pain is bad only in those cases in which there is something wrong with the organism, than the goodness of pleasure and the goodness of well-functioning is going to be coextensive. Better to say that perfectionism is the Good, and that a good, well-functioning organism is, as a matter of pure contingency, most likely going to have a high hedonic level. That is, the 'hedonic Good' is a nice by-product of being good in a perfectionist sense; Then it may be up to the organism whether it values a high hedonic level or not. Most organisms do, and therefore they see it as good if they have a high hedonic level. This may explain the appearance that hedonism is good, even though it isn't really in a metaphysical sense. I conclude that it is best to have a monist theory of well-being on which perfectionist flourishing is the sole good.

---

[171] See Damasio, 1994, 117, 262ff.

4.1.3. Flourishing and Integrated Well-Functioning

The central claim of Naturalistic Aristotelianism is that the Good for living beings is to function well in all important respects throughout the course of a life.[172] This sort of Aristotelianism fits well within the broader framework articulated above. The natural history expressed in a system of natural-historical judgments about a life-form describes a set of functional traits associated with that life-form which may be in good working order or malfunction. Well-functioning is a matter of degree. The highest good is perfect functioning in all respects associated with a life-form throughout the course of a life. Well-functioning in all respects through the life of the life-form may usefully to thought of as successful navigation of all spheres of action and experience associated with the life-cycle of creatures belonging to a given life-form.[173] Well-functioning in a sphere is about meeting the challenges associated with that sphere successfully, satisfying needs, and achieving Goods in that sphere. This might include external Goods such as the having of shelter, a family, a group, a safe and agreeable environment etc. (NE 1101a5-20). I adopt a perfectionism according to which the Good is well-functioning in a life-form relative sphere throughout the course of a life.[174] I call this type of prudential normative understanding og the Good *flourishing*.[175]

Drawing freely on Aristotle's characterizations of flourishing I maintain that an S is good *qua* S iff it is well-functioning in all important spheres associated with S's throughout the life-cycle of the S. The well-functioning of S in a sphere consists in the well-functioning of the traits associated with that sphere.[176] The spheres of an S is determined by the natural history

---

[172] Perceptive readers might susptect that I will give a circular definition of function in terms of the Good or final ends. At this point I can only assure that this is not the case, this crucial notion will be reductivelly analyzed in terms of nonnormative nonteleological notions.

[173] This way of thinking about goodness owes to Nussbaum (1987, 686).

[174] Nussbaum attributes a view like this to Aristotle (1987, 689).

[175] Flourishing is one of many possible translations of the ancient greek concept eudaimonia. "[eudaimonia is] activity of perfect life in accordance with perfect virtue" (EE1219a35-9), where the context implies that perfect ought to be understood in the sense of 'complete' or 'comprehensive'. On that interpretation, as Anthony Kenny says, eudaimonia is 'the activity of all the virtues of the soul - the rational soul, in the broadest sense of the term' (1992, 5-6). The concept I espouse ignores the emphasis on virtue and rationality, these are traits alongside physiological traits on my view. Also, for the greeks, eudaimonia is something only humans achieve. I choose the translation to flourishing because I want to ignore this aspect of the greek concept. I also think flourishing best captures the distinctive Aristotelian perfectionist sense of eudaimonia I advocate.

[176] Is the concept of a well-functioning trait defined in terms of successful navigation of a sphere of experience in the life of some S, or is successful navigation of some sphere defined in terms of well-functioning traits? Foot, Thompson and Micah Lott have argued that the best answer is that well-functioning is circular; that is, it goes both ways. This was the response which led to the indeterminacy objection, which in turn led me to advocate a reductive Aristotelianism.

of the S, the natural history is determined by natural-historical judgments. Hence, natural-historical judgments are the basic units of Naturalistic Aristotelianism.

Flourishing is a matter of well-functioning in all respects throughout a life. However, individual traits may contradict each other at a particular time, or throughout the course of a life. In those cases it is necessary to look to all spheres associated with the whole organism throughout a life to determine which traits are most important for the overall Good of the life-form.[177] This idea of overall harmonic well-functioning throughout a life is what I call '*integrated well-functioning*'.

This determination of goodness on the basis of part-whole consistency must be conducted at all levels, including that of types of activities, practices or spheres of experience and action. This invariably leads to reflections whose conclusions are settled by reflective equilibrium. However, the natural normative reasons we must consider to establish a satisfactory reflective equilibruim are not *sui generis*, they arise from the determinate nature of a life-form. The subject matter for normative thinking is concrete and given by empirical investigation to biological natural kinds. However, these kinds are crude materials that must be molded to better suit *their own purposes*.[178] They should be integrated so as not to contradict each other, and to best suit the present circumstances of the life-form as a whole throughout a life, and not merely in the near future.

On this conception of the Good, one may read the gorilla sentence like this: 'It is good for gorillas to live in troops because the gorilla is most likely going to flourish if it lives in a troop'. Notice that this normative construal is still instrinsic because it is concerned with the prudential normative reasons that the individual has from a first-person point of view. However, the normativity this time around is not of a judgmental sort, it does not come from without, and it does not come from 'the forms themselves'. Rather, the normativity associated with natural-historical judgments expresses the dependence of the flourishing of every individual member of the life-form on the well-functioning of the trait or operation denoted by the natural-historical judgment. The normativity of natural-historical judgments expresses the simple idea that it is bad for most mammals if their immune system malfunctions, or their

---

[177] In Jesse Prinz's lightning fast walk-through and critique of virtue ethics he briefly brings up this point about nongood functional traits. He thinks that explaining the difference between good and nongood teleological traits implies that virtue ethicists must go beyond teleology to a more substantive notion of well-being in terms of life-satisfaction (2009, 133-4). Fortunately, virtue ethicists must do no such thing.

[178] Definitions of health and disease in the philosophy of medicine may fruitfully be interpreted normatively according to this formula. Health can be constructed on the basis of the well-functioning of the physiological traits associated with the human body. Disease would be whatever effects that go against any important trait that is necessary for good health.

locomotive abilities are impaired. I suggest that all instances of the evaluative concept of natural goodness derive their meaning this way. This entails that all instances of evaluative description expresses a judgment of the quality of a life for the individual evaluated. This may seem to contradict important moral appearances, since we often intend our moral concepts to have an evaluative sense associated with praise and blame in a stronger sense than mere attribution of irrationality, weakness or unfortune. This is in fact an important concession of Naturalistic Aristotelianism, the theory cannot support these paradigmatically moral judgments. The evaluative dimension of the view is entirely constrained by the formal egoistical limits of prudential goodness and badness.

On the view of the Good I have suggested, the evaluative normativity of natural-historical judgments is explained by the trait denoted in the judgment's reliable promotion of flourishing for the life-form. The Good is identified with flourishing, and flourishing is a matter of integrated well-functioning. Integrated well-functioning is about mastery of essential spheres of life. Spheres are individuated on the basis of essential needs, capacities in the life-cycle of the life-form. Needs and capacities can be identified by considering relations of dependence within a given kind of life, if survival and well-functioning of many traits depend on the maintenance of a trait, that is a need. Similarly, if a trait is necessary in order for a living beings to survive, grow and cope well with its environments, that is an essential capacity. This leaves us at last with the idea of the function of a trait.

The notion of 'function' will still be considered a creature of teleological darkness in many quarters. Copp and Sobel critisized Foot for ascribing functions and ends in nontransparent and seemingly arbitrary ways.[179] As long as the ascription of teleological properties is unclear, it is not explanatory. Moreover, for any explanation to be genuinely explanatory, it must be true. Consequently, I must show that functional ascriptions can be true for them to have any explanatory currency. In addition, the truth of at least some of these functional ascriptions must be objective, too, in order for Naturalistic Aristotelianism to retain the claim to objectivity. Moreover, even if it is shown that some ascriptions *can* be true, this account is vulnerable to an indeterminacy objection. It must be possible to differantiate the function or purpose of some part or operation from merely accidental causal effects associated with that part or operation. So what is needed, is an account of what makes function-ascriptions true. That is, a principled analysis of function-ascription on the basis of which one may determine the truth of functional ascriptions objectively.

---

[179] Copp and Sobel, 2004.

4.2. A Unifying Etiological Analysis of Function-Ascription

I have argued that natural-historical judgments ought to be interpreted normatively in a prudential normative sense. This means that the goodness of some trait is explained by the well-functioning of that trait being condusive to the flourishing of the organism. The heavy explanatory work is done by the notion of 'well-functioning', which underlies both flourishing and the meaning of the functional characterization of the target trait. I now explicate this notion in more detail. The problem with which I left the teleological notion of function in the preceding sub-section was that of explicating function-ascriptions. A few points about the analysis of function-ascription should be noted before I move to the analysis. First, the analysis should give clear and objective truth conditions for function-ascriptions to retain objectivity and deflect the indeterminacy objection. Second, the analysis ought to incorporate function-ascription of artifacts as well as biological traits.

Before I go on with the analysis, I should make a note on terminology. I have spoken about life-forms and traits, intending by these terms categories of living beings and their organs and behaviours. For the discussion in this particular section I adopt a wider terminology that is neutral in regard to living and nonliving beings. I shall speak of systems and traits. By 'system' I mean a complex organized being whose parts relate to the whole, and on which the whole is dependent on its parts. By 'trait' I mean a vital part or operation, organ or behaviour whose identity criteria is determined by teleological ascription. Sometimes I will use the term 'object'. In those cases I mean something that may be either an artifact or a trait.

The distinction between artifacts and natural traits can be spelled out more clearly by considering some examples. The belt-buckle is an artifact. The best explanation of the existence of belt-buckles is that some intelligent being invented the concept of the belt-buckle, and that intelligent beings held that concept in their minds when constructing the object to which the concept corresponds. That process is top-down; It begins with a concept and ends with an object. Artifacts are objects that are individuated on the basis of their functions, and the function of an artifact is an effect of the object that is the reason, or purpose, for which the artifact was created. Hence, the function of the belt-buckle is to keep pants from falling down.

A rabbit foot on the other hand, is not an artifact constructed on the basis of a concept developed by an intelligent being. The rabbit foot is a natural trait brought about by the

process of evolution by natural selection. However, rabbit feet serve a purpose in the life of the rabbit, just like the belt-buckle serves a purpose in the life of many human beings. Rabbits employ their feet to get around. This function is not given by an intelligent designer. Rather, the process is bottom-up. The function is somehow given by nature itself through blind mechanical forces.

I hope this disambiguation was clear: There is a difference between design-function and mechanical function. I indicate some differences in the teleological analysis of both types, but the plan is for the analysis of function-ascription to accommodate both types. The central problem for an account of function-ascription that pursues this sense is to distinguish between accidental causal effects and 'the true function' of the object in question. Belt-buckles may deflect bullets in a gunfight and can therefore be very advantagous to its wearer. But that is not the function of belt-buckles. The best analysis of function-ascription for traits and artifacts that satisfies this demand is the *etiological* analysis of function-ascription.

Etiology is the study of origination; the etiological analysis of function, ascribes functions to objects on the basis of their histories. The most influential etiological analysis of function was given by Larry Wright (1973). Wright's etiological analysis is easy and straightforward. It identifies the function of an object with that particular consequence of its being where it is, which explains why it is there.[180] The analysis goes like this:

The function of X is F iff:

(a) X is there because it does F,

(b) F is a consequence or result of X's being there.[181]

The explanatory sense of 'because' in (a) is etiological.[182] Etiological explanatory forms answer historical 'why' questions. They say something about the causal background history that led to the existence of X in its current form. Notice that the explanatory sense of 'because' in this formula is indifferent to the reasons/causes distinction. We may insert either artifacts or traits in the place of X, and consciously represented reasons or blind mechanical causal chains in the place of 'because'.[183] The generic 'it does F' encompasses a broad

---

[180] Wright, 1973, 154.

[181] Ibid, 161.

[182] Ibid, 156.

[183] Ibid, 157.

conception of effects, and could conceivably be extended to include intensional effects as well as causal and constitutive relations.

As for (b), it identifies the function of X as being the effect X has just where it is because it is exactly there. This is the condition that distinguishes functional etiologies from other causal chains.[184] The causal effects associated with a rolling rock, its shape and weight etc., may explain (a)—why it is where it is, rolling down a hill, say. Those causal effects are not a consequence of the rock being where it is, however. The rock would have had those effects even if it were somewhere else.[185] The belt-buckle, on the other hand, only serves the function of holding up pants if it is on a waist keeping a belt together. A lone belt-buckle on a rock without the specific context of a waist, belt, and pants would not have the effect for which it exists. The function of holding pants up also explains why a person would put the belt-buckle on his waist and use it to keep his belt together.

For vital traits, the formula points in the direction of an evolutionary explanation. For instance, both 'thumping sound' and 'pumping blood' are effects associated with the heart, but only the pumping of blood explains why there is a heart within cardates. Evolution by natural selection is a very economical process, only the organs whose effects are unimportant for the maintenance and reproduction of the organism are selected for. Furthermore, a heart will not be pumping blood if it is removed from the system of which it is a part. Therefore, according to Wright's analysis, the function of the heart is to pump blood, not to make a thumping sound.

The analysis suggested here is vague and therefore vulnerable to counterexamples. For this reason, and because function-ascriptions of traits are of special interest, I refine this aspect of the analysis further by the adoption of a *selected effects* account of biological function. I begin with a refinement due to a general idea to be found in Ruth G. Millikan's analysis of 'proper function'. The idea is to employ the type/token distinction to get at the function of a type of trait, rather than merely looking at the causal trajectory of particular traits.[186] In selected effects analyses the relevant 'why' question is: Why was this trait selected for in this species instead of some other trait?

---

[184] Ibid, 161.

[185] Boorse (1976) notes that Wright's analysis may have counterintuitive consequences. Inspired by Boorse, Godfrey-Smith gives the following example: If a small rock by a creek is holding up another larger rock, and the small rock would wash away if it was not holding the larger rock up, it seems like we have to attribute to the small rock the function of holding up the larger rock (1994, 3).

[186] Häggqvist, 2013, 74.

To answer this question, it is necessary to give an evolutionary explanation. This means that we must invoke reproductive groups and inspect trait-types instead of merely looking at individual traits. This yields a type/token analysis on which the function of a trait X is whatever other tokens of the same type T which form a reproductive group did, that explains why current tokens exist, i.e. were reproduced. In other words, the function of a trait is the effect that the trait was selected for.[187]

A strength of the adoption of the type/token distinction in this etiological analysis is that it is possible to determine the function of a trait without that particular trait ever exercising its function. However, another refinement is called for to distinguish a sense of the concept of a function that has to do with part-whole relationships. There is a sense of the concept of a function that associates biological function to the system within which it functions. In cases of functional part-whole interdependence, analyses of functional parts ought to be sensetive to the whole, that is, to the kind of biological system in which it resides. For this reason the following qualification should be admitted: The function of traits promotes the fitness of the kind of system in which the type of trait resides.[188] For our purposes we can identify 'type of biological system' with 'a species', and the phylogenetic species concept delineated in the preceding chapter suits the analysis well. Viruses and bacteria that cause disease in organisms form reproductive groups, and yet are evolutionary disadvangageous for the host organism— for example, in the context of the human body. It would be strange to ascribe functions to bacteria that are detrimental to health and fitness. The proposed refinement gives us the oppurtunity to make that distinction.

A last refinement concerns a distinction between 'ancient evolutionary history' and 'recent evolutionary history'. Gould and Yrba (1982) give many examples of traits that were probably selected for some function in a population at one time, but later on, came to exercise another function.[189] A good example of this is 'feathers'. Apparently feathers were selected for in early birds to maintain the right body temperature. However, after a series of developments, the primary selective advantage of feathers became the causal contribution to flight.[190] This kind of case thwarts the selected effects analysis, because both 'selections' seem

---

[187] Ibid, 75.

[188] This qualification is endorsed by many in the functions literature. I follow Godfrey-Smith (1994, 7), he attributes the idea to Brandon (1990).

[189] I cannot go into the details of these examples here, but see Gould and Yrba (1982).

[190] Gould and Yrba, 1982, 7.

to be adequate grounds for the ascription of function to feathers. This renders the analysis indeterminate. Also, some traits may be on the way out, like human wisdom teeth. They don't have any important function for us anymore. The selected effects account ascribes a function to them nonetheless because it is backwards-looking.

The distinction between ancient evolutionary history and recent evolutionary history lends credence to a distinction in terms of different 'why' questions and different explanations corresponding to each question type. The first type of question is a question of the current function of a trait and corresponds to what is sometimes called a functional explanation. The second question is in terms of the evolutionary history of a trait and the right explanation for that is an evolutionary explanation.[191] The selected effects analysis obviously attempts to answer both questions at once with the same explanation, but this is problematic if it is true that the same trait may have different functions at different times, as Gould and Yrba insist.[192] This is also the reason Foot gives for rejecting the selected effects theory of function for her theory of natural goodness.[193]

For this reason Kitcher and Godfrey-Smith propose a new qualification that retains the backwards-looking perspective of the Wrightian analysis, but still manages to capture the function of a trait that is relevant at the time at which the analysis is given. Their proposal is that: "functions are dispositions and powers which explain the recent maintenance of a trait in a selective context."[194] This adumbrates the two different 'why' questions and explains how they are best thought of as different aspects of the same natural history. With these qualifications in view, it seems like I am in a position to present the final analysis of biological function.

The function of X is F iff:

(i)   X is a token of type T,

(ii) tokens of T are components of systems of type S,

---

[191] The two questions are often traced to Tinbergens characterization of why questions in biology (1968). The idea that there are different question types was made famous by Ernst Mayr (1976).

[192] It is unclear whether there are counterexamples of heterogeneous functionality in traits within the same organism. The examples produced by Gould and Yrba, and the other examples Godfrey-Smith cooks up (18-19), all have different functions across different species, at least on the understanding of species according to the phylogenetic species concept. Therefore this last qualification may be superfluous, because traits may always have the same function within a species. However, that is only a possibility, and imagined counterexamples doesn't seem wildly implausible.

[193] Natural Goodness, 32n.

[194] Godfrey-Smith, 1994, 16.

(iii) among the properties reproduced between members of T in systems of type S is property C, which can do F,

(iv) one reason tokens of T such as X exist now is the fact that past members of T were succcessful under selection in the recent past, through positively contributing to the fitness of S, and

(v) tokens of T were selected because they did F, through having C.[195]

This is the final analysis of vital function I shall adopt. In a nutshell, it identifies biological function with the effect a trait has which explains the recent maintenance of the trait within a system in a population under natural selection. It is a lot more detailed than the original analysis given by Wright, but it may still usefully be thought of as a particular instance of that more general type of etiological explanation.[196] Furthermore, the analysis is not tailor-made for Naturalistic Aristotelianism in an ad-hoc fashion. Rather, it is a variant of an analysis towards which the functions literature is converging.[197] It is a variety of the standard view.

4.3.   Taking Stock

In this section I briefly summarize the reductive analysis of natural-historical judgments as these pertain to first and second nature life-forms on Naturalistic Aristotelianism. In particular, I demonstrate how the new analysis of natural normativity is applicable to concrete cases. As I aim to show, there are important differences as well as similarities in first and second nature life-forms (3.3.1.). I also want to dispel a variant of the *prima facie* worry that the marriage of natural normativity with a selected effects account of function implies a distortion of practical thought (3.3.2.).
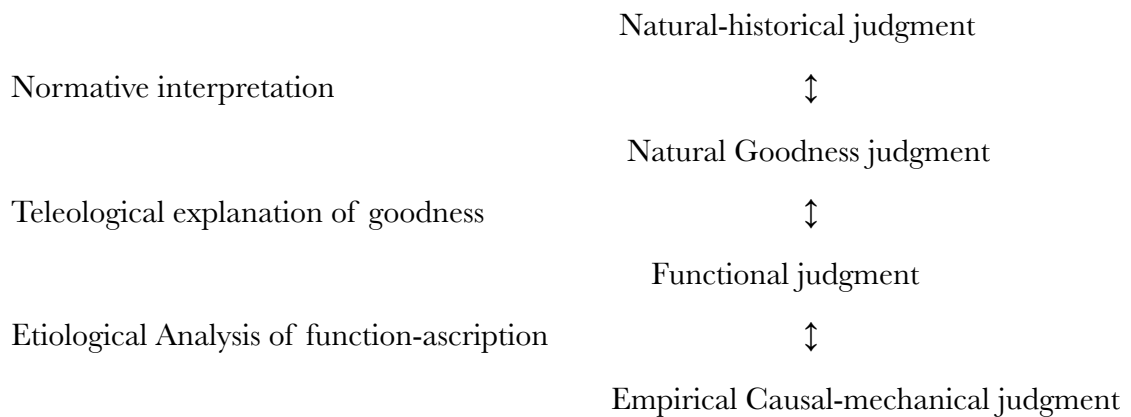
---

[195] This analysis closely resembles Godfrey-Smith's account of biological function (1994, 20) and is compatible with Kitchers account (1998).

[196] To see the structural similarity, it may be useful to attempt to analyse biological functions the same way we would analyse artifacts. As Kitcher points out, the difference between artifacts and organisms is that human designers create artifact for various purposes, whereas natural selection always shape organisms according to the same principle, fitness. The same way we may predict the best way to construct a bridge for the purpose of crossing a river given full information about materials and the environment, we could in principle predict the way evolution would select for traits in a species given unlimited time, and full information about the organism at present and the environment. This way of thinking could in principle extend the analysis of function to account for how traits may be optimized. See (Kitcher, 1993).

[197] Godfrey-Smith, 1993, 1, 4-6.

4.3.1. Analyzing Concrete Examples

Before analyzing concrete examples it may be useful to revisit the structure of the reduction above. The main nodes in the reduction is represented in this figure:

<div style="text-align:center">

Natural-historical judgment

Normative interpretation $\updownarrow$

Natural Goodness judgment

Teleological explanation of goodness $\updownarrow$

Functional judgment

Etiological Analysis of function-ascription $\updownarrow$

Empirical Causal-mechanical judgment

</div>

This general structure holds true for all natural-historical judgments. There are important differences in the nature of the teleological explanation of goodness and the etiological analysis of function-ascription in first and second nature life-forms. Most importantly, the functional judgments of second nature life-forms cannot be reduced to causal-mechanical judgments. Consider the following description of gorilla life:

> Gorillas live in groups called troops. Troops tend to consist of an adult male or silverback and multiple adult females and their offspring. A silverback is typically more than 12 years of age, and is named for the distinctive patch of silver hair on his back, which comes with maturity. Silverbacks also have large canine teeth that also come with maturity. Both males and females tend to emigrate from their natal groups. Mature males also tend to leave their groups and establish their own troops by attracting emigrating females. However, male mountain gorillas sometimes stay in their natal troops and become subordinate to the silverback. If the silverback dies, these males may be able to become dominant or mate with the females. The silverback is the center of the troop's attention, making all the decisions, mediating conflicts, determining the movements of the group, leading the others to feeding sites, and taking responsibility for the safety and well-being of the troop.

'Gorilla' and 'silverback' are life-forms characterized by this description. Clearly 'gorilla' is a species and therefore a first nature life-form, whereas 'silverback' is arguably better characterized as a second nature life-form. The description entails many natural-historical judgments about the two life-forms in. Let's focus on 'Gorillas live in troops' and 'The silverback is responsible for the safety and well-being of the troop'. Here is how the Aristotelian Reductionist analysis of these natural-historical judgments look like:

> Good gorillas live in troops because living in troops promotes the flourishing of gorillas
>
> The good silverback preserves the safety and well-being of the members of the troop, because the silverback flourishes *qua* silverback in exercising its responsibilities well.

First, the judgment is analyzed normatively by evaluative concepts like 'good', 'bad', 'better', 'worse'. The evaluative concept fills an adjective place in the judgment that attaches to the subject indicating that the execution of the trait denoted in the judgment is a normative matter that reflects the well-functioning of the subject 'Good gorillas live in troops', 'Good silverbacks successfully take care of the safety and well-being of the troop'.

Secondly, the goodness predicated of subjects that successfully execute the function of the trait is explained teleologically. The explanatory 'because' in the sentences explains the predicative judgment by recourse to the flourishing of the members of the life-form to which the judgment applies. This indicates that gorillas and silverbacks are good if they are well-functioning in the sense denoted by the natural-historical judgment. They are good in the sense of flourishing in a perfectionist manner *qua* 'gorilla' and 'silverback'. Remember, flourishing was a matter of integrated well-functioning. Hence, *prima facie*, the well-functioning of the trait denoted in the judgment promotes the flourishing of the subject. However, this is not a priori true, because the well-functioning of some trait way interfere with the well-functioning of another more important trait, in which case integrated functioning is undermined.

Thirdly, to see whether the natural-historical judgment is true, one must investigate whether the trait denoted in the judgment expresses a true function for the life-form. As Foot points out, 'In the spring, the fallen leaves of the oak tree rustle in the wind' is not a natural-

historical judgment that expresses natural normativity for the oak tree.[198] This is because 'leaves rustling in the wind' does not fulfill the functional requirement of the 'trait place' of true natural-historical judgments. The rustling is a mere accidental property and not a true functional trait. To assess the objective truth of function-ascriptions to potential trait place properties we apply the etiological analysis of function-ascription:

> The function of X is F iff:
> (a) X is there because it does F,
> (b) F is a consequence or result of X's being there.

At this most general level of logico-metaphysical description, all three analytical steps apply equally well to all natural-historical judgments associated with both first and second nature life-forms. Here there is similarity. However, there are two important disanalogies between first and second nature judgments at the logico-metaphysical level of analysis.

First, the application of the etiological analysis of function-ascription diverges in the explanation of functional traits associated with first and second life-forms. Biological traits associated with first nature life-forms are explained by the etiological selected effects theory of function-ascription. That theory asserted that the function of biological traits is the effect it has which explains its recent maintenance within an organism in a population under natural selection. Traits associated with artificial second nature life-forms are explained by tracing the ancestry of that type of trait to the effect which constitutes the reason for which it came to existence. It is implicit here that the trait came into existence intentionally by having been devised by some intelligent system, either consciously as in the construction of rules for a social role, or unconsciously as in the case of the continuation of some beneficial habit or practice. If the same effect is the reason why the trait is instantiated in the life-form, then that effect is the function of the trait.

The exact nature of the correct etiological explanation of concrete judgments is a complex empirical question. One would need expert knowledge of gorillas to give accurate explanations of these judgments. Unfortunately, I don't have expert knowledge about gorillas so the explanation I will give is bound to be inaccurate. However, my intention here is simply to give a toy example to illustrate the way a true explanation might go. With these caveats in place, I'll propose the following explanation of the two functions:

---

[198] Natural Goodness, 30.

The gorilla live in troops because the social structure of the troop has the effect of protecting individuals from predators. This effect explains why the trait was selected for in gorillas in recent history. The effect is also a result of the trait's manifestation in the natural habitat of the gorilla, in which predators like leopards, humans, and other gorillas abound.

The silverback has the responsibility for the safety and well-being of the troop because this trait is an ineradicable part of the best explanation for why gorilla troops organize themselves in terms of a group of females and a silverback. Other male gorillas often engage in infanticide, so the best protection of the children of the females is the presence of a strong silverback leader of the troop that may defend them. The silverback best propagates its genes if it maintains the safety and well-being of the troop. The mutual advantagousness of the convention that the silverback has the responsibility for the safety and well-being of the troop best explains why the convention persists. Also, the effect is a result of the silverback being in its habitat, and specifically being in the troop in which it is the silverback leader. If the same individual was in another group where there was another silverback, our individual male would try to kill the other silverback and if successful, kill off the children in the group, mate with the females, and become the new silverback of the troop. This presumably, would not count as being responsible for the safety and well-being of the troop.

The two explanations of the functional traits ascribed to gorilla and silverback life-forms affirm the correctness of the ascriptions. It is an empirical question whether the first nature gorilla explanation is correct, and it is an hermeneutical question whether the second nature silverback explanation is correct. In both cases one would have to go out to investigate if they are true. Accurate explanations would perhaps be the subject of full doctoral dissertations. Yet I hope that my brief indication of the structure of these explanation illustrates the possibility of answering questions about the truth of teleological ascriptions.

3.3.2. Evolution and Natural Normativity

The employment of the selected effects account to reduce functional traits to empirical properties is a dangerous move. In the literature on ethical naturalism, the idea of deriving normativity from an evolutionary teleology is widely condemned.[199] Yet, at a very course-grained level of description, this is exactly what I have done, even though I have done it in a deflationary manner. Before I go on to do anything else then, I should explain what role evolution plays in the reductive explanation of natural normativity.

It is easy to think that the very mention of the idea of natural selection in the context of normativity automatically implies an endorsement of reproductive success as the sole good from which everything else that is normative must be derived.[200] But that is not in any sense what Naturalistic Aristotelianism affirms. To be clear: *The evolutionary process of natural selection is not itself normative, but it gives us the objectively true functional nature of first nature life-forms, and nature is normative*. If there are living beings on twin earth that are identical to living beings on earth in every respect, goodness for them would be the same as goodness for us, regardless of the process that led to them being as they are. If it seems here that I have made an illegitimate distinction, I would like to point out that this type of distinction is made everywhere in every science and in everyday thinking all the time. If I make a statue out of a lump of clay, does this mean that there was a statue in the lump of clay all along? If the statue is beautiful, does this mean that it's beauty was conferred by the process of making it, and would not have been beutiful if it was made another way? Does the truth of a written proposition consist in the personality of its author? The answer may seem obvious, yet I want to explain why the answer is 'no' to dispel misunderstanding and confusion.

On Naturalistic Aristotelianism, all individuals bear a second nature that warrants functional characterizations that make no reference to natural-selection. The well-functioning of second nature traits are important Goods in the life of individuals. So even if the normative credibility of first nature traits is seriously denigrated, a Naturalistic Aristotelianism could vindicate the value of first nature traits instrumentally through second nature traits. However, this structure of justification could not sustain the objectivity of natural normative evaluation. Fortunately, it is not necessary to fall back on this strategy.

---

[199] See for instance, Williams, 1985, 1995, Kitcher, 1999, Copp and Sobel, 2004, Lenman, 2005, Millum, 2006, Woodcock, 2006, Fitzpatrick, 2008, Odenbaugh, 2017.

[200] For instance, Spencers 'survival of the fittest' variety of evolutionary ethics take the mechanism of natural selection to express a normative ideal. E. O. Wilsons idea that evolution is inherently progressive is also an instance of this variety of evolutionary ethics. (Michael Ruse asserts that this is Wilsons view in Ruse, 2008, 36)

Kitcher briefly imagines and dismisses the plausibility of a neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalist line like the one I have articulated for first nature life-form traits. As he admits, an evolutionary explanation of the functional traits associated with a species does adequately explain its nature.[201] However, he goes on to say:

> Drawing the normal/abnormal distinction by appeal to fitness and then hunting human essences by investigating what normal human beings share would, if successful link the human essence to traits that promote human reproductive success. If this is to serve as the entrée to an account of what is valuable, then an objectivist would have to be committed to the claim that the development of those capacitites that promote human reproductive success is valuable.[202]

Obviously, there is nothing especially valuable in reproductive success, so why should everything hang on that? Kitcher dismisses objectivist perfectionism when the connection between natural-normative functional traits and natural selection is pointed out.[203] Now, I will agree with the premise that there is nothing particularly valuable about reproductive success. But I want to reject the hidden assumption that an ethical naturalist perfectionist theory has to endorse this false premise.

Recall that flourishing is a product of the integrated well-functioning of an individual as a whole. Now, note the simple point that integrated well-functioning of a trait within the life of an individual is something else than the successful reproduction of that trait through successful reproduction of the individual. The function of the heart is not reproduction, even though the heart may promote that end. The function of the heart is to circulate blood. Similarly, the function of an altruistic disposition to help those in need is not to propagate genes, but it may turn out that the disposition promotes that end too. Also, exceptionally well-functioning eyes are not eyes that are especially condusive to reproductive success. Well-functioning eyes give clear sight. Of course, many traits promote survival and reproduction in more direct ways, but the fact remains that most traits in living beings has other functions, at least according to the selected effects theory of functions.

---

[201] Kitcher, 1999, 77.

[202] Ibid, 78.

[203] See Jay Odenbaugh (2017) for a more nuanced discussion of the same point in the context of Aristotelian Naturalism specifically.

Perhaps the claim is that particular functional effects of traits cannot be divorced from ultimate explanatory ends? On that view, every trait has the function of propagating genes. Moreover, every behaviour has that end too. But this is absurd. It is simply to insist that the very idea of functions is nonsensical. Of course, the view is a logical possibility, but it is very unattractive. If it is held in any principled manner, it should be applied in an equally principled way to questions about causality too. The cause of all effects is the big bang on that theory. The theory is of course a logical possibility, but is totally useless.

If it is conceded that traits having to do directly with reproduction is but a small part of the full set of traits from which an account of first nature flourishing is derived, than there is nothing *special* about reproduction on Naturalistic Aristotelianism. The good of having and raising children is on a par with other characteristic human ends, like the good of developing one's athletic potential, or tending one's friendships, or excelling at the type of work one does. If Kitcher's point is that these other activities are true Goods but that having and raising children is a worthless thing to do, then I think he is wrong. If that isn't the point, then I don't see what the point is.

A different more accurate objection is formulated by Jay Odenbaugh (2017). Odenbaugh briefly articulates and considers a neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism that depends on Godfrey-Smith's selected effects account of function. Unlike Kitcher's objection, Odenbaugh's objection targets concrete functional traits that seem to contradict our considered moral beliefs. His example is that of rape. In the highly controversial book *A Natural History of Rape* (2000), the evolutionary psychologists Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer speculate that rape is an adaptive behaviour whose function is to propagate the genes of low status males. Odenbaugh speculates that this natural-historical judgment might be true: "Unchosen, low status human males rape human females".[204] As Odenbaugh admits, this conclusion has received much criticism, and is probably false.[205] However, the very fact that rape might have an adaptive function seems to him to imply that there might be other immoral traits that in fact do have adaptive functions. The very possibility of immoral traits being candidates for natural normative properties implies that the conceptual connection between natural normativity and morality is at best contingent, and in the worst case nonexistent.[206]

---

[204] Odenbaugh, 2017, 12.

[205] Ibid.

[206] Ibid.

As is plain, the judgment Odenbaugh thinks qualify as a natural-historical judgment isn't really a natural-historical judgment at all according to Naturalistic Aristotelianism. The life-form place in the judgment is occupied by a highly qualified subject-type: "Unchosen, low status male human". There are many problematic features of this judgment from the point of view of Naturalistic Aristotelianism. Most obviously, the life-form place in the judgment is not held by a first nature life-form, but by a combination of life-forms across first and second nature with slighty normative adjectives thrown in. This muddles the whole judgment. To qualify the life-form in a natural-historical judgment to being 'unchosen and low status' is to already import a normative appraisal of the life-form. It is like saying bad types occasionally successfully do bad things, which shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone. To top it off, the judgment is most probably false too. If there is a true natural-historical judgment that well-functioning high-status chosen males also characteristically commit rape, and this is an adaptive behaviour, then we have a problem. But that does not seem to be the case. In fact, Aristotelians tend in general to believe that something must have went seriously wrong for someone if they rape. Perhaps psychological troubles, lack of affection, love, respect etc. This is of course an empirical question, but what is needed for this kind of argument to have any traction with Aristotelians is to present a finding that reliably predicts immoral behaviour with integrated well-functioning individuals.

The reason why anti-social traits are bad on Naturalistic Aristotelianism is because they contradict flourishing as integrated well-functioning. If Good S's do X, the goodness of doing X for S's is explained by X promoting the flourishing of S. However, the flourishing of S is a holistic matter, depending on the integrated well-functiong of S in all the essential spheres in the natural history of S's. Say, we have three natural-historical judgments about S: B, and G. B is immoral relative to our considered moral judgments, whereas G is good relative to our considered moral judgments. Suppose we have strong reasons to believe that G is central to the flourishing of S, whereas B is only peripheral to the flourishing of S, but may promote flourishing to a small extent. Suppose also that B is incompatible G. Then B would not be part of the integrated well-functioning of S. This is because B would not satisfy the criterion that B promotes the flourishing of S, because one would have to give up either B or G in order to admit B to the natural history of S, and G promotes the flourishing of S to a larger extent than B does. Now, the substantial empirical claim on which Naturalistic Aristotelianism depends is the claim that: *For any immoral natural-historical judgment, there will be more important natural-historical judgments which the immoral judgment contradicts*. If this claim is true, it follows that

there will be no true immoral natural-historical judgments in the integrated well-functioning of any life-form. Consequently, morality would be highly contingent, but this should be accepted. In the next chapter, I argue that this substantial claim is true in the case of human nature, and that the contingency of morality is less radical than one might think.[207]

---

[207] However, the mere possibility of there existing adaptive immoral traits is serious. Though the actual example can be disregarded, it indicates the possibility of other true counterexamples. Though it is reasonable to posit an identity relation between integrated well-functioning of first nature traits throughout a life and flourishing. The mere possibility of there being immoral traits that pull towards a conception of flourishing that may imply a conception of evaluative natural goodness in individuals that involve immoral behaviour may appear to denigrate the conceptual connection between the natural and the normative. What is needed to posit an identity connection is *analytic truth* in the sense of synonymy. To believe this is what I would like to call 'the naturalistic fallacy fallacy'. I explain why this insistence is illegitimate in the next chapter (5.1.).

5.   A New Aristotelian Theory Of Reasons

The best understanding of life is historical. We can only get a true grip on the nature of a life-form by understanding how and why it came to be as it is. I have argued that these two questions come together in an etiological analysis of the functional nature of living beings. Different types of traits come about for different reasons. The best historical explanation of the emergence of organs, instincts and basic physiological and psychological needs is in terms of selection. The best explanation of the emergence of behaviours, habits, emotional responses, conventions, and practices is often through historical interpretation of cultural self-understanding. On the basis of a deep historical understanding of nature one may grasp the teleological structures according to which the patterns of natural normativity flow.

In this chapter, I move from the logico/metaphysical level of analysis to the local and substantive levels of analysis to see what light an historical understanding of human nature can shed on the normative patterns that permeate our lives. Following a downward spiral of generality, I turn to the local level of analysis first. The issue I investigate at this juncture is whether the onset of reason constitutes a fundamental disconnect between us and other animals. I shall reject this idea, and argue that reason retains a grip on us through our first 'animal' nature, not alongside or contrary to it (5.1.).

Thereafter I move to the substantive level of analysis. The question I address here is whether human beings considered solely in terms of their shared first nature have prudential natural normative reasons to be virtuous or vicious. My focus will be on the other-regarding virtues of justice and benevolence, since it is least obvious how the adoption of these virtues reliably promotes a flourishing human nature. I will argue that reflections on human nature lend credence to the idea that human beings have strong natural normative reasons to adopt the other-regarding virtues, and shun the vices. (5.2.).

In the following section I address the difficult question of the relationship between first and second nature in identity-relative goodness. I argue that the determination of flourishing for a person involves a synthesis of all life-forms that person bears. Real individuals have identities, and it is in virtue of the full identity of an individual that it is possible to determine what they person ought to do all things considered. The subsumption of second nature life-forms in the determination of flourishing for persons appears to contradict the objectivity and universality of the virtues. This is because sinister second nature life-forms are incompatible with virtue. Against this appearance, I argue that the rationality of second natures is

evaluated relative to first nature, and that it is irrational for persons to adopt vicious second natures (5.3.). This may suggest that the natural normativity of human nature is too restrictive. It appears to imply a 'rational iron cage' which restricts the rationality of human unfolding, contradicting important normative appearances. Contrary to this appearance, I argue that the substantive Aristotelian theory of practical reason does not constrict the rationality of second nature too narrowly (5.4.).

Finally, I reflect on the modularity of life-form relative goodness, the place of science and philosophy in ethical theorizing (5.5.). After this, I return to a broader perspective in order to assess Naturalistic Aristotelianism according to the desiderata for a metaethical theory about the normativity of practical reasons. I conclude that Naturalistic Aristotelianism saves all the important normative appearances, and explains them in a satisfactory naturalistic manner (5.6.).

5.1.   The Onset of Reason and the Naturalistic Fallacy

The grand argument for the objectivity of natural normativity is that the grammar of goodness is the same across all of nature. This is what warrants the claim that natural goodness and badness are general instances of natural normativity, which is a natural phenomenon—not an anthropocentric projection. This cosmocentric generality is undermined by Aristotelians when they claim that the grammar of goodness changes in important and fundamental ways when the transition from plants and animals to human beings is made. For instance, in Foot's view, the Good for human beings is dependent on 'what we see as good'. The onset of reason enables human beings to stand back and ask themselves whether the Good for them is to flourish. It is not absolutely clear what's meant by phrases like these, but they may appear to undermine the reductive identification of the Good as flourishing. Here it is helpful to reconsider Annas' metaphor of the craftsperson at work on a material: First nature is the material, constraining the possible shapes the craftsperson can impose on it. However, the craftsperson can stand back and reflect upon what shape she wants to impose on the material. In this reflective space of reasons, practical deliberation trades on reasons associated with both with substantive self-conceptions and reasons drawn from first nature. The material itself does not determine what the craftsperson should make of it, but the craftsperson does hot have absolute freedom either. In a similar vein, McDowell writes that:

First nature matters not only like that, in helping to shape the space in which reflection must take place, but also in that first-natural facts can be part of what reflection takes into account. This is where we can register the relevance of what human beings need in order to do well, in a sense of 'doing well' that is not just Aristotle's 'acting in accordance with the virtues'. [208]

However, despite the admission of the normative significance of 'first-natural facts', he is wary of a naturalistic reductionist account of the Good. He writes:

A formed state of practical reason is one's second nature, not something that dictates to one's nature from outside. But the conception is not naturalistic in the sense of purporting to found the intellectual credentials of practical reason on facts of the sort that the natural sciences discover.[209]

There is a tension in these passages, and I think the same tension permeate Aristotelianism more generally. On the one hand, Aristotelians want to say that nature is normative, but on the other they want to retain the authority of our conception of nature over and against nature itself detached from our conceptualizations. This oscillation in contemporary Aristotelianism has led Foot to claim too much, which led to the cold reception of *Natural Goodness*. It has also led Aristotelians like Taylor, McDowell and Hursthouse to claim too little. They neglect the objectivity of 'first natural facts', and the promise of an objective Aristotelianism to preserve the sensible thinking associated with a deeper hermeneutical understanding of humankind. That is why these authors all emphatically write that the empiricist conception of absolute objectivity is unworkable in the context of practical thought. The downside, as I have argued, is that these conceptions lose the grounding in nature that warrants realism about natural normativity.[210]

My project is to resolve this tension and restore an ambitious Naturalistic Aristotelian realism about value and normativity. To do this, it is first of paramount importance to get clear on what reasons for action a rational being has, and where the sources of the normative force of those reasons are. I want to reject the image on which conceptions of Good

---

[208] McDowell, 1995, 172.

[209] McDowell, 1995, 174.

[210] See 3.1.

associated with a second nature may override basic Goods associated with first nature. On the contrary I want to argue that the normative force of considerations associated with second nature is derivative of the natural normativity of first nature.

I grant that we may stand back from our first nature and ask ourselves whether it is Good for us to satisfy our first natural needs or develop our capacities. However, I am sceptical about the normative authority of the 'reflective point of view' from which the rational person evaluates first nature when he 'stands back'. In fact, I doubt that there is any sense to the idea of a second nature viewpoint from which the flourishing of first nature can *intelligibly* be judged not to be Good. The reason why is that the normativity of reasons dependent on second nature self-conceptions ultimately draws on the natural normativity of first nature traits. The claim is that the rational wolf who judges his first natural wolfish needs to be superfluous to his superiour new conception of himself as the *überwolf,* is fooling himself.[211] Even the rational wolf cannot choose for himself that he doesn't need to eat, sleep or cooperate with the pack, such a wolf is delusional.

The charge of delusion is warranted when a consideration associated with a second nature self-conception assigns value in a way that is disconnected from the natural normativity flowing from first nature. On the image I have drawn of nonreductionist Aristotelians, first natural facts alongside good second natural interpretations are valid considerations to have in mind in devising a conception of the Good. I want to challenge the idea of these considerations being valid 'alongside' one another. In its place I want to construct an image on which the spheres of first nature and the objective goodness of well-functioning in these spheres is brute. And on which second nature consists in an extensive set of more detailed ways of being which optimize the well-functioning in these spheres to a lesser or larger extent. The image is no longer that of a craftsperson respecting the nature of her materials, rather the materials themselves dictate the shape according to which they are to be crafted, the craftsperson is merely to find the best way to realize that shape.

Insofar as second nature life-form traits engage important parts of our first nature and realize potentialities the developments of that which is a great Good for human beings, these second nature traits are great Goods too. Moreover, because it is a psychological fact of our first nature that meaningfulness is important to us, and that alienation bad, it is of huge importance to human beings that they identify with the practices that engage first nature

---

[211] In Natural Goodness, this is the line of argumentation Foot takes to rebut the Nietzschean immoralist. She claims that Nietzsche was ignorant of human nature and how the actual psychology of human beings is like. (114).

spheres of action and experience. In Susan Wolf's slogan, "meaning arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness".[212] The slogan is explained by Naturalistic Aristotelianism: the good, meaningful life consists in being deeply engaged with traditions and practices of one's culture in a way that engages the objective well-functioning of capacitities associated with the spheres of first natural human nature.[213] Thinking about meaningfulness this way indicates an interpretation of nature that can make sense of the Good of polar expeditions, political activism and playing the piano, but not for instance, a practice of maintaining exactly 3732 hairs on one's head.[214] The former activities engage spheres of human functioning, whereas the latter is irrelevant to us.

I now want to claim that the Good of developing capacities associated with a second nature that is unrelated to the objective spheres of action and experience associated with first nature is not good at all, but merely a projection. The capacity for practical reasoning allows us to look ahead and take into account future Goods, enabling us to devise the best strategies in a changing environment quickly. It is therefore a great advantage for beings endowed with rationality to have the capacity to reflect on whether present desires will lead to the good or lead one astray. However, the capacity for practical reasoning cannot support extra natural normativity, that is, having a character cannot support practical reasons that don't relate to first nature concerns somehow. This means that the theory I propound is committed to saying of some practices that they are worse than others, because they don't engage the capacities of human nature. Perhaps some forms of repetative factory work is like this, a practice in which it is impossible to immerse oneself or go to a state of 'flow' is most likely not a the best type of practice humans can engage. The theory is also committed to a mild idea of 'well-roundedness': The passionate artist who devotes herself fully to her art also have reasons to eat well, exercise and keep contact with friends and relatives.

This stronger claim about the exhaustiveness of the natural normativity from first nature in human beings cannot be defended at present. The argument for this claim is a long winded parsimony argument. Throughout this chapter I want to argue that all the essential normative appearances can be accounted for directly or indirectly by natural normativity flowing from first nature. If the argumentation is sound and the conclusion correct, then there

---

[212] Wolf, 1997, 7.

[213] On my view, the fact that we represent and respond to reasons does not constitute a break with the animal and plant world. Objective normative reasons remain the same regardless of whether we represent them or not.

[214] Taylor, 1992, 36.

is no need to posit any other normative influences in human lives, hence it can reasonable be maintained that natural normativity is exhaustive of practical normativity.

The image of practical reasoning I espouse is of a capacity whose function is already determined by our first nature. To have a well-functioning capacity for reasoning practically is, as Socrates told us, first and foremost to know oneself, and he could have added, to have a good conception of what is Good for persons like oneself. This amounts to knowledge of all spheres of human experience that figures in more or less any human life, and knowledge of sociological, anthropological and psychological facts about one's particular way of life. If one knows what it takes to flourish according to each life-form, and in addition have a sense of their relative importance and their relations of dependence, it is possible to determine what the good life is. To have such knowledge, in conjunction with uncodifiable wisdom of how to apply it, enables the reflective capacity of practical reason to function excellently. Such a person is sensible to practical reasons and understand their significance. In practical deliberations all relevant considerations are weighted correctly, and this enables the excellent practical reasoner to always know what reason prescribes. This cognitive understanding of the normativity of nature and ability to make accurate distinctions of value in concrete cases is the mark of the important virtue of *phronesis*, often translated as practical wisdom. For a person to possess this virtue is sufficient for that person to know what is Good for herself. However, it is not sufficient for that person to be fully good in the evaluative sense. This person is rational and wise, but not good yet.

Practical reason manifests itself in the virtues. Earlier on I gave a definition of virtue according to which the virtues for an individual were the set of character traits that most reliably promoted the Good for that individual. This is also the definition of virtue adhered to by Naturalistic Aristotelianism. This means that it is still an open question whether the neo-Aristotelian cardinal virtues will be true virtues according to Naturalistic Aristotelianism. It might turn out that the Nietzschean virtue ethical conception turns out to best promote the Good for human beings. I will have more to say about the nature of the virtues in the next section. To possess all the virtues is a necessary part of being good as a human being because it is invariable part of the human life to reason and to strive for goals aimed at the Good. However, these psychological traits are not exhaustive of the good human being. For instance, other necessities are plausibly good physiological and psychological health, and a set of external Goods associated with what is part of the Good human life.

On this picture of practical reason, goodness and the Good for humankind, there is no fundamental break between humans and the other animals. We act on reasons and represent our goals, but this does not constitute a fundamental break, because nature is still normative for us the same way it it with other animals. We cannot change the patterns of normativity in the human life-form through some act of rationality, what is to be considered rational is authoritative constrainted and even given direction by natural normativity.

The normative appearances were Objectivity, Universality, Conservatism and Practicality. I have already indicated how Objectivity, Universality and Practicality can be answered (albeit perhaps implicitly), but I have not shown how Naturalistic Aristotelianism can accommodate Conservatism. In this chapter I argue that Naturalistic Aristotelianism does not contradict our considered normative judgments. It would be surprising and unacceptable if Naturalistic Aristotelianism implies that human beings have strong reasons to be vicious, or if it turned out that there were no moral reasons. Hence, in order for Naturalistic Aristotelianism to pass the final test, it should be plausible that the neo-Aristotelian cardinal virtues can be vindicated rationally. That is the main task ahead.

5.2. The Holy Grail of Moral Philosophy

The greatest challenge for a theory of normativity equating all practical reasons, is that moral reasons ceases to have special 'categorical' standing. All practical reasons, rational and moral alike, have natural normative force for a person because they promote the Good for that person. How then, do other-regarding moral reasons fit into the practical deliberations of persons? The answer is that moral reasons may promote the Good for virtuous persons, because the Good for virtuous persons includes the Good of others. However, in order for moral reasons to be universal in the sense of having normative force for all humans, there must be good prudential reasons for all persons to adopt the virtues. However, on the neutral non-moralized conception of flourishing, the Good for human beings does not *necessarily* include the virtues. If it is a fact that rational human beings should be virtuous, it is a contingent fact about human nature. Classical writers were concerned with what we may call the rationality of inculcating character traits, and on some traditions, only those traits that benefited their possessor would be counted a virtue. There is a fine line between being a morally good person and being a self-sacrificing fool. To raise one's children up to have a

character trait of limitless benificence, would be tentamount to hurting them.[215] Therefore, the virtues ought to benefit their possessor.

The neo-Aristotelian cardinal virtues are: courage, temperance, justice, benevolence and practical wisdom.[216] The self-regarding virtues courage, wisdom and temperance appears to be Aristotelian necessities. It is not hard to see how a life lived with wisdom courage and temperance reliably promotes flourishing in human beings. However, the other-regarding virtues of justice and benevolence does not obviously promote flourishing. Cases in which their exercise seem to be to the detriment of their possessor readily spring to mind. An argument is needed to lend credibility to the idea that these virtues are rational requirements for reliably achieving the good life for human beings.

To possess justice and benevolence is to be sensible and responsive to moral reasons, hence, if these virtues are vindicated by the sword of reason it will have been shown that human beings have natural normative reasons to be moral and respond to moral reasons. If this can be achieved, the toughest challenge of demonstrating the action guiding normative authority of objective moral reasons will have been met. I do not intend my discussion to demonstrably prove that justice and benevolence are vindicated rationally for all human beings. This is a complex empirical question, but I want to give speculative reasons why one might think the answer is going to be affirmative.

Humankind is a first nature life-form for which it is possible to devise a determinate natural-history objectively. What the natural history for human beings includes is a complex empirical question.[217] I shall not speculate about what an exhaustive list of capacities and spheres are going to be in the flourishing human life. I do, however, want to suggest how the question about the rationality of the virtues can be answered. I also want to indicate that a positive answer is plausible. To do this I follow Foot in seeking to identify virtues as

---

[215] In the last paragraphs of Foot's "Moral Beliefs" (1958) she argues this point. See also (Wolf, 1982).

[216] As it happens, all linguistic communities studied so far has virtue and vice terms. Also, cross cultural studies indicate that the five Aristotelian character traits are considered virtues universally. (Peterson and Seligman, 2004, Flanagan, 2007, 51, 130)

[217] Owen Flanagan and Martha Nussbaum has both speculated about what elements might be included in a natural history of the sort I am considering. Flanagan thinks the following traits will be included: the six basic emotions of anger, fear, disgust, happiness, sadness, and surprise, the perceptual input systems, the propositional attitudes (but not their contents), biological sex, sexual desire, hunger, thirst, linguistic capacity and the capacity to be conditioned, to reason and to remember (1991, 41-2). Nussbaum thinks rather about shared spheres common to humanity which includes: mortality, the body, pleasure and pain, cognitive capability, practical reason, early infant development, affiliation and humor (1987, 697-8). I follow Nussbaums way of thinking through spheres important to human lives, but it is useful to consider the traits on Flanagan's list to get a fuller picture of what capacities are important in human lives. On the basis of a natural history, probably involving many of the elements from the two lists, we may speculate about what a flourishing human life is like.

Aristotelian necessities. Recall, an Aristotelian necessity is a trait that reliably promotes flourishing. To identify Aristotelian necessities, it is first necessary to have a rough picture of flourishing. Foot proposes two speculative strategies for achieving this: Reflection on the ideas of human *deprivation* and human *benefit*.[218]

It is hard to get a grip on human flourishing, so Foot suggests we start with the idea of human deprivation. It is easy to think about deprivation: Disease, deformation, anxiety, depression, loneliness is clearly not excellent states, and plausibly bad. On reflection, it is clear that states like these reliably go against flourishing. Even though they are not themselves all noninstrumentally bad, they might have causal effects that go in the way of noninstrumental Goods some way or another.

The other idea we should consider is that of human benefit. When we consider human benefit, we should ask ourselves what it means to benefit a 'bland' human being, that is, a human being before he or she has acquired a second nature. If we think of human beings, stripped to the bare bones, without any particularities, what would be a well-lived flourishing life for them? In answering that question, it might be helpful to consider what loving parents would want their children to be or to have before knowing how they are going to turn out.[219] The intuitive answer to that question, according to Foot, is that we would want our children to have 'things that are basic in human life, such as home, and family, and work, and friendship'.[220] That particular items on these lists are bad or good in the human life is up for debate. The idea that there are items like these is, however, plausible. It seems that there are Goods that are so great, that a person who leads a life without them cannot fully flourish as a human being, similarly that there are evils so great that a life cannot be flourishing with it.

Reflection on deprivation and benefit provides a rough picture of flourishing. The next step is to consider whether it's plausible that justice and benevolence are Aristotelian necessities—that is, whether these virtues reliably promote basic Goods or are necessary to avoid deprivation.[221] To investigate this, we ought first to consider what a virtue is. A virtue is a complex psychological disposition to reliably act in predictable ways and to be properly motivated to so act. Furthermore, the possessor of a virtue sees value in actions and traits on

---

[218] Natural Goodness, 43.

[219] On Virtue Ethics, 175, Natural Goodness, 41.

[220] Ibid, 88.

[221] So, to be clear, I do not claim that virtues are adaptations, I claim that virtues are Aristotelian necessities. In Aristotle's phrase, they are neither by nature nor contary to nature (NE 1103a24).

the basis of the virtue, and thus the virtue play an important part in the practical deliberations of their possessors. Hence, the honest person is reliably disposed to tell the truth, all else being equal, and to value honesty and disvalue dishonesty in herself and other persons.[222] With a rough idea of what a virtue is and what some essential aspects of flourishing are, we may finally consider whether it is plausible that justice and benevolence are Aristotelian necessities.

My argument will be quick and speculative, but I think it indicates a fruitful avenue for the vindication of other-regarding virtues. Its first premise is that 'human beings are social animals'. This Aristotelian idea appears to be a true natural-historical judgment about humankind.[223] Furthermore, the having of friends and stable social relations with other persons are seemingly important Goods in the flourishing life of a human being. To have someone to talk to and with whom one may grow within a shared practice, seems to be a great Good. Indeed, there is ample experimental evidence for the fact that positive relationships are essential to human flourishing.[224] As the celebrated psychologist Martin Seligman puts it: "very little that is positive is solitary."[225]

It follows from these plausible premises that traits which reliably promote positive relationships are important traits in good lives. What traits reliably promote positive relationships? It wouldn't be appalling, I hope, to suggest that a sensible concern about the well-being of others and a habit of treating like cases alike are traits that promotes this end. It might be, however, that the *appearance* of benevolence and justice is more rational than the real deal.[226] Perhaps it is more rational to maintain the appearance of benevolence and justice, and then to shirk away from their requirements when no-one is looking or when the price is high. Perhaps a callous and clever Calliclean character has found the best strategy for leading a flourishing life.

I shall suggest three reasons why the Calliclean way is irrational. Firstly, it seems like it requires a lot of psychological energy to maintain false appearances. It is perhaps easier and

---

[222] On Virtue Ethics, 10-13.

[223] Flanagan argues that it is a basic psychological need in human beings to be cared for and be sociable. He indicates robust scientific findings in support of this claim (1991, 48).

[224] See Tiberius and Plakias (2010) for an overview of contemporary psychological research on well-being in an eudaimonist sense. That is, a sense that focus on "vital human needs, self-actualization and development rathen than positive affect" (407). All major theories in this area include positive relationships as a major element in the flourishing life (407-10).

[225] Seligman, 2013, 20.

[226] See Plato's *Gorgias* and *Republic* for the locus classicus for this kind of discussion.

more relaxing to maintain harmony between outward appearances and inward sentiments. Secondly, and more importantly, the maintenance of false appearances is alienating. It is not possible to have authentic relationships with others while deceiving them, and there are great Goods in authentic relationships. Thirdly, and decisively, the 'costs' of benevolence and justice are slight, and benefits great, for the possessor of these virtues. This third and decisive point rests on the premise that the characterization of virtue given above is correct; but if it is, this point is very powerful against the rationality of the Calliclean way of life. Since the nature of the virtues is such that the Good for their possessors change in accordance with them, the just person will value justice in itself and the benevolent person will value the well-being of others noninstrumentally. This means that for the possessor of these virtues, just and benevolent acts will be great Goods.

Even though this argument indicates that it is plausible that persons within the same social sphere will be caring and just to each other, it may be thought that true benevolence and justice requires a much wider range of concerns. True benevolence requires care for humanity as a whole, including human beings far away, and true justice require great efforts toward legislation the effects of which in many cases would not be felt directly by oneself. How can wide concerns like these be accommodated on a formally egoistical approach like the eudaimonist virtue ethics of Naturalistic Aristotelianism?

If it is granted that benevolence and justice are important Goods for maintaining positive relationships, it appears to follow that their possessors will be concerned with ethical matters beyond their own spheres of self-regarding concern. It is not possible to truly possess the virtue of justice and benevolence without thinking about the nature of justice and inherent value of all lives. The exercise of these virtues will be a scaling matter. It is possible to possess them in a minimal sense. If they are possessed at all, however, it will be clear to their possessor that the values associated with the virtues ought to be promoted. Weak-willed persons may forgo the demands of justice or the rights of the poor, but on Naturalistic Aristotelianism it is not rational to be weak-willed, or to neglect the Good. Hence, insofar as the possessor of some virtue to a small degree is rational and strong-willed, she will develop the virtues to a stronger degree, and act in accordance with them.

This line of thinking derives from the thesis of the unity of the virtues. A plausible weak thesis about the unity of the virtues is that the possession of one central other-regarding virtue inclines its possessor to value things that give her a *pro tanto* reason to acquire the other

moral virtues.[227] Another way to put this point is that the possession of an other-regarding virtue gives its possessor moral reasons to develop that virtue to a stronger degree. Hence, the brief argument above for the possession of other-regarding virtues in a minimal sense plausibly leads to a robust development of those virtues. The robust possession of the virtues of justice and benevolence disposes its possessor to find the striving for justice and the good of humanity as meaningful activities, and not as costs. In fact, extreme cases suggests that it may be rational for champions of justice to sacrifice their lives for the cause. Naturalistic Aristotelianism can make sense of this. I conclude that for good persons it may be rational to break beyond tribalism and extend a concern for the lives of people that have no direct influence on their own lives.

The contents of justice and benevolence for the virtuous person is not directly determined by Naturalistic Aristotelianism. It is absolutely possible within the virtue ethical framework that the contents of justice and benevolence in the deliberations of the virtuous agent is given, for instance, by Rawls's *Theory of Justice* (1971) and Singer's altruistic utilitarianism (1993).[228] Even though the principles of these theories contribute moral reasons within the practical deliberations of the virtuous agent, it is nevertheless the virtue of practical wisdom, phronesis, that assigns the correct practical normative weight to these reasons relative to their importance in the complex nexus of considerations about how to live a good life. The phronimos does not deprive herself in order to help others, but she does not disregard the suffering of others either. She feels the pull of justice regardless of the consequences, but she is also aware that the value of justice can be overcome in particular cases by greater Goods.

These tentative speculations about the prudential rationality of other-regarding virtues are inconclusive.[229] A full vindication of the virtues for humankind is beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet, I hope to have indicated what it takes to vindicate a virtue relative to a life-form, and in particular, relative to the first nature life-form of humankind. The best strategy for loving parents whose child bears a close to blank slate, is to inculcate in it the full range of virtues including other-regarding virtues such as justice and benevolence. If they choose to

---

[227] This way of stating it owes to Mark Schroeder (2008, 115). See Flanagan (1991, 268-275) for a discussion of the full unity of the virtues thesis, and Badhwar, (1996) for a thorough discussion and development of the more plausible weak unity of the virtues thesis.

[228] See also Hursthouse on this, (1999, 224-6). Blackburn also argue that different first order theories best suit different functions in personal and social human life (1998, chapter 2).

[229] For two more detailed speculative arguments for the rationality of justice, see Bloomfield (2008) and (2011).

raise the child to care only for herself, and to take advantage when oppurtunity strikes, their strategy would be tantamount to binding her feet. Likewise, raising her without learning her how to be a virtuous human being is like forgetting to let her play as a child, or forgetting to teach her language.

5.3.   Identity, Relativity and Goodness

I have indicated a plausible line of reasoning according to which justice and benevolence are traits that reliably promote flourishing for the human life-form. The question I want to raise in this section is what the relation is between first nature and second nature in the determination of identity-relative flourishing.

Flourishing for a person is a whole lot more complex than flourishing for members of a life-form *qua* members of that life-form only. Persons have complex identities whose constituent life-forms influence what flourishing is for them. Flourishing for Peter the musician is different from flourishing for Sarah the socialist. To accommodate this fact, Naturalistic Aristotelianism is a modular theory that may be applied different ways. We may evaluate Sarah *qua* socialist, and in that case we judge the functioning of Sarah relative only to the second nature life-form 'socialist'. We may also evaluate complex identities. Peter's identity, for instance, is very complex. It includes the following life-form attributions: Middle aged human Danish engineer, husband and father of three, who likes classic rock music and plays in a jazz band. Let's call this complex identity Q. To get a good grip on what flourishing is for Q, we need adequate conceptions of the natural histories of all these second nature life-forms. When we have a good idea of what flourishing involves relative to each life-form, we would have to combine them all to a complex identity Q and determine what flourishing is for Q as a whole. This task is further complicated because some life-form relative Goods contradict each other. For instance, Peter plays in a jazz band, but he likes rock. Flourishing *qua* jazz musician to some degree contradicts flourishing *qua* rock-lover. Furthermore, the relative importance of different life-forms within an identity is not something it is easy to come to terms with. How are we to say whether Peter is to give up the jazz band or his taste for rock music?

I cannot give a codifiable decision procedure for determining the correct normative weight of life-form relative traits to the flourishing of complex identities all things considered. Yet, the framework of Naturalistic Aristotelianism indicates how the phronimos reasons practically to arrive at reasonable answers. Firstly, the weight of reasons is determined

contrastively. This means that the strength of some particular reason is determined relative to contrasting reasons.[230] Thus, the phronimos considers the importance of some trait to flourishing for identity by contrasting that trait to other traits, and considers concrete questions like: Ought one to spend so and so many hours with the band *in contrast* to spending more time with the family *qua* Q. This process is long winded and very difficult, questions about how to live are immensily complex. A conclusion is reached when the phronimos attains reflective equilibrium. Reflective equilibrium is the state at which a value is assigned to the functioning of all important traits relative to Q.

Secondly, the phronimos acknowledges the ancient Stoic maxim according to which one is to accept the things one cannot change, and change the things one can change for what is better. What this means for Naturalistic Aristotelianism is that first nature has a special role to play in the determination of flourishing for human beings. First nature is the essence of persons, this means that it cannot be abandoned. Of course, a child cannot choose a culture and language for herself, but she can choose to learn and speak another. She may choose to follow her ancestors way of life, or to break from it radically. This radical freedom is what Sartre affirmed when he said that 'existence precedes essence'. By this he meant that human nature is plastic; we can shape our nature and way of life. This is in many ways a fine and hopeful doctrine. It inspired feminism and probably helped women break free from the chains of an oppressive (and false) conception of the 'female life-form'.[231] However, despite the important truth to be grasped within this doctrine, it is also importantly false, or at least overstated. One cannot choose to be a fox, or not to have to sleep; and someone in love can't choose to not be jealous if a friend marries the person they like. The wise person knows what life-form traits are changeable and what life-form traits are nonoptional for the flourishing human life. This means that for all identities in which there are second nature life-forms that contradict first nature to some degree, persons with those identities are going to have a reason to dispose of the life-forms that are disagreeable to their first nature. All persons have a *pro tanto* reason to find a way of being that is agreeable to first nature.[232]

---

[230] See Sinnott Armstrong (2008).

[231] The example is Hursthouse's (1999, 221).

[232] The distinction shouldn't be overstated though. Certain second nature life-forms are relatively unconditional too. Since they often depend on the choices or beliefs of a whole community, one cannot do away with them alone. For instance, if I decide to rob a bank, and go through with it, I cannot say afterwards that I no longer choose to be a bank-robber and ought not to be punished. When, on the other hand, Don Quixote thinks himself a knight, it is plain that he is not a knight really. Second nature life-forms aren't objective in the objective sense in which first natural life-forms are. However, they are intersubjectively true, and this means that they may be more or less robust depending on the faith and convictions of the community in which they exist.

With the help of these two ideas—contrastivism about reasons and the unconditionality of first nature—it is possible to determine the relative normative weight of life-form relative goodness within complex identities. This means that it is also possible to make existential choices on the basis of natural normative practical reasons. If it's simply a brute fact about Peter that he loves rock-music, something about himself that he cannot change, than we may say that it is wrong for him to continue playing in a jazz band, trying to change his ways. By extension of this existential strain of thinking, it is possible to determine in advance what identities are going to be harmonious. Some combinations of life-forms do not go well together, others are mutually supportive. Furthermore, since first nature is an essential aspect of every identity, and since all persons have a *pro tanto* reason to flourish *qua* human being, what identities harmonize with first nature is of special interest to Naturalistic Aristotelianism.

The contingent empirical claim I wish to defend, and on which much of the plausibility of the idea of natural normativity rests, is the Dostoyevskyan idea that identities which harmonize with first nature include as Aristotelian necessities the other-regarding virtues that make salient for their possessor the normative force of moral reasons.[233] All identities that harmonize with first nature, imply virtue and exclude vice.[234] As a test for a claim of this kind, Gary Watson has suggested that one must answer the following two questions affirmatively:

1. Can an objective theory really establish that being a gangster is incompatible with being a good human being?

2. If it can, can it establish an intelligible connection between [this] appraisal and what we have reasons to do as individuals?[235]

Above, I have given reasons for believing that all persons, in virtue of their first nature, have rationally compelling reasons to adopt the other-regarding virtues of justice and benevolence. This means that all persons have a *pro tanto* reason to disvalue being a gangster. However, on Naturalistic Aristotelianism, it is not only possible to show that other-regarding virtues are rationally warranted; it is also possible to show that vicious life-forms are

---

[233] Pick up virtually any book by Dostoyevskij for a forceful expression of this idea. It is the leitmotif around which all his thought turns. It is, however, especially clear in *Crime and Punishment, Brothers Karamazov, Demons* and *Notes From Underground*.

[234] That is to say, exclude what we consider to be virtue and vice from our (conservative) ethical outlook.

[235] Watson, 1990, 67, quoted from Natural Goodness, 53. Both Foot (Natural Goodness, 53) and Hursthouse (1999, 193) quote Watson's challenge as the ultimate test for the objectivite rationality of virtue.

irrational. That is, not only is it more rational to be virtuous than it is to be vicious, it is irrational to be vicious. Let's consider the gangster life-form to see why.

Flourishing for the second nature life-form 'gangster', taken in abstraction, plausibly includes drinking, partying, defending territory and in group, and doing drugs. I'll grant that for the gangster, stealing and lying, at least to outgroup individuals, are Aristotelian necessities that reliably promote these ends (perhaps because honest work is incompatible with flourishing *qua* gangster). Plausibly, it is not possible to combine the other-regarding virtues of justice and benevolence with these Aristotelian necessities, so for the gangster, it is not good to be just, benevolent or honest. So, for Georg the gangster who lives a life of excess, it may seem like it is necessary for him to lie and steal to support his thuggish lifestyle. However, this is not so. The reason is that Georg is a person, and persons bear the human life-form as well as whatever second nature life-forms they bear. We ought to admit that Georg's base thuggish second nature means that for him, it is an important aspect of the good life to enjoy base pleasures, a habit that is not easily supported within the limits of the law. However, Georg is also a human being, and *qua* human being, important Goods for him include positive relationships, good health, being safe and having a place to call home. With this fuller picture of flourishing for Georg in view, we may ask whether stealing and lying reliably promote flourishing for Georg. The answer to this question is again empirical, but to me it seems like the answer is likely to be negative. Doing what gangsters do, and living the gangster life appears *prima facie* to be incompatible with flourishing *qua* human being. Stealing puts one at odds with the law, and this implies a danger that is detrimental to the important good of being and feeling safe in the course of one's life. Moreover, doing illegal work alienates a person from the rest of society, and the lack of safety and stability in a life undermines the possibility of forming stable and strong relationships. For these reasons, I think a good instantiation of the identity constituted by the first nature life-form 'humankind' and the second nature life-form 'gangster' will do best by refraining from lying and stealing. Furthermore, Georg will have rationally compelling reasons to abstrain from many of the Goods relative to flourishing for a gangster because they are detrimental to his health.

For the reasons presented above, I regard Watson's challenge as having been met. I have explained why being a gangster is incompatible with being a good human being and I have shown what the connection is between this moral judgment and practical rationality. However, if it turned out that Georg the gangster grew up in the slums, and had at no time in his life a real chance of being anything else than a gangster, I would have to take back my

claim that being a gangster was not the most rational way for him. This is because of the contrastivism about reasons I have assented to. However, even if being a gangster had been shown to have been the most rational choice for Georg, we should still judge him to be a bad human being, in the sense of being worse off. The appropriate attitude in this respect is pity rather than blame. Even though this context makes Naturalistic Aristotelianism unable to answer Watson's second question affirmatively, I do not regard this as a weakness. I regard it as a strength of Naturalistic Aristotelianism to make a distinction between these cases. It is no strength in a theory of normativity to imply the rightness of high minded judgments of irrationality to those whose situation does not readily permit action on moral reasons. On Naturalistic Aristotelianism immorality is analogous to irrationalty, ill health or weakness. There is no room for a special moral evaluation whose normative force is outside the scope of natural normativity.

5.4.   Underdetermination and the Value of Autonomy

The structure of justification according to which first nature determines the rationality of second nature successfully explains why immoral second nature life-forms are incompatible with human nature. First nature excludes immoral life-forms. But now a new worry emerges: Does first nature exclude too much? Sometimes we want to say that a person had a good life even though that person neglected first nature in important respects. Foot recalls an anecdote about Wittgenstein to illustrate this point. Wittgenstein is reported to have said at his deathbed: 'Tell them I have had a wonderful life.'[236] Foot makes it clear that she has never met anyone that doubts the truth of that statement, and neither does she.[237] Wittgenstein was not a well-functioning man in many respects, yet there is a strong intuition driving us to say that his life was a good life well-lived. As Foot says, "What Wittgenstein said rang true because of the things he had done, with rare passion and genius, and especially on account of his philosophy."[238] The value of doing philosophy was surely great in Wittgenstein's life, and it seems that the contributions of that practice to his flourishing were very important. However, doing philosophy seems very remote from the Goods associated with first nature. Can Naturalistic Aristotelianism redeem Wittgenstein's life as a good life well-lived?

---

[236] Natural Goodness, 42.

[237] Ibid, 85.

[238] Natural Goodness, 85.

In short, the answer is that philosophy is a legitimate development of cognitive abilities and satisfies many important spheres of human life. However, the challenge warrants a more detailed answer, and this is a good opportunity to explain how Naturalistic Aristotelianism handles '*well-rounded*' and '*focused*' lives.

First nature constraints the shape of the flourishing human life in terms of spheres of action and experience. Well-functioning in a sphere contributes to the flourishing of a life in general. However, there is a legitimate sense in which it is alright to prioritize one sphere over another. Concentration on one sphere to the detriment of another may yield a more flourishing life all things considered. To see how this may work, lets say there are only two spheres in human life, the theoretical sphere and the practical sphere. It may turn out that the natural history of human nature implies that tending each sphere equally means that one cannot excel at either. If that is the case, the human predicament is aptly illustrated by the M-shaped thin line in this figure, where the thick line indicates the flourishing life.[239] Naturalistic Aristotelianism does not imply that there is only one kind of life that constitutes true flourishing for human beings. There will be many ways to live a flourishing life, and there is room for concentrated lives.
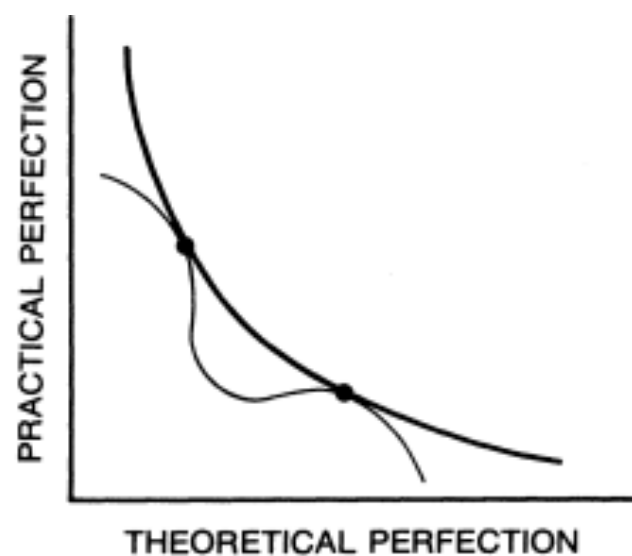
Now we are in a position to explain why Wittgenstein's life was a life-well lived according to Naturalistic Aristotelianism. The sphere in which Wittgenstein excelled played a very important role in the kind of life that he lived, and the additional Goods of concentration in this sphere made up for the deficiencies in the other spheres of his life. This made the life devoted to philosophy a viable life-plan for Wittgenstein; the excellent exercise of his rational capacities was what mattered most to him.[240] However, make no mistake, this came at a great cost. Wittgenstein often lamented that he lacked true friends, and would very

---

[239] The figure is due to Thomas Hurka (1987, 739).

[240] Early on in Wittgenstein's life he had decided that he had to become a genius. For him, there was no legitimate alternative way to lead a life than to strive for this end.

much have liked to live a simpler practical life. He did indeed strike out to do "honest" work multiple times throughout his life, but he always came back to philosophy.[241]

In the simplistic figure, two spheres and two 'optimal' ways of life are represented. If we take on board Nussbaum's tentative proposal for sets of spheres of lives for human nature, we'll have something like 8-10 spheres. This complicates things, but the idea of balancing between spheres constrained by general considerations of natural history still gives us a reasonably clear picture of how it is possible to evaluate the shape of lives. I want to explain this in more detail in the next section, but now I want to address a reasonable concern about paternalism.

The picture I have drawn promises to deliver a determinate conception of the range of good human lives. This very idea may appear to contradict what we know about the multiplicity of different ways of living good human lives. If Naturalistic Aristotelianism implies that there is a small, determinate set of lives that are truly flourishing, while most ways of being human are less than first rate, that seems to imply a worrying elitism. A substantial conception of reason undergirded by natural normativity may appear to impose an iron cage constraining the rationality of human ways of being. Dostoyevskij puts this point best:

> For this stupidest of all…may in fact be the most profitable of anything on earth for our sort…because in any event it preserves for us the chiefest and dearest thing, that is, our personality and our individuality. [242]

The way I see it, Dostoyevskij's charge is a claim about the value of autonomy. There is inherent value in deliberating about and choosing how one is to live one's life. A life lived according to a 'rational life-plan' perhaps devised by bureaucrats or psychologists is not the good way for human beings to live their lives.[243] I want to grant this point. There is indeed value in finding one's own way in the world, and this is a fact that Naturalistic Aristotelianism has to respect. But what does it mean for Naturalistic Aristotelianism to respect this point? Does it imply that natural normativity cannot constrain our second nature after all? That reason is not, and cannot be substantive? No. The value of making existential decisions about one's own life is best construed as a psychological fact about human nature. We are alienated

---

[241] See Ray Monk's excellent biography *Ludwig Wittgenstein the Duty of Genius* (1990).

[242] Dostoyevskij, Notes From Underground, 28.

[243] Here I draw on Putnam's discussion of this issue (2002, 82).

from ourselves if we don't appreciate the reasons why we are as we are. It is important to us to be able to say that the way we live our lives is our own way, it is a way that resonates with our way of seeing the world. This is a psychological fact about alienation and authenticity in human beings. Naturalistic Aristotelianism could not give a simple schema according to which all lives are to be fitted; it can only be a theory according to which different types of persons have a set of normative reasons, whether they know it or not.[244]

The admission of the value of autonomy means that the underdetermination of flourishing lives is far greater than one might first suspect on Naturalistic Aristotelianism. There is a great variety of lives that are good, flourishing lives well-lived. Because it is important to human beings that their way of life resonates with them, contextual factors in the life of every individual human beings are important. This means that the substance of wisdom about human lives is going to be very general, and allow for different instantiations in a wide range of second natures. Yet, they are going to be determinate enough, I think, to indicate that blatantly vicious and immoral life-styles or anti-social life-forms are worse than virtuous and consciencious ways of life. The Aristotelian conception of practical reason is neither empty, nor an iron cage.

---

[244] Whether someone choose to restrict the freedom of others in accordance with what they take their reasons to These reasons should not be imposed on anyone by force, as in Orwell's or Huxley's dystopias.

Conclusion

I have traversed a vast terrain to articulate a truly naturalistic Aristotelianism. Building on the Aristotelian Naturalism of Thompson and Foot, I have done my best to develop a sensible Naturalistic Aristotelianism that may explain the normative appearances associated with practical reasons naturalistically.

Belief in the objective existence of a pervasive natural normativity throughout the biological world is warranted because that hypothesis best explains the normative structure of our natural-historical representations of living beings. The teleological way of representing living beings make them out as functional systems engaged in intentional pursuits. We have a good understanding of what this means, and the prospects for reducing biological function to non-teleological notions are promising. Furthermore, the functional understanding of living beings is explanatory; it explains their nature better than mere mechanical theories. For these reasons, explanations involving functional traits merits ontological commitment to the objective existence of those traits. Hence, if the grounding identification of Naturalistic Aristotelianism is granted— that the Good for a living being is integrated well-functioning throughout a life— then goodness can be said to merit objective existence too. Evaluative properties inherit the causal properties of the conglomerate of functional properties they are identified with, and this makes them suitable to figure in our best explanations of the world.[245] In contrast to Hume and Moore, I conceive the reductive identity claim as an inference to the best explanation. A claim like this sets off alarms in many quarters. For it to be plausible at all, it must be an ideal match with our considered normative convictions. The test is whether it can accommodate the normative appearances associated with practical reasons, and whether it can support our most cherished moral beliefs.

Throughout this dialectic I have responded to objections, and made an effort to explain how Naturalistic Aristotelianism saves the normative appearances. In many cases the theory appears to have damning implications, but I have argued against these appearances that Naturalistic Aristotelianism is not revisionary in deeply counterintuitive ways. On the contrary, the theory has surprising implications that undergird some of our moral intuitions that are otherwise hard to explain.

---

[245] As Van Roojen notes, this conclusively answers parsimony/redundancy arguments, including Harmans latest updated version (Roojen, 2015, 227).

If my argumentation is sound, Naturalistic Aristotelianism can explain why good persons ought to adopt other-regarding virtues and act on moral reasons even though these are a subspecies of practical rationality. However, Naturalistic Aristotelianism has to make one very important concession. Moral judgment and moral reasons are reduced to judgments and reasons of rationality answerable to natural normativity. This eliminativism of the distinctively 'categorical moral' aspect of practical reasoning may be a dealbreaker for some ethical theorists. The question to ask is whether the confidence in the reality and authority of naturalized morality in terms of natural normative practical rationality is more worthwhile than a conception of morality that retains cagegorical authority at the price of an uneasy place in a naturalistic worldview. The answer here is dependent on metaphilosophical views that I have had no opportunity to delve into here. Sceptical naturalists might side with me and affirm the former view, whereas philosophical nonnaturalists respectful of robust moral appearances might affirm the latter view.

I have emphasized that life-form relative natural normativity gives all human beings across cultures reasons to cultivate virtue and a broad, but not too broad, range of second natures. Contrary to received wisdom, I have argued that there is no fallacy in supposing that nature is normative for rational beings like ourselves. In fact, the normativity of nature is the grounds for the normative authority of reason itself. The normative authority of particular practical reasons are not binding for all possible rational agents as such, as Kant insisted it had to be. Yet, the normative authority of practical reasons is universal, stable, and robust across the first nature life-form of humankind. This means that there is at least a substantial set of practical reasons that all humans share, even though there are going to be many pracrical reasons they don't share as well. Natural normative practical reasons are agent neutral in the sense of being life-form member neutral, and I submit that this adequately saves the normative appearance that practical reasons are universal.

The Aristotelian conception of practical reason guides rational beings in thinking how to live wisely. It is a formally egoistic framework within which the normative force of all practical reasons for an agent are explained by their promotion of the Good for that agent. The Good for an agent is to live a flourishing life. The possession of a strong character endowed with the cardinal virtues reliably promotes the flourishing life for human beings. Therefore it is Good for persons to be virtuous, even on the formally egoistical conception of practical rationality. This structure of normative justification breaks down the traditional dualism of practical reason that is so problematic for all deontological and utilitarian theories

of practical reason. Yet it explains why individuals ought to be moral on much weaker premises than these theories do.

The last appearance concerns the objectivity of reasons on Naturalistic Aristotelianism. This is the biggest challenge, and it is the one that I have been at the greatest pains to meet. I have admitted that second nature life-form relative flourishing is mind-dependent. This bars the way for second nature life-form relative goodness and practical reasons. By implication, identity-relative practical reasons will not be absolutely objective. However, in virtue of the modular nature of Naturalistic Aristotelianism, it is possible to canvas objective first nature life-form relative practical reasons to consider their bearings on particular identities. Because of this, it is possible to retain a grain of objectivity for Naturalistic Aristotelianism. Furthermore, since the normativity of practical reasons relative to second nature life-forms derives from the natural normativity relative to first nature, we ought to have a realistic attitude towards these also. This carries over to the virtues too. Since the virtues are Aristotelian necessities that reliably promote flourishing for human beings, they are objectively Good for us. Even though the virtues are objectively good traits for human beings, the specific propositional contents particular persons might entertain because of the possession of a virtue cannot be explained by Naturalistic Aristotelianism. However, general attitudes and dispositions associated with important virtues might be accommodated, so I think that Naturalistic Aristotelianism can at least explain the objective existence of some central moral reasons, as well as a broad range of practical reasons.[246] Hence, I conclude that Naturalistic Aristotelianism satisfies the requirement of the objectivity of practical reasons.

As I have argued throughout the thesis, and indicated in this conclusion, I believe that Naturalistic Aristotelianism accommodates the normative appearances. Therefore we ought to believe that nature is pervaded by patterns of natural normativity, and that there is such a thing as natural goodness.

Naturalism pervades most fields of philosophy. It appears that philosophy is converging on a new silent consensus. However, a few bastions of resistance remains. One of the strongest is nonnaturalism in metaethics. The dominant view about normativity is nonnaturalist. Most theorists in this field cannot even conceive of the possibility of

---

[246] The question of how objectivity spreads through relations of necessary promotion of flourishing to second nature life-forms is actually very complex and it is fully possible that the objectivity of reasons associated with second nature life-form necessities are objective too. However, it is not within the bounds of this essay to investigate this, so I will concede for now that those reasons will not be objective.

normativity being a real part of the natural world. If I have managed to indicate at least one way this can be coherently imagined, I will regard my efforts to have been successful.

Quine's main argument for his naturalism consisted in a long ardous attempt to explain how knowledge of the world can be obtained naturalistically. In a similar vain, I intend this thesis to be a major supporting argument in favor of naturalism generally. If the naturalistic view of the world can support normative reasons, the greatest argument against naturalism will have been removed. It is not necessary to conceive the natural world as disenchanted, cold, and devoid of values. It is possible within a naturalistic worldview to make sense of the great questions of how we are to live together rationally.

References

Aristotle. (2002) *Nichomachean Ethics*, eds. Broadie and Rowe, Oxford: Oxford University press,

Bechtel, William and Jennifer Mundale. (1999) "Multiple Realizability Revisited: Linking Cognitive and Neural States", *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 66, No. 2.

Blackburn, Simon. (1984) *Spreading the Word*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

— (1985) "Error and the Phenomenology of Value", in T. Honderich (ed.) *Morality and Objectivity: A Tribute to J. L. Mackie*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

— (1993) "Supervenience Revisited", in Eds Russ Shafer-Landau and Terence Cuneo, *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*, Maldon, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

— (1998) *Ruling Passions*, Oxford: Oxford University press.

Block, Ned and Robert Stalnaker. (Jan., 1999) "Conceptual Analysis, Dualism, and the Explanatory Gap", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 108, No. 1, pp. 1-46.

— (2003) "Do causal powers drain away?", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 67 (1): 133-150.

Bloomsfield, Paul. (2001) *Moral Reality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— (2008) "Why It's Bad to Be Bad" in *Morality and Self-Interest*, (Ed.) Paul Bloomsfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— (2011) "Justice as a Self-Regarding Virtue", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 82 No. 1.

Boyle, Matthew. (2012) "Essentially Rational Animals", in *Rethinking Epistemology Volume 2*, Eds. Günter Abel and James Conant, Berlin: De Gruyter, pp 395-428.

Casebeer, William (2003) *Natural Ethical Facts*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Chrisoula, Andreou. (2006) "Getting On in a Varied World", *Social Theory and Practice* 32 (1): 61-73.

Copp, D. and Sobel, D. (2004) "Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics", *Ethics*, Vol. 114, No. 3 (April 2004), pp. 514-554.

Damasio, Antonio. (2006) *Descartes Error*, London: Vintage Books.

Darwall, Gibbard and Railton, (1992), "Toward Fin de siècle Ethics: Some Trends", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 1, Philosophy in Review: Essays on Contemporary Philosophy, pp. 115-189.

Dennett, Daniel. (1995) *Darwins Dangerous Idea*, London; Penguin Books.

Doris, John M. and The Moral Psychology Research Group, (2010) *The Moral Psychology Handbook*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fitzpatrick, William. (2014) "Morality and Evolutionary Biology", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/morality-biology/>.

Flanagan, Owen. (1991) *Varieties of Moral Personality": Ethics and Psychological Realism*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

— (2007) *The Really Hard Problem; Meaning in a Material World*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

Flanagan, Wong and Sirkissian (2008) "Naturalizing Ethics", in *Moral Psychology, Volume 1: The Evolution of Morality: Adaptations and Innateness*, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (ed.), Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

Fodor, J. A. "Special Sciences (Or: The Disunity of Science as a Working Hypothesis)", *Synthese*, Vol. 28, No 2 (Oct., 1974), pp. 97-115.

Foot, Philippa. (1958 - 1959) 'Moral Beliefs', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 59, pp. 83-104.

— (1972) 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives', in *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*, (Eds). Shafer-Landau, Russ and Terence Cuneo, Maldon, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

— (2001) *Natural Goodness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Interview in *Philosophy Now*, Issue 41. link: https://philosophynow.org/issues/41/Philippa_Foot.

— (2009) 'The Grammar of Goodness', in *Conversations on Ethics*, (Ed.) Alex Voorhoeve, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Frankfurt, Harry, G. (1971) "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person", *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Jan. 14, 1971), pp. 5-20.

Geach, Peter. (1956) "Good and Evil," *Analysis*, Vol. 17: 33-42).

Geertz, Clifford. (1973) "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture". In The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Thesiss. New York: Basic Books, 3-30.

Godfrey-Smith, Peter. (1993) "Functions: Consensus Without Unity", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 74: 196-208.

— (1994) "A Modern History Theory of Functions", *Nous*, Vol. 28: 344-362.

— *Philosophy of Biology*, NY: Princeton University Press.

Gould, S. J. and Yrba, E. S. (1982) "Exaptation-A Missing Term in the Science of Form", *Paleobiology*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 4-15.

Haggqvist, Sören. (2013) "Teleosemantics: Etiological Foundations", *Philosophy Compass*, 8/1: 73-83.

Hampshire, Stuart. (1982), "Morality and Convention", in *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, eds Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 145-158.

Hare. R. M. (1972) 'Nothing Matters', in *Applications of Moral Philosophy*, London: Macmillan.

Harman, Gilbert. (1965) "Inference to the Best Explanation", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 74, No. 1.

— (1977) "Ethics and Observation", pp 3-10 from *The nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*, in (Eds.) Shafer-Landau and Cuneo, *Foundations of Ethics*, Blackwell, (2007).

Harman, G. & Thomson, J. J. (1996) *Moral relativism and Moral Objectivity*, Maldon, MA: Blackwell.

Hacker-Wright, John. (2009) "What is Natural About Foot's Aristotelian Naturalism", *Ratio*, Volume 22, Issue 3, pp (sep., 2009) 308–321.

— (2012) "Ethical Naturalism and the Constitution of Agency", *Journal of Value Inquiry* 46 (1): 13-23.

Honderich T. (ed.) (1985) *Morality and Objectivity: A Tribute to J. L. Mackie*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Hull, D. (1978) "A Matter of Individuality", *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 335-60.

Hume, David. (1739-40) *A Treatise of Human Nature*, (Eds.) L. A. Selby-Bigge, Second Edition, P. H. Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press. (1978).

Hurka, Thomas (1987) "The well-rounded life", *Journal of Philosophy* 84 (12):727-746.

Hursthouse, Rosalind. (1999) *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hylton, Peter. (2007) *Quine*, New York: Routledge.

Joyce, Richard. (2008) "Morality, Schmorality" in *Morality and Self-Interest*. Edited by Paul Bloomsfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kant, Immanuel. (1790) *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Trans. Paul Guyer and Erie Matthews, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (2000).

Kim, Jeagwon. (1989) "The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism", *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* Vol. 63, No. 3 (Nov., 1989), pp. 31-47.

— (1992) "Multiple Realization and the Metaphysics of Reduction", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 52, No. 1 (Mar., 1992), pp. 1-26.

— (1992) "'Downward Causation' in Emergentism and Nonreductive Physicalism", in Ansgar Beckermann, H. Flohr & Jaegwon Kim (eds.), *Emergence or Reduction?: Thesiss on the Prospects of Nonreductive Physicalism*. W. De Gruyter.

— (2005) *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press,.

Kitcher, Philip. (1984) "Species", *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 51, No. 2, pp. 308-333.

— (1998) "Function and Design", in *The Philosophy of Biology*, Eds. David L. Hull and Michael Ruse, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— (2001) *Science, Truth and Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— (2012) "The Lure of the Peak", in the January 2012 issue of *New Republic*, link*:* https://newrepublic.com/article/99529/on-what-matters-derek-parfit

Lenman, James, "Moral Naturalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/naturalism-moral/>.

— (2005) "The Saucer of mud, The Kudzu vine and the uxorious cheetah: Against neo-Aristotelian naturalism in metaethics", *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 1 (2):37-50.

Lott, Micah. (2012) "Have Elephant Seals Refuted Aristotle? Nature, Function, and Moral Goodness", Journal of Moral Philosophy 9 (3):353-375.

— (2012) "Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form", *Social Theory and Practice* 38 (3): 407-431.

— (2014) "Why be a good Human Being? Natural Goodness, Reason, and the Authority of Human Nature", Philosophia 42 (3):761-777.

— (forthcoming) "Foot's Grammar of Goodness", downloaded at 18.00.03.05.2018, link: https://micahlott.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/lott-foots-grammar-of-goodness.pdf.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. (2007). *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury.

— (2002) "Review: Virtues in Foot and Geach", *Philosophical Quarterly* 52 (209):621 - 631.

McDowell, John, (1980) "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics", in ed. A. O. Rorty, *Essays on Aristotele's Ethics*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

— (1985), 'Values and Secondary Qualities', in T. Honderich (ed.) *Morality and Objectivity: A Tribute to J. L. Mackie*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

— (1994) *Mind and World*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

— (1995), 'Two Sorts of Naturalism', in R. Hursthouse, G. Lawrence and W. Quinn (eds.) *Virtues and Reasons: Foot and Moral Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Merricks, Trenton. *Objects and Persons*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Millikan, R. G. (1989) "In Defense of Proper Functions", *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Jun., 1989), pp. 288-302.

Monk, Ray. (1990) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, New York: Free Press.

Moore, A. W. (Jan., 1987) "Points of View", *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 146.

— *Points of View*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

— "Realism and the Absolute Conception", in (Ed). Alan Thomas, *Bernard Williams*, in the series Contemporary Philosophy in Focus, Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007

Murdoch, Iris. (1970). *Sovereigny of Good*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Murphy, Mark C. (2003) "Natural Goodness by Foot", *Ethics*, Vol. 113, No. 2, pp. 410-414.

Neander, Karen (1991) "Functions as selected effects: The conceptual analyst's defense", Philosophy of Science 58 (2):168-184.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1990), *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (1968), London: Penguin Books.

Nussbaum, Martha (1987) "Non-relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach", in *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* edited by Russ Shafer-Landau, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, (2007).

Odenbaugh, Jay (2017) "Nothing in ethics makes sense except in the light of evolution? Natural goodness, normativity, and naturalism", *Synthese* 194 (4):1031-1055.

Parfit, Derek. (2011) *On What Matters Volume Two*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pettit, Philip. (1991) "Realism and Response-Dependence", *Mind*, Vol. 100.

Prinz, Jesse, (2009) 'The Normativity Challenge: Cultural Psychology Provides the Real Threat to Virtue Ethics', *Journal of Ethics* 13 (2-3):117-144.

Putnam, Hilary. (1967) "Psychological Predicates" In W. H. Capitan & D. D. Merrill (eds.), Art, Mind, and Religion. University of Pittsburgh Press. pp. 37–48.

— (2002) *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

— (2004) *Ethics Without Ontology*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 2004.

— (2016) *Naturalism, Realism, and Normativity*, edited by Mario De Caro, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Quine W. V. (1960) *Word and Object*, NY: MIT Press and Wiley.

— (1954) "The Scope and Language of Science", in *Ways of Paradox*, New York: Random House, 1966.

— (1969a) "Epistemology Naturalized", in Kim, Sosa, Fantl and McGrath, eds, *Epistemology; An Anthology*, Maldon, MA: Blackwell, 2008.

— (1969b) "Natural Kinds", in *Metaphysics an Anthology*, eds Jeagwon Kim, Daniel Z Korman and Ernest Sosa, 2nd ed, Wiley, 2012.

— (1986) "Reply To Morton White", in *The Philosophy of W. V. Quine (2nd edn)*, eds, W. Hahn and P. A. Schilpp, Open Court Press, 2nd ed, 1992.

Quinn, Warren, (1993) *Morality and Action*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Railton, Peter. (1989) "Explanation and Metaphysical Controversy", In Philip Kitcher & Wesley Salmon (eds.), *Scientific Explanation*. University of Minnesota Press.

Rosen, Gideon. (1994) "Objectivity and Modern Idealism", in *Philosophy in Mind*, eds Michaelis Michael and John O'Leary-Hawthorne, Kluwer Publishers.

Sayre-McCord, Geoffrey. (ed.) (1988) *Thesiss on Moral Realism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Scanlon, T. M. (2003). "Metaphysics and Morals". *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 77.2: 7–22.

— Being Realistic about Reasons, (2013). Oxford: Oxford University Press,.

Schroeder, Mark. (2007) *Slaves of the Passions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— (2008) "What is the Frege-Geach Problem?", Philosophy Compass 3/4 703–720.

— (Forthcoming) "Why You'll Regret Not Reading This Paper." in The Passions, a volume of lectures given to the Royal Institute of Philosophy in 2017-18, to be published by Cambridge University Press.

Scheffler, Samuel. (2008) "Potential Congruence" in *Morality and Self-Interest*. Edited by Paul Bloomsfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press,.

Seligman, Martin. (2013) *Flourish*, New York: Atria Publishing.

Shafer-Landau, Russ. (2003) *Moral Realism: A Defence*. NY: Clarendon Press,.

Shafer-Landau, Russ and Terence Cuneo, (Eds). (2007). *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*, Maldon, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. (2008) "A Contrastivist Manifesto", *Social Epistemology* Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 257–270.

Skorupski John. Ed, *Routledge Companion to Ethics*, New York: Routledge, 2010

Smith, Michael. The Moral Problem. Maldon, MA: Blackwell, 1994.

Taylor, Charles. (1985) *Philosophical Papers: Volume 1, Human Agency and Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

— (1985b) *Philosophical Papers: Volume 2, Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

— (1985c) *Sources of the Self*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

— (1992) *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Thompson, Michael (1995) "The Representation of Life", in Rosalind Hursthouse, Gavin Lawrence & Warren Quinn (eds.), *Virtues and Reasons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. pp. 247–296.

— (2004) "Apprehending Human Form", in *Modern Moral Philosophy*, ed. A. O'Hear, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

— (2008a) *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

— (2008b) "Three Degrees of Natural Goodness", uploaded by Thompson on his homepage at 2008.03.24:1154, link: http://www.pitt.edu/~mthompso/three.pdf.

— (2013) "Forms of Nature", in G. Hindrichs, Axel H. (eds.), Freiheit. Stuttgarter Hegel-Kongres, Frankfurt/Main: Vittorio Klostermann 2013, 701-735.

Tiberius and Plakias, "Well-Being", in John Doris (Ed.), *The Moral Psychology Handbook*,, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Van Roojen, Mark. (2015) *Metaethics*, New York: Routledge

Wolf, Susan. (1982) "Moral Saints", *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 79, No. 8.

Woodcock, Scott. (2006) "Philippa foot's virtue ethics has an Achilles' heel", *Dialogue* 45 (3): 445-468.

— (2015) "Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism and the Indeterminacy Objection", *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 23 (1):20-41.

Wright, Crispin. (1988) "Moral Values, Projection and Secondary Qualities", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes, Vol. 62, 1-26.

Wright, Larry. (1972) "Explanation and Teleology", *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 39, No. 2 pp 204-218.

— (1973) "Functions", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 82, No. 2 (Apr., 1973), pp 139-168.

Pensumliste

Aristotle. (2002) *Nichomachean Ethics*, eds. Broadie and Rowe, Oxford: Oxford University press, 95-260s.

Hursthouse, Rosalind. (1999) *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 265s.

Foot, Philippa. (2001) *Natural Goodness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 116s

McDowell, John, (1994) *Mind and World*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 187s.

Quine W. V. (1960) *Word and Object*, NY: MIT Press and Wiley, 276s.

Taylor, Charles. (1985) *Philosophical Papers: Volume 1, Human Agency and Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 292s.

— (1985b) *Philosophical Papers: Volume 2, Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 337s.

— (1985c) *Sources of the Self*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 521s.

Thompson, Michael (2008a) *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 214s

Van Roojen, Mark. (2015) *Metaethics*, New York: Routledge, 291s.

Sum 2664 sider.