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Human goodness and natural goodness

A STUDY OF THE ETHICS OF PHILIPPA FOOT AND CHARLES TAYLOR

MATT PERRYMAN

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Abstract

In this thesis, I draw a comparison between the moral philosophies and ethics of Philippa Foot and Charles Taylor. Foot is perhaps best known for her contribution to neo-Aristotelian 'virtue ethics', including her influential work on the meanings of moral concepts and the rationality of moral action. While Taylor is better known as a social and political theorist, I am more interested in his studies of language and human agency, especially as these connect with the more traditional concerns of philosophical ethics and practical philosophy. A key point of tension between the two accounts appears in Foot's later naturalistic turn, which seems to constrast sharply with Taylor's interpretive, and strongly anti-naturalistic, approach. In what follows I will explore the various facets of this apparent disagreement. I argue that there is a robust agreement between the two standpoints despite the surface appearances.

Contents

Contents ii

Introduction 1
- 0.1 Background . . . 2
- 0.2 Objectives . . . 3
- 0.3 Comparing Taylor and Foot . . . 6
- 0.4 Structure . . . 17

1 Ethics as a part of philosophical anthropology 19
- 1.1 On transcendental arguments as reflection on the categories of human life . . . 21
- 1.2 Transcendental arguments in Foot's ethics . . . 30
- 1.3 Later Foot's neo-Aristotelian naturalism as philosophical anthropology . . . 33
- 1.4 Conclusion . . . 43

2 On language and meaning 45
- 2.1 The problem of meaning and modern epistemology . . . 46
- 2.2 Expressivism as an alternative to designativism . . . 49
- 2.3 From Aristotle to Wittgenstein and back . . . 53
- 2.4 Meaning in Foot's naturalism . . . 60
- 2.5 Two issues about representationalism . . . 66
- 2.6 The meaning of natural norms . . . 68
- 2.7 Conclusion . . . 72

3 Metaethical naturalism and the best explanation of human agency 73
- 3.1 The Best Account of the self and its actions . . . 75
- 3.2 Human beings as human agents: Foot on naturalizing human agency . . . 86
- 3.3 Naturalism as a metaethics . . . 88
- 3.4 The animal with reason . . . 96
- 3.5 What does Foot mean by human rational agency? . . . 100
- 3.6 Conclusion . . . 108

4 The rationality of acting well **111**
4.1 Practical thinking, ancient and modern 112
4.2 Human agency and practical thinking 113
4.3 Strong value and practical reason 117
4.4 Naturalizing practical rationality 122
4.5 Agency and practical rationality for human beings 128
4.6 The sovereignty of goodness over the human practical intellect 134
4.7 Conclusion 137

5 The self and its goods **141**
5.1 Socrates's question: on the theoretical task and methodological aims of moral philosophy 142
5.2 Goodness of character and human action 147
5.3 Virtue and vice as the basis of goodness and badness in action 150
5.4 Virtuous agents and personal identity 161
5.5 Rule-following and virtue 162
5.6 Conclusion 167

6 The goods of a life **169**
6.1 Happiness as the highest human good 170
6.2 Three zones of moral conflict 173
6.3 Value pluralism and moral relativism 175
6.4 Taylor's Herder and Foot's Aristotle 180
6.5 The Good beyond human life? 183
6.6 The Letter-Writers: some remarks on human goods and the good human life in neo-Aristotelian ethics 193
6.7 Conclusion 197

Conclusion **201**

Bibliography **207**

Introduction

This thesis is a comparison of the ethical and moral philosophies of Philippa Foot and Charles Taylor. A comparison of these two figures might seem like a strange undertaking. Foot is mostly known for her contributions to analytic moral philosophy, as a key figure and co-author of the 'virtue ethics' turn in Anglo-American ethics in recent decades, as a defender of naturalistic Aristotelian ethics in her later works. Taylor is best known to many as a political philosopher and social theorist, a defender of communitarian and republican politics, and a historically-sensitive thinker displaying conspicuous Hegelian influences to boot.

At face value there seems to be little overlap between them or their work. Why a comparison?

For one thing, there is far more of an overlap of concerns than is evident from the caricatures sketched above. It is a mistake to identify Taylor as a social theorist or political philosopher while casting Foot as a 'mere' moral philosopher (or vice-versa, as one may be inclined).

One motivation for comparing Foot add Taylor is simply due to the interesting historical and philosophical vintage of which both are notable members. Their philosophical works are an interesting topic for their own sake, as exemplars of a tradition which originated at Oxford in the years after the second world war.

Another motivation arises from a glaring problem that appears when one attempts a comparison. Taylor is a profoundly anti-naturalistic thinker, provided we understand 'naturalism' as an anti-teleological, reductive enterprise of bringing philosophy into accord with the physical sciences. Despite some recognizable 'analytic' fingerprints, his work borrows heavily from Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, and other figures classified as 'Continental', in the traditions of German Idealism, Romanticism, existentialism, and phenomenology.

Foot, in her later writings, argues for a form of ethical naturalism, asking us quite seriously to consider plants as a model for our understanding of ethics. This is a self-consciously Aristotelian project, which complicates reading Foot as a reductive naturalist. But as we will see moving forward, this still complicates any easy reconciliation with Taylor's views on human agency and morality.

Even so, I want to argue that Taylor, rather than being an antagonist, is in fact friendly

towards *the kind of* naturalism that Foot elaborates. Taylor's attention to the psychology of human agency, and to the historical aspects of our self-conceptions, provides a potent source of insights and resources which can help to explicate Foot's form of Aristotelian naturalism. Foot, for her part, is attempting to elaborate a form of naturalism which can accommodate human agency, moral value, and moral reasons, and this is – I want to say – quite compatible with Taylor's program.

0.1 Background

My starting point and guiding assumption is well expressed by Timothy Chappell:

> It is no denigration of the best work in virtue ethics since Anscombe and Foot to say that it has largely just filled out the research program that they outlined in these three revolutionary articles of 1958…Charles Taylor's (1989) marvelous *Sources of the Self* contributes to "philosophy of psychology" (and many other things) by treating our notion of the person, the agent, in neo-Hegelian style as something with a long history and a complicated sociology inscribed in it, and by trying to understand that history better.[1]

The three articles of 1958 mentioned in the first sentence are G. E. M. Anscombe's (in)famous "Modern Moral Philosophy" and Foot's "Moral Beliefs" and "Moral Arguments". During the late 1950s, Foot belonged to a group of four women – Iris Murdoch and Mary Midgley along with Anscombe – who are now widely known for their influence in re-shaping Oxford moral philosophy during the post-war years. We may be hasty in calling theirs a school of philosophy,[2] though there is little doubt that a tight agenda motivated all of them.

Anscombe called flatly for moral philosophers to stop doing ethics, especially if it were centered on a concept of moral obligation, the kind indicated by the use of the word 'ought' in a special moral sense. Murdoch challenged the prevalent view of the human agent as a willing, freely-choosing self, a presupposition she found shared between the ethics of the Oxford behaviorists and the Parisian existentialists. Both of Foot's papers helped to establish an overall agenda for much of her ethical work, raising serious challenges to the distinction between facts and values, while elaborating its consequences for moral argumentation and cases of moral disagreement. All three writers found ancient theories of virtue indispensable for serious study in ethics.

[1]Timothy Chappell, "Virtue Ethics in the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, ed. Daniel C. Russell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 161–62.

[2]But see Rachael Wiseman and Clare Mac Cumhaill, "Anscombe, Foot, Midgley and Murdoch: A Female Philosophical School?" 2017, http://www.womeninparenthesis.co.uk/anscombe-foot-midgley-and-murdoch-a-female-philosophical-school/ for a competing take.

Although all three are known as 'moral philosophers', and their works all touch on problems within moral philosophy, it cannot escape notice that there are an interlocking set of concerns at work. Talk of the virtues brings us around to the topics of psychology and sociology as well as the philosophical issues which surround those subjects. It is not coincidence that Anscombe called on moral philosophers to *stop doing ethics* until a more adequate philosophical psychology could be elaborated. Part of the difficulty was that no one had, at the time, an adequate theory of what kind of characteristic the virtues are, or a theory of human action, or an account of human flourishing.

Murdoch had already raised much the same difficulty two years previously in her "Vision and choice in morality", charging the Oxford behaviorist and the Parisian existentialist with smuggling implicitly moral premises into an expressly neutral theory. The widespread belief in an anti-metaphysical method purged of presuppositions only managed to quietly hurry an unacknowledged metaphysics through the back door.

Similar thoughts motivate Foot's arguments in both of her 1958 papers. Ethics simply could not be the exercise of analyzing moral concepts from a neutral standpoint. The method itself already segregates evaluation from description, on purely theoretical considerations no less. Because evaluations could not belong to the class of respectable facts, one must thereby discover moral meanings in the only place left, which is to say, in human choices, feelings, or desires. Foot's antipathy to noncognitivist metaethics can be understood to derive from a more general kind of worry shared with Anscombe and Murdoch. *Meaning is not determined by human subjects.*

Considered as a general program, all three of them express worries *in* ethics that originate from theories and assumptions *outside of* ethics. Moral philosophers have simply gotten it wrong, they argue, and not due to being mistaken about any particular theories, hypotheses, premises or assumptions *in* moral philosophy. What is missing is an adequate understanding of *the human being*, and moreover, an adequate account of *meaning*.

Taylor, who arrived at Oxford in 1954 and became a student of Murdoch and Anscombe, can be situated in this background. He would come to share in his teachers' dislike of the status-quo of analytic philosophy, finding inspiration in thinkers like Hegel and Merleau-Ponty. The problem of meaning and the topic of philosophical anthropology – the account of the nature of human persons – are key features of his work.

0.2 Objectives

As Chappell highlights, we aren't far off the mark if we read Taylor as filling out the psychological and historical dimensions of program Anscombe, Foot, and Murdoch set out in the 1950s. Although I can and will point out numerous points of difference, the two main con-

cerns with the human person and with the problem of meaning form, I will argue, a central agenda which can be discerned in Foot's and Taylor's ethical works.

The secondary literature focusing specifically Taylor's accounts of human agency or language is *comparatively* sparse when compared with the attention attracted by Taylor the political thinker, Taylor the social theorist, and more recently Taylor the philosopher of religion. This matter is substantially compounded, however, by the synoptic breadth of Taylor's writings, which often make it difficult to classify them within the usual disciplinary taxonomies of professional philosophy. Rarely does a paper concern *only* philosophy of mind, or epistemology, or philosophy of language, or ethics. Any single article is likely to cut across some or all of these categories, making it difficult to engage with Taylor's writings on social theory, such as his latest work on secularization, without also engaging in discussions of human agency and meaning.

A comprehensive bibliography maintained by Ruth Abbey and Bradley Thames "includes 25 original books or essay collections, 5 co-authored books, 2 co-edited books, over 400 articles, and nearly 2000 secondary books and articles, including more than 60 books and journal issues dedicated all or in part to assessing Taylor's thought."[3] My attention here will by sheer necessity concern only a small fraction of this material. I intend to mostly emphasize Taylor's own works, and of those, his works which most directly touch on ethical or moral-philosophical issues, taking into consideration the above-mentioned difficulties in teasing apart these categories.

The scholarship on Foot has been somewhat more modest. Until recently there was one *Festschrift* dedicated to her work[4] and an introductory survey by John Hacker-Wright[5] in addition to *Natural Goodness* and two volumes of her collected papers.[6] In recent years there has been somewhat more interest in her work, including papers in several volumes on Aristotelian ethics and a very recent volume of essays edited by Hacker-Wright.[7] My interest in Foot is focused on the philosophical nuts-and-bolts of her ethics, and primarily in the account of ethical naturalism that she develops in *Natural Goodness*.

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[3]Bradley Thames and Ruth Abbey, "Charles Taylor Bibliography," 2019, http://charlestaylor.net/.

[4]Rosalind Hursthouse, Gavin Lawrence, and Warren Quinn, eds., *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory: Essays in Honour of Philippa Foot* (Clarendon Press, 1998).

[5]*Philippa Foot's Moral Thought* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

[6]Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, Reprint edition (Clarendon Press, 2003); Philippa Foot, *Moral Dilemmas: And Other Topics in Moral Philosophy* (Clarendon Press, 2002).

[7]Julia Peters, ed., *Aristotelian Ethics in Contemporary Perspective*, Routledge Studies in Ethics and Moral Theory 21 (New York: Routledge, 2013); Markus Rothhaar and Martin Hähnel, *Normativität des Lebens – Normativität der Vernunft?* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), doi:10.1515/9783110399820; Martin Hähnel, *Aristotelischer Naturalismus* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler Verlag, 2017), http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4939355; John Hacker-Wright, *Philippa Foot on Goodness and Virtue*, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91256-1. This latter volume was published in late 2018, appearing just as I was in the final stages of completing this thesis, so I have been unable to engage with its contents in the depth that these excellent contributions demand.

Now approaching 20 years old, the book has attracted a modest amount of scholarly interest and much (though not all) of it is lukewarm if not negative.[8] Many of the objections to the book largely rest on a series of premises, assumptions and presuppositions which, however popular and influential in the mainstream of analytic philosophy, are systematically mistaken (or so I want to argue). Part of my task here is to bring these assumptions to light and, where possible, defuse them. Although Taylor can be read as antagonistic to Foot's naturalistic project – and as we will see, there are several places in which he expresses just such worries – in my thinking he brings crucial resources to the table which strengthen, rather than undermine, at least Foot's variety of Aristotelian naturalism as well as her method for articulating it.

With one important exception, which I will return to shortly, there are no existing interpretations of the relationship between Foot and Taylor. In addition, what follows is intended as a problem-focused discussion rather than a systematic treatment of either philosopher. My primary concern is with the comparative analysis of Foot and Taylor, with the question of ethical naturalism serving as a center of gravity. To that end my energies are mostly focused on specific topics and problems that appear when Taylor's writings are are set alongside

[8] Articles expressing a critical (not to say a necessarily negative) interest in the book include Alasdair MacIntyre, "Virtues in Foot and Geach," *The Philosophical Quarterly (1950-)* 52, no. 209 (2002): 621–31, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3542725; Michael Thompson, "Three Degrees of Natural Goodness: A Short Elucidatory Note on Philippa Foot's Natural Goodness." April 2003, http://www.pitt.edu/~mthompso/three.pdf; James Lenman, "The Saucer of Mud, the Kudzu Vine and the Uxorious Cheetah: Against Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism in Metaethics," *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (2005): 37–50; Chrisoula Andreou, "Getting on in a Varied World," *Social Theory and Practice* 32, no. 1 (2006): 61–73; Joseph Millum, "Natural Goodness and Natural Evil," *Ratio* 19, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 199–213, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9329.2006.00320.x; Scott Woodcock, "Philippa Foot's Virtue Ethics Has an Achilles' Heel," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review / Revue Canadienne de Philosophie* 45, no. 3 (2006): 445–68, doi:10.1017/S0012217300001013; John Lemos, "Foot and Aristotle on Virtues and Flourishing," *Philosophia* 35, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 43–62, doi:10.1007/s11406-007-9049-9; Christopher W. Gowans, "Virtue and Nature," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 25, no. 1 (December 20, 2007), doi:10.1017/S0265052508080023; John Hacker-Wright, "What Is Natural About Foot's Ethical Naturalism?" *Ratio* 22, no. 3 (2009): 308–21, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9329.2009.00434.x; John Hacker-Wright, "Human Nature, Personhood, and Ethical Naturalism," *Philosophy* 84, no. 3 (2009): 413–27, doi:10.1017/S0031819109000394; Steven Hendley, "Reassuring Ourselves of the Reality of Ethical Reasons: What McDowell Should Take from Foot's Ethical Naturalism," *Dialogue* 48, no. 3 (October 13, 2009): 513, doi:10.1017/S0012217309990102; Sanford S. Levy, "Philippa Foot's Theory of Natural Goodness," *Forum Philosophicum: International Journal for Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2009): 1–15; Stephen Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue," *Ethic@-an International Journal for Moral Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (2010): 7–22, http://journal.ufsc.br/index.php/ethic/article/view/14807; Tim Lewens, "Foot Note," *Analysis* 70, no. 3 (January 7, 2010): 468–73, doi:10.1093/analys/anq036; Micah Lott, "Have Elephant Seals Refuted Aristotle? Nature, Function, and Moral Goodness," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 9, no. 3 (January 1, 2012): 353–75, doi:10.1163/174552412X625727; Micah Lott, "Why Be a Good Human Being? Natural Goodness, Reason, and the Authority of Human Nature," *Philosophia* 42, no. 3 (September 1, 2014): 761–77, doi:10.1007/s11406-014-9540-z; Steven Hendley, "Moral Reasoning as Naturally Good: A Qualified Defense of Foot's Conception of Practical Rationality," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 53, no. 4 (2015): 427–49; Jay Odenbaugh, "Nothing in Ethics Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution? Natural Goodness, Normativity, and Naturalism," *Synthese*, February 20, 2015, 1–25, doi:10.1007/s11229-015-0675-7; Scott Woodcock, "Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism and the Indeterminacy Objection," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 20–41, doi:10.1080/09672559.2014.940366.

Natural Goodness.

My engagement with the secondary literature on *Natural Goodness* will likewise be brief, mainly where I believe there are specific misinterpretations or faulty presuppositions (as I take them) held by critics.

The virtue ethics literature will, likewise, remain a secondary concern. Though Foot is so often mentioned in connection with virtue ethics that one barely needs to repeat it, there are some difficulties with the label as Foot herself points out. It is worth saying something about this, but otherwise I will not belabor the topic. I discuss the virtues most explicitly in chapter 5, drawing out some connections between Taylor's account of personal identity and Foot's account of the virtues.

In what follows I will often use the expression "neo-Aristotelian naturalism" and similar constructions in an unqualified sense. Unless explicitly flagged, this should be understood to mean *Foot's* account of neo-Aristotelian naturalism. This is to distinguish her views from other contemporary Aristotelian naturalists, like John McDowell[9] and Alasdair MacIntyre[10] who differ from her in important respects despite the 'naturalistic' label, and even from closely allied forms of ethical naturalism like that advanced by Rosalind Hursthouse.[11] This qualifier is necessary as many writers do not take care to distinguish between them. Influential critical replies, such as we find in David Copp and David Sobel[12] and James Lenman,[13] have tended to conflate Hursthouse and Foot on the matter of ethical naturalism. While their views are similar, they are not similar enough to proceed as if objections to Hursthouse are *de facto* objections to Foot and vice-versa. In the following section I want to say a little more about some of these differences.

0.3 Comparing Taylor and Foot

To begin with, I want to return to the exception I mentioned above to the dearth of scholarly comparisons of Foot's and Taylor's work.

David McPherson's paper "To What Extent Must We Go Beyond Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism?" offers a sympathetic critique of neo-Aristotelian naturalism before bringing in Taylor's phenomenological approach as a corrective.[14] This paper provides an opportu-

[9] "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (July 1, 1979): 331–50, doi:10.2307/27902600.

[10] *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (London: Duckworth, 1999).

[11] *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

[12] "Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics," *Ethics* 114, no. 3 (2004): 514–54.

[13] "Moral Naturalism," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2013, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/naturalism-moral/.

[14] David McPherson, "To What Extent Must We Go Beyond Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism?" *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (November 1, 2012): 627–54, doi:10.5840/acpq201286449.

nity both to comment on some differences between Foot and other Aristotelians, specifically Hursthouse and McDowell. It is also an opportunity to develop some differences between my own position and McPherson's. Many of the arguments here must await further defense and development in coming chapters, so this will be a necessarily schematic treatment.

Problems with Neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism

McPherson's central objection to neo-Aristotelian naturalism is that it characterizes human flourishing in terms of facts about living organisms and their characteristics. Such facts belong to an objective, third-personal description of living nature; they can be known in principle to any observer, requiring no special or privileged point of view.

This fact raises a difficulty for Hursthouse's variety of ethical naturalism, McPherson argues, given her three claims about the virtues: (1) the virtues benefit their possessor; (2) the virtues make their possessor a good human being; and (3) claims (1) and (2) are interrelated.[15]

Hursthouse takes it that the virtues are "the only reliable bet" for achieving eudaimonia (flourishing). This is because of an appeal (2) to the natural, biological order, to which human beings belong, as a source of ethical objectivity. Virtue is a reliable bet to secure flourishing because there are certain *functional* characteristics belonging to our objectively-described human kind of life, which the virtues satisfy or help to satisfy.

Claim (3), the connection between claims (1) and (2), is intended to establish that beneficial character traits (those contributing to flourishing) coincide with "good-making" characteristics (the virtues) because of our nature as human beings, inclusive of our powers of rational thought.

This departs from ancient and medieval Aristotelians, and even contemporary writers like MacIntyre, in an important respect. Those figures have recourse to a strong teleology that can secure a necessary connection between individual flourishing and being good as human being is good. Hursthouse argues that the connection is contingent. My flourishing and my goodness qua human being intersect only insofar as the latter is a reliable way for me to achieve the former.

The contingent connection between flourishing and virtue is not merely established at the level of biological functioning. The justification of ethics must be made from within an acquired ethical outlook. A harmony between *my ends* and *human goodness* is possible for human beings, Hursthouse argues, but it manifests in the actualization of a latent human potential: we can learn to see ethical matters rightly. As Aristotle once wrote, we are each fitted by nature to *acquire* virtue, but virtue itself is not *natural* to us in the way as having two arms is natural for us. We must acquire it, through education, training, and development

[15] Ibid., 629–31.

that inculcates the right standpoint within us. Only from this acquired ethical perspective can the connection between flourishing and virtue appear for us, and so become rationally justified for us.

McPherson sees this as an important difference between Hursthouse and Foot or MacIntyre. Hursthouse realizes the importance of a first-personal perspective from which the virtues may be justified, where the latter two do not.

MacIntyre for his part holds to a teleological view of human nature, drawn heavily from the tradition of natural law ethics inspired by Aristotle's reception by medieval Christian philosophers. This is a variety of naturalism, though heavily influenced by Catholic doctrine as well as the classical Greek tradition. The worldview, and the associated system of concepts belonging to this tradition, are key for MacIntyre, as he endorses this outlook as a rival to the whole moral outlook of the modern world.[16] Because of both the religious connotations as well as his claim that morality is unintelligible for us in the absence of a retrieval of a classically Aristotelian outlook, MacIntyre's project is a substantial departure from what Hursthouse and Foot have in mind.[17]

Given Hursthouse's functionalist view of nature, a rational first-personal standpoint is a necessary condition for the connection between flourishing and virtue. Her account is influenced here by John McDowell's anti-foundationalist account of naturalized practical thought. For both of them, reasoning is something that appears in the natural world but remains at a distance from it, expressed through the power of rational human beings to question our natural inclinations and opt to do otherwise. Reason is a "second nature" for us, being a part of our natural existence, on the one hand, and yet answerable to a space of rational norms which are not part of the causal or functional order of the observable natural world, on the other.

Here is my first departure from McPherson's characterization. It does not strike me as right to say that Hursthouse does, where Foot does not, affirm the importance of the first person. I can only offer a promissory note on this point for now, but one of my central claims throughout the present work is that it is profoundly mistaken to impose a dualism of objective third-personal and rational first-personal perspectives on to the neo-Aristotelian program in general. Setting aside Hursthouse and McDowell, such a dualistic elaboration of the concepts of nature and human agency invites a serious misunderstanding of Foot's arguments in *Natural Goodness*.

[16] As he argues in his *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd edition (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

[17] While MacIntyre's sensitivity to historical considerations which have shaped the modern moral outlook in some ways resembles Taylor's project, MacIntyre's concern with the indispensability of the classical worldview Greek philosophy and Christian natural law, joined with his pessimism about the prospects of modernity, also distance him from Taylor in important respects.

As I will stress throughout this project, it is imperative that one keep in mind that Foot begins her argument with an attack on the distinction between evaluations and descriptions of natural facts.[18] This fact colors everything that follows. Living nature *can be* given an objective description, as the sciences demonstrate. But it is not right to say that Foot is arguing that living nature *just is*, or aspires to be, a set of such objective descriptions, or that human goodness can be sufficiently expressed in third-personal propositions about living nature. Functions, in Foot's usage, include an intrinsically evaluative aspect at least where life is concerned. She makes it clear that she is not using the word in the technical and historical sense in which it is used in evolutionary biology.[19] A corollary to this argument is that nature itself need not exclude intrinsic meanings, purposes, or values.

A further issue is what these matters imply for the task of ethics. Hursthouse is concerned with the justification of right (virtuous) actions from within the ethical standpoint. She aims to show the moral skeptic or the wicked person that they are in a kind of error in acting as they act. They have reason to act as the good person acts, and fail to do so. But, importantly, this must be established within an ethical standpoint at one remove from living nature itself, wherein our naturally good ends show up for us as good. In this sense, Hursthouse is abandoning moral foundationalism, which seeks ultimate grounds for moral beliefs and judgments. There is no final justification beyond the ethical standpoint; natural ends are grounds for us only so far as one can see reasons rightly.

This raises a problem, as McPherson rightly points out, of showing what, if anything, the objectively-characterized functions that establish our human goods have to say to the reasoning person who has not adopted the ethical standpoint. It is one thing to speak of proper responsiveness to practical reasons. It is another thing to show a person who has not acquired an ethical outlook that he is thereby defective, or missing something, or not acting as he ought. As John McDowell has pointed out in his influential "Two sorts of naturalism", it is always open to the person with practical reason to ask of any moral judgment, "why should I?"[20]

For Foot, however, living nature is not an objective 'ground' of normative functions that establish our human goods independently of a human ethical standpoint. McPherson is right to draw out this point.

Yet there are two potential pitfalls here. First, it is not right to say that Foot requires a further first-personal standpoint in addition to objective human nature in order to justify moral norms. Unlike Hursthouse, Foot is not working with a notion of "disenchanted" biological nature that requires the further addition of a rational second nature. Foot's nature

[18] Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), chap. 1 *passim*.

[19] Ibid., 31–33, esp. footnote 10, and 40-2, esp. footnote 1.

[20] John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 2001, 149–79.

is "first natural" through and through, though what she means by "first nature" is not what McDowell means by the term.

This point itself must be understood given Foot's persistent challenge to the necessary conceptual connection between choice and goodness.[21] The meaning of evaluative words is not specified by a person's choices. As such, the conceptual connection between one's rational standpoint and natural human goodness is not present in Foot's work. Yet she does not opt for a contingent relationship between them, as we find in Hursthouse. Instead she affirms a *certain kind of necessity* at work in this connection, one which depends on a different relationship between rationality and goodness in human beings. I will unpack this point in more detail in chapters 3-5.

Second, it would be mistaken to argue that Foot's account of reason-responsive human agency shares the same characteristics as Hursthouse's ethical standpoint. For her, human agency is a specifically human capacity for practical thought, as human beings have practical thought. This differs from the more abstract and general notion of practical rationality we (seem to) find in Hursthouse and McDowell. This invites not only a reconsideration of the ontological status of rational thought as among the contents of nature, but *how* it becomes natural, and furthermore what part it plays in the moral life of human beings.

All of this leads to a somewhat different way into the general problem of moral motivation, giving reasons to individuals who may not care about or want to act for moral reasons. Because human nature is already shot through with evaluative and normative features, what is good and what is rational are not (entirely) decided in reflective acts from an autonomous rational standpoint.[22] Foot isn't terribly concerned to give reasons to the skeptic; she does not consider an inability to convince a bad person that he ought to be good is a serious problem for an account of ethics. Nevertheless, the skeptic *has a reason* to be good even if he cannot or will not recognize it. There is a fact about the matter no matter what one chooses.

It is important to be clear about this detail. Although Hursthouse and McDowell do attribute practical rationality to our natural human condition, Foot argues that *practical rationality in human beings* is a specially human characteristic. An analogy might be useful. Squid and eagles have eyes, and human beings have eyes, but no human being has squid eyes and no eagle has human eyes. Practical rationality is a characteristic of this sort. In speaking of practical rationality, we must ask "rationality for whom or what?" It is not as if we could imagine some spectre floating down from on high and gifting conceptual thought to any being without consideration of its particular constitution and history.

Foot will argue that, in our kind of life, rationality matters, but not because it commands

[21] Philippa Foot, "Goodness and Choice," in *Virtues and Vices*, 2003, 132–47, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/4106680.

[22] This is *partly* true, but the way she arrives at this point is subtle and it requires more detail than I can provide at this point. I discuss it in chapter 4.

our allegiance. Rationality is how we are, yes, but in respect of this connection with our nature, rationality is made practical for us in being something that we care about and which is *worth* caring about. The ideal of a disinterested and maximally-autonomous reasoner is not part of what she has in mind, either as a source of moral judgments or as their justifying grounds.

For Foot, because even practical reason is natural *as she understands nature*, it is answerable to standards of goodness which belong to the concept (or life-form) of the human being – which, to further complicate the details, include standards of human practical reasoning. A good human being will reason and act *absent defects in her practical reasoning* – she will be practically rational – and therefore she will recognize the virtues as among her reasons for acting. Rationality for human beings is so constituted as to include recognition of the virtues *as reasons*. The virtues, in turn, stand as necessary conditions on practical rationality in human beings.

In this way Foot also rejects moral foundationalism, albeit in a somewhat different manner than Hursthouse. The ethical standpoint which McPherson finds important in Hursthouse's account is, in its own way, present in Foot. But it is present as a part of objective human nature. This is possible because Foot's concept of objective nature does not exclude first-personal perspectives. Rather, it is robust enough to include the human agent's standpoint. That standpoint remains important in connection with the structure of rationality in human beings.

Charles Taylor's contribution

Given the weak points he locates in the neo-Aristotelian position, McPherson wants to bring Charles Taylor into the story at this point as a contrasting perspective, identifying three points where Taylor's moral philosophy usefully amends or supplements the Aristotelian position.

Taylor's concept of *strong evaluations* are central to this developments. Strong evaluations are irreducibly qualitative distinctions drawn within a human agent's desires, emotions, and actions, which express a person's commitment to standards of worth.[23] Such distinctions are constitutive of a human agent's identity, wherein commitments to strongly-valued goods partly define who one takes oneself to be. Identity is internally related to what one cares most strongly about – strongly, in this sense, means that the object of a strong evaluation is taken as worthwhile for its own sake, not to be appraised in terms of an intensity of affect or some other subject-centered response.

[23]"Self-interpreting animals" in Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, Philosophical Papers 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

I am in broad agreement with McPherson in this move. Indeed one of my claims is that the concept of strong evaluations – a centerpiece of Taylor's account of human agency as well as his phenomenological approach to moral thought – is a useful interpretive tool by which to approach and explicate Foot's naturalism.

However, given my above disagreements the characterization of Foot's ethical naturalism, I have some reservations about the difficulties that McPherson believes Taylor presents to a Footian naturalist as well as the part Taylor might play as a corrective.

The first problem is that the neo-Aristotelians do not make use of a concept of "the noble", which figured importantly into Aristotle's own account. The eudaimonia which is the ultimate end of neo-Aristotelian ethics is defined in terms of physical or biological outcomes, whether avoiding death and injury and the like or attaining healthy bodies and characteristic enjoyments. "Such a thin view of the good life," McPherson writes, "can be specified from a third-personal standpoint without having to appeal to our first-personal strong evaluative experience."[24] But a concern with flourishing as elaborated in terms of natural, biological standards of well-being leads neo-Aristotelian ethics to treats the virtues as instrumental to the good life, rather than as constitutive of the good life.[25]

Whether this is true or not for Hursthouse, it does not accurately express Foot's account of goodness for human beings. Given what's been said so far, we cannot say that Foot is specifying goodness in merely third-personal terms. Goodness is objective, yes, and its objectivity depends on how things are with our kind of life. But it is not right to say that this is *thereby* a merely causal or instrumental account of the virtues. Goodness for human beings is *sui generis*, she writes, and because human beings are also rational beings, we have goods other than survival and reproduction in the narrow biological sense. Indeed for us even survival and reproduction are not so neatly explained as objective biological facts.[26]

Foot is quite explicit that talk of human goodness involves a profound and radical shift when we move from the subject-matter of plants and nonhuman animals. Whatever the meaning or implications of this "sea change" in human beings, the point is that she does not conceive of human goodness, nor individual good or benefit, as explicable directly or indirectly in terms of goods merely instrumental to biological well-being.[27]

This is not merely a point about a difference of characteristic functions and behaviors in humans versus nonhuman organisms. It marks a qualitative shift, away from a bare functional or reductive account and into a specially human perspective. The point revolves

[24]McPherson, "To What Extent Must We Go Beyond Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism?" 643.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Hursthouse makes this point in a recent article. See "The Grammar of Goodness in Foot's Ethical Naturalism", in Hacker-Wright, *Philippa Foot on Goodness and Virtue*, 40–42.

[27]The "sea change" remark is in the opening paragraphs of chapter 3, *Natural Goodness*. Hursthouse stresses this aspect of Foot's account in the article cited above, pp. 38-9.

around the curious fact that *human beings can be apart from the natural world because we are a part of the natural world*. That we can understand, choose, and act for our own chosen ends is part of our nature. Nature is both source and means, on the one hand, and that which is overcome, on the other. That a human person comprehend what is valuable to her, to see her ends *as* ends and means to ends *as* means, is also a characteristic of the human life-form. A characteristic which, by its very nature, cannot be reduced to functional descriptions known to an impartial observer.[28]

There is a plausible case (I will argue) that Foot's notion of a good human life, which includes these biological "life goods" in Taylor's usage, does not stop at such goods, nor exclude or contrast with what Taylor calls "constitutive goods" – those goods of higher worth which connote higher standards beyond the flourishing of a human life or indeed of human *lives*.[29] My claim is that given what she says about human goodness, Foot draws no clear lines between the good life of a human person and that person's recognition of or allegiance to higher or constitutive goods. To be a good human is to be involved in commitments to goods beyond one's own flourishing.

McPherson's second issue relates to "the nature and extent of other-regarding concern."[30] He is concerned that other-regarding virtues "such as justice, fidelity to promises, honesty, loyalty, generosity, and compassion, are regarded as virtues primarily because of their role in promoting the 'good functioning of our social group.' "[31]

This is not what Foot argues, in two respects. One, the other-regarding virtues are not a logically distinct type of reason from considerations stemming from self-regard.[32] There is no difference of moral content between a virtue like justice, which concerns the doing-well of others, and a self-regarding virtue such as prudence. My good, conceived as my (prudential) benefit or advantage, and goodness-as-such are not contrasting sources of practical reasons.

Two, the other-regarding virtues do not serve an instrumental role to secure the further end of good functioning of the group. My quibble is with the "primarily because of…" clause in McPherson's statement. The virtues may in fact do these things, and it is certainly part of the tone of Aristotelian ethics to highlight the close connection between individual flourishing and the welfare of the group. However, for the reasons already mentioned it is mistaken to interpret Foot as saying that this is *the* sole or primary point to virtuous activity.

In a similar fashion, it would be mistaken to take the flourishing of the group, up to and including the human species as a limiting case, as the foundation of morality as Foot

[28] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chap. 4.

[29] Examples of constitutive goods include Plato's Idea of the Good and the part played by God's love in Christian theology.

[30] McPherson, "To What Extent Must We Go Beyond Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism?" 645.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chap. 5.

conceives of it. Human goodness is something apart from and prior to any propositions about the flourishing, welfare, or well-being of any particular human or humans, although such propositions may well be a part of goodness. As she writes, there is no room in her account for foundational propositions linking the goodness of actions to good states of affairs.[33]

Furthermore, given that Foot believes it is a mistake to characterize the content of expressions like "good functioning of the social group" in third-personal, functionalist terms, group welfare in human beings itself cannot be a merely functional matter open to third-personal description. To the extent that group welfare is also a matter for ethics and subject to evaluation in moral terms, there is an irreducibly evaluative aspect to it beyond the functional or instrumental element.

McPherson ends up agreeing with Foot when he writes that

> the virtues that enable us to flourish qua human being are not simply a "reliable bet" for flourishing qua individual, but rather they are constitutive of it insofar as they are viewed as part of a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life.[34]

This seems to me exactly what Foot has in mind. He goes on to say:

> What [neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists] do not articulate is the strong evaluative sense that human beings are worthy of love and respect for their own sake and that a higher mode of life can be realized in such love and respect for other human beings, which goes beyond the third-personal account of human flourishing on analogy with the flourishing of plants and non-human animals.[35]

This is a contentious reading even of Hursthouse and McDowell. For them the ultimate justification of the virtues is that *they have no justification outside of the ethical viewpoint*. But if we grant that much, it isn't clear why they could have no basis for a strong sense of evaluation within the ethical point of view.

Setting their accounts to one side, there are some real questions about whether a Footian ethics can provide a basis for human dignity for its own sake, grounding the intrinsic worth of human beings rather than as a means to secure a *further end* of well-being. I believe that it can, though with some amendments to the ways in which we understand these considerations come to bear upon us as practically rational *human beings*. Respect for persons based on intrinsic dignity, or love, has its basis in the virtues of justice and charity, and these are consequently involved in a more mitigated ideal of "necessity" than we find in traditionally

[33] Ibid., 48–49.
[34] McPherson, "To What Extent Must We Go Beyond Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism?" 645.
[35] Ibid., 646.

Christian and Kantian notions of morality. Nevertheless, these virtues do bear upon us as part of our goodness and as giving reasons to us.[36]

The third issue McPherson raises concerns "the meaning of life."[37] McPherson states that for the Aristotelian, "the focus is on the significance of our lives as a whole, rather than with the issue of performing virtuous actions for their own sake"[38]. This is partly right in that the Aristotelian does focus on the whole of a life. It is the second clause concerning "virtuous actions for their own sake", coupled with the fact that this is framed as a disjunction with "our lives as a whole", that leads me to wonder who the complaint addresses.

This strikes me as an important matter if only for the otherwise hidden assumptions that it helps bring to the surface. Modern thought, permeated as it is by dualisms of opposing concepts, makes it too easy to *contrast* the whole of a life with the particular actions it contains. Yet the distinction between the whole shape of a life and the performance of intrinsically good virtuous actions is not a part of the Aristotelian position; it is not present in Aristotle's own works nor in those of his medieval interpreters.

On the orthodox Aristotelian view, our estimation of the goodness of a life as a whole is determined by the activities which constitute that life. A life well lived is a life rich in virtuous activities and (mostly) lacking in vicious activities. The relationship between the whole life and individual activities also runs in the other direction: an activity's status as intrinsically good, and therefore virtuous, is determined (in part) by its contribution to the goodness of a life.

This might seem like a vicious circularity. A similar circularity seems to afflict the Aristotelian concept of virtue, and it might be helpful to draw a comparison between these two issues. For Aristotle, to be a virtuous person is to be the kind of person who characteristically does virtuous acts. What is a just act? It is the kind of thing that a just person does on an occasion calling for justice. This is less than helpful, not least of which because it is possible for the unjust person, or the person who has not yet become just, to do a just act on an occasion. What differentiates the just from the unjust or not-yet-just is that the former has a just character, while the latter do not.

But hang on. We've just said that just character consists in characteristically doing just acts. So the description of an act as a just act depends on the virtue of justice in the person, while the appraisal of the quality of justice in the person depends on that person's regularly and reliably doing just acts. Is Aristotle simply confused?

Not exactly. Two issues come to the fore here. First, there is an important point about

[36] In chapter 5 of *Natural Goodness* Foot seems much more interested in defending a relatively small range of absolute prohibitions against certain types of wicked actions than in elaborating a robust positive account of obligations.

[37] Ibid., 647.

[38] Ibid.

the explanation of action which is glossed over when the reason for an action is logically distinguished from the outward behavioral manifestation of the action. The character trait is something private and internal from which the public and external movements logically and causally follow. An action theory consistent with Aristotelian psychology – such as those endorsed by Foot and Taylor – considers the purpose in an action as an intrinsic part of the action, rather than being a logical and causal determinant of the subsequent movements of the body. This has important ramifications for the possibilities of evaluating actions in respect of virtue and vice concepts. I discuss this matter in more detail in chapter 3.

Second, there is more to the Aristotelian story about evaluation than the concept of a virtue. It is perhaps tempting for us moderns to imagine virtue as a basic and foundational set of concepts from which the goodness of persons and acts derives. I believe, as I argue in chapter 5, that this is a misleading and anachronistic reading. Part of being a just person is to do just acts *as the just person does them*. This means that one does them habitually. It also means that there is a way in which a just person does just acts in a way unlike a person who accidentally does a just act on an occasion. A just person does just acts in the right way, with the right desire, for the right reason, on the right occasion.

Put another way, there are standards of correctness, appropriateness, and worthiness in addition to the virtues, to which the virtues are answerable. The relationships between virtuous character, virtuous acts, and goodness are quite different than that between a justifying reason and a right action (for example).

The upshot of all this is that particular virtuous actions and the evaluative appraisal of a whole life are mutually constitutive concepts. One is virtuous who characteristically does virtuous acts. One's acts on an occasion are virtuous if done from a virtuous character, which is to desire, reason, and act appropriately as virtue demands.

Here is my point in all this. Given this discussion, I believe there is a good *prima facie* case for my claim that much of Taylor's moral-evaluative account usefully explicates much of what we find in *Natural Goodness*. Certainly in the matters of historical considerations, and in the area of philosophical psychology, he offers a much richer, more developed and nuanced account of the tangle of problems surrounding morality and the individual person.

In this respect Taylor's work is a useful foil for Aristotelian ethics by helping to draw out some of its limitations. Yet in doing so it also provides us with a clearer illumination of what exactly is going on in Foot's naturalism. As I hope I have shown, there is more in Foot's account of ethical naturalism than might first appear, and a good portion of this is at least consistent with Taylor's own positions. It is a mistake – I am arguing – to read Foot as a biological functionalist who places evaluative meanings at one remove from the world of living nature. It is no less an error to see her as unconcerned with the languages, the cultural expressions, and the historical and interpretive acts of human beings. Despite her stress on

the intrinsic normativity of living nature, the entire second half of *Natural Goodness* stresses just these social, linguistic, and 'existential' aspects of lived human lives.

In summary, I agree with McPherson in challenging the assumptions that he finds problematic in neo-Aristotelian naturalism. I agree with him further that Taylor's concept of strong evaluations raises interesting questions and provides a useful resource for investigating them. Where I disagree is in the thought that at least Foot's variety of ethical naturalism runs into many of these errors in the first place. For the same reason, I contest the thought that she is so far from Taylor on the matters of human agency and of the import of strongly valued goods. It remains for me to argue this case.

0.4 Structure

I will proceed as follows. In chapter one, I explore my claim that Foot and Taylor are engaged in a form of philosophical anthropology as a necessary background for doing ethics. Although Taylor understands his work in these terms already, it is not obvious that (later) Foot could or should be read this way. I have in mind a particular form of transcendental argument which Taylor develops in several of his works. My claim is that Foot, even naturalistic Foot, also employs this form of argumentative method. If I am right, this reading will call into question many of the critical attacks on neo-Aristotelian naturalism.

In chapter two I further develop this thread of argument by turning to the philosophy of language. Taylor has written extensively on this topic, posing challenges to designative and representational theories of meaning. He proposes an expressivist alternative inspired by Hegel and the Romantic writer Herder, arguing that language does many things besides naming or designating or representing. A key claim is that much of our social and psychological activities are inseparable from expressive uses of language. Such a position seems downright inimical to naturalistic philosophy. I argue that Foot's background and her stated positions both tell against reading her as either (a) a representationalist thinker in the sense Taylor attacks or (b) a naturalist of the type that would need to evade Taylor's criticisms.

Chapter three considers the implications of these thoughts for the subject of human agency and action. One crucial point running through Foot's and Taylor's work is that *the moral is never neutral*. Meta-ethical programs which attempt to tie moral behaviors to neutral analysis or objective descriptions of fact implicitly rest on working conceptions of human persons and their actions. Here I will explore some of Taylor's arguments against reductive explanations of human agency and what they imply for meta-ethical theories. Considering Footian naturalism in contrast, I argue that Foot's human beings are closer to Taylor's *self interpreting animals* than an unqualified distinction between "naturalist" and "non-naturalist" characterizations would suggest.

In chapter four I turn to the topic of practical rationality and the rationality of moral action. These are themes which made up the bulk of Foot's work. I will consider what she says about the topic in connection with her later naturalism. Foot elaborates in some detail on how a living organism can be an agent performing rational actions and a subject of moral evaluations. Taylor's concept of practical reason seems at odds with this, bringing in a social-historical dimension which seems to be missing from the reasoning of the Footian human being. I argue that this is another superficial dispute which can be dispelled with a closer attention to the details.

Chapter five turns to the virtues and their connection to personal identity. Both Foot and Taylor raise important questions about the close relationship between the constitution and activities of the human person and ideals of moral goodness. Here I will bring Foot's theory of the virtues into dialogue with Taylor's account of human agency. Of special importance is Taylor's concept of *strong evaluation*, which draws connections between an agent's desires and emotions and the evaluative objects of those attitudes. There are important resonances with this account and the concept of a virtue in the neo-Aristotelian program.

Chapter six concludes with some reflections on the concept of "good" as it figures into Foot's and Taylor's ethical accounts. A superficial reading of each might read Foot as an orthodox Aristotelian, with the good specified by whatever contributes to the immediate flourishing of living human organisms. Taylor would be more like an orthodox Platonist, elaborating a concept of Good belonging to a super-sensible heaven distinct from concrete things. Tempting as this may be, I believe it is wrong and will argue for an alternative. My claim is that Taylor (in those few places where he has commented directly on neo-Aristotelian writers) misunderstands Foot when he regards her naturalism as incapable of accounting for goods that transcend the flourishing of a single life. What Foot considers the goodness of a life, and what Taylor considers transcendent to a life, are not antagonistic ideals. Foot's remarks on happiness and flourishing in *Natural Goodness* belie a reading of her as unconcerned with goods beyond simple animal flourishing.

Chapter 1

Ethics as a part of philosophical anthropology

My topic in this thesis is a comparison of the moral philosophies of Philippa Foot and Charles Taylor. Both these figures have made their own considerable contributions to the subject of moral philosophy. However *the way in which* Foot and Taylor have contributed to moral philosophy is not entirely as one might expect if the inquiry were restricted to the disciplinary area of moral philosophy. Their respective contributions do not amount to (say) novel meta-ethical positions or normative ethical theories as these are traditionally understood in the mainstream of English-speaking ethics.

My claim is that they begin with a reflective interest in the concept of the human person, more precisely, in the concepts and categories which we can employ in talking about the existence of human persons. They see this as a necessary starting point for any practical philosophy, inclusive of ethics and moral philosophy as these are ordinarily understood. I will borrow Taylor's term and call this a program of *philosophical anthropology*. I claim that their contributions to moral philosophy thus have the character of 'transcendental' inquiries into the conditions of human life and experience, ranging well beyond concerns with this or that moral belief or moral theory.

This is an uncontroversial characterization of Taylor's work, as he is self-consciously working within the tradition of post-Kantian transcendental philosophy. It might seem more controversial with respect to Foot, who is best known as an ethicist and moral philosopher in the analytic neo-Aristotelian tradition. A key claim in this thesis is that this is a mistaken reading of Foot's ethics, which involves us in considerations beyond the scope of moral philosophy as the subject is usually understood.

In her final book, *Natural Goodness*, Foot substitutes the concept of the rational person with *the human being*, the term indicating a concrete living animal belonging to the human species. This provocative claim has not been well received in the secondary literature. A theory of natural norms based on the functions and activities of living things can seem *prima facie* implausible, by turns pre-scientific, unable to ground our moral beliefs at all, or else war-

ranting "moral" beliefs which hold narrowly selfish or even anti-social behaviors as morally good.

I will argue that most of the existing objections are misreadings of Foot's arguments for naturalism. By showing that Foot's naturalism is supported with the materials of a 'transcendental' argument, we can see that she does not intend this naturalistic ethics as a quasi-scientific story about the natural history or natural functions of the species *homo sapiens*. Her reflections on the unquantified propositions and the network of concepts involved in our talk of living things are not *theories*, in the usual sense of advancing a series of empirical propositions and conceptual truths about them.

Foot is more interested in reflections on the *logical grammar* of the concepts and propositions in question, in the sense implied by a transcendental argument. A quick remark on this. The expression "logical grammar" traces its pedigree to Wittgenstein's remarks in his later writings.[1] The thought here is that the meanings of our words, including (perhaps especially) those used in a special technical sense by philosophers, can twist us up in knots as we attempt to hammer them into a more precise and general form according to this or that theory. The philosopher's real task, Wittgenstein thought, is to avoid this temptation to generalize from particular uses of words, on the one hand, while turning our attention to just those particular ways in which words are actually used, on the other. Philosophy's purpose is to "assemble reminders for a particular purpose", as Hursthouse tells us:

> The general Wittgensteinian purpose is always to "*command a clear view* of our use of words" (§122); the *particular* purpose in Foot's case has always been to get clearer about our use of words when we are making moral judgements.[2]

Language presents us with a richly diverse and variegated range of uses, only some of which are easily available to the philosopher's theories and explanations.[3]

Foot's reflections on the meaning of moral words, their logical grammar, in her earlier works stem from this method and this attitude towards doing philosophy. As we will see shortly, her philosophy of (living) nature extends and refines the general strategy to the subject matter of living organisms. Her ethical naturalism, then, aims to locate the objectivity of morality in a more suitable conception of nature, one already shot through with evaluative attributes and normative patterns. The grammatical method used to investigate nature and morality, if I am right, can be understood as a philosophical anthropology situated in the

[1] Notably in *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd edition (Macmillan, 1968); *The Blue and Brown Books* (New York: Harper & Row, 1995).

[2] Hursthouse, "The grammar of goodness in Foot's ethical naturalism", in Hacker-Wright, *Philippa Foot on Goodness and Virtue*, 25.

[3] I expand on the matter of language and Foot's investigations of logical grammar, especially in connection with Michael Thompson's influential work, in the following chapter.

Aristotelian tradition, set out in propositions concerning the logical grammar of our talk of living things. This emphasis on method and its close connection to language is crucial in order to understand both the position Foot advances as well as my strategy for reconciling her with a position like Taylor's.

1.1 On transcendental arguments as reflection on the categories of human life

Iris Murdoch, anticipating much of Charles Taylor's writings on the self, once wrote that the self – the ego, the freely-choosing will of post-Cartesian and post-Kantian philosophy - is a notion that must be understood as given expression in metaphorical languages.[4] The operative metaphor is *vision*, as when one sees a world beyond the selfish desires and interests of the ego, not the choices of an unrestrained will.

How are we to interpret such claims? Philosophers of an empiricist and naturalistic inclination will attempt to read such claims as asserting either empirical propositions, known to us through experience and observation, or else conceptual truths known by inference and reflection. That is if we grant she is not uttering nonsense. But such claims can indeed seem nonsensical to many philosophers.

When Murdoch tells us that our images of the self are expressed in metaphor, we cannot interpret her as asserting either empirical propositions or conceptual truths. As she once argued, the classification of meaningful expressions into empirical (or synthetic) propositions and logical (or analytic) propositions is already a philosophical thesis closely connected with both methodological assumptions and a moral psychology.[5] If we do not assume a broadly empiricist theory of meaning, then metaphorical and artistic expression need not be classified as parasitic on non-metaphorical uses of language.

What could such claims mean if they are not empirically verifiable, or conceptual truths, or else analyzable into one or the other of these? When Murdoch tells us that thing are *like this* with human persons and with our forms of self-understanding, she isn't (presumably) uttering nonsense by her own lights. She is saying how things are with us, as human beings, and if she is not uttering nonsense, these statements must be meaningful somehow. The trick is to say what validity conditions these propositions might have if we aren't concerned with either synthetic or analytic propositions.

We find a clue in the starting point: these are reflections on the human person, of *what it is to be a human being*. This kind of reflection cannot neatly detach its subject matter from

[4] Iris Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, 1956, 14–58, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4106662.

[5] "The idea of perfection" in Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 2nd edition (Routledge, 2001).

the methods of inquiry which are used to formulate and articulate it. There is no neutral standpoint to adopt in matters of human persons. As Isaiah Berlin once wrote, disputes about the nature of the human being do not terminate in charges of faulty observations or invalid inference, but to "a failure to recognise what it is to be a man, that is, failure to take into account the nature of the framework – the basic categories - in terms of which we think and act and assume others to think and act, if communication between us is to work."[6] The kinds of answers given in these terms cannot be adequately thought as either empirical or formal. Reflection on the categories through which we understand human beings raises characteristically philosophical questions concerning the "all but permanent ways" in which we think, perceive, judge, act (and so on).

We make a serious error then if we conflate empirical descriptions and analysis of concepts with reflection on the concepts used to understand the human being.[7] To apply the methods of empirical study or tests of logical coherence to the framework itself by which we perceive and understand human beings is just the mistake that Kant highlighted in his critical turn – to confuse the objectivity of a description with the existence of the object described.

Murdoch's metaphorical image of the person as involved in an essentially moral orientation to the world anticipates many themes in Charles Taylor's writings on human agency.[8] There is much to say on this topic; of present interest is the form of the arguments just introduced. What is involved in a reflection on the basic categories of the person? How are propositions about basic categories meant to be valid propositions if they are neither empirical nor logical?

Taylor picks up these questions in his paper "The validity of transcendental arguments". There is a particular *form* of argument that appears in Kant's first *Critique* which concerns just what it means to understand some evidently invariant or self-evident feature of human existence.[9] The 'transcendental' arguments indicated in the title are a mode of argument which start

> from some feature of our experience which they claim to be indubitable and beyond cavil. They then move to a stronger conclusion, one concerning the nature of the subject or the subject's position in the world They make this move by a regressive argument, to the effect that the stronger conclusion must be so if the

[6]"Does political theory still exist?" in Isaiah Berlin, *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy, Pimlico 341 (London: Pimlico, 1999), 163.

[7]Ibid., 164–65.

[8]Taylor defends the basics of his account in "What is human agency?", "Self-interpreting animals", and "The concept of a person" in *Human Agency and Language*, chaps. 1, 2, and 4; the basic ideas are further elaborated in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially the four chapters in Part I.

[9]Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

indubitable fact about experience is to be possible (and being so, it must be possible).[10]

Kant's arguments in the transcendental deduction of the first *Critique* are the exemplary case of this mode of argumentation. In having any experience it is possible to ask "how is experience possible?" Having an experience also presupposes the question of its possibility. No experience taken as a raw 'sense-impression', as the empiricists tended to think of sensation, can constitute itself *as* an experience – which is to say, as an experience *of* something which is not just a feeling or sensation – unless experience itself contains an aspect which is not merely subjective. The meaning of a sensation must contain something objective, which is not simply there in respect of the subject's having an uninterpreted affect.

The specifics of Kant's arguments are less important to Taylor than the form of the arguments. Taylor has a different starting-point in mind in elaborating his own account of human agency. For one thing, we don't need to follow Kant into *a priori* reflections on the validity or the discoverability of the basic categories. It is entirely possible to inquire into features of experience which are invariant, or at least much less variable than other empirical characteristics. That we inhabit three-dimensional space, say, or the preferential directionality in the orientation of our perceptual field, are such features.[11] There is no empirical science of such properties as the three-dimensionality of space, or an orientation "up" contrasted with "down". Such features are supposed in the languages in which experiences are formulated and expressed.

Taylor has it that two distinctive features of experience characterize human agents in this transcendental sense. (1) We are "animals possessing language", able by our nature to grasp, use, and master symbolic language in communication with others of our kind. (2) The human subject is an essentially embodied and active being.

Take the capacity for language.[12] Language itself can only exist in a community of speakers. Contrary to certain older theories of language, the meaning of the words or propositions of a language cannot be a private matter. No individual chooses what "red" or "chair" or "star" means. As individual agents, we have all had to learn the meaning of these words by learning how they are used in the public language. Our understanding and mastery of language requires participation in the language, and by extension in the shared form of life to which our language belongs.

The question of agency, or personhood, arises here, in the community of speakers. The question "who am I?" finds its original intelligibility situated among others and our conversational forms of dialogical exchange:

[10] Ibid., 20.
[11] Ibid., 23–25; Berlin, *Concepts and Categories*, 165.
[12] My remarks here will be deliberately brief. I take up language in greater detail in the following chapter.

> I define who I am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation within which my most important defining relations are lived out.[13]

Self-definition occurs within shared spaces of meaning, which dialogical interactions in language open up between two or more speakers. Our sense of identity as a person is inseparable from this background of language use, of which the face-to-face conversation is the model, and of the social background which this presupposes.

This relation of personhood to the linguistic and social background in which it is expressed in dialogical forms of action between speakers cannot be a contingent attribute of one's identity. Certain philosophical doctrines and myths have tried to make it so. The fable of the self-sufficient consciousness, the person who already knows how to attach names to inert objects without reference to anything beyond itself, is hard to sustain. Self-understanding presupposes public language and "webs of interlocution" between speakers.[14] Only against this inescapable background of mutual intelligibility with and to others can we then deviate in the many interesting and independent ways that originality and creativity in thought so often realize.[15]

A parallel argument can be made for the essentially embodied form of human agency. Because all such claims go beyond the empirically necessary conditions of functioning as a human agent, they touch on what is essential to human thought and experience *as subjects*. This rules out any strictly causal or empirically determinable account of bodily constitution or function.[16]

Methods and models borrowed from the natural sciences exclude the dimension of meaning in which both linguistic expression and bodily action occur. Scientific models, whether mechanistic, rationalistic, or more recent syntheses of the two approaches which apply computational and information-theoretic models to mechanistic explanations in the neurosciences, all rest on a conflation of empirical description with reflection on the framework in which they are put to use.[17] As promising as such models may be in the sciences, they all require stepping out of philosophical reflections on the framework and looking to empirical or formal propositions to spell out the nature of the human person.

Transcendental arguments do not involve determinations of a priori truths. We cannot take it for granted that any such argument suffices to refute skepticism, or (what amounts to the same thing) resists our falling into illusion or self-deception. We have no guarantees

[13] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 35.
[14] Ibid., 36.
[15] Ibid., 37–38.
[16] Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 22.
[17] Charles Taylor, "Embodied Agency," in *Merleau-Ponty: Critical Essays*, ed. Pietersma, 1989, 1–21.

that a complete neurophysiological or computational theory of experience is not forthcoming, which would suffice to explain experience and action. It could be that our self-awareness is misleading, in important parts if not systematically. A deeper explanation of thought and experience might rest on very different principles than anything we could establish in reflection alone.[18]

If transcendental arguments do not establish certainty, nor license any final conclusions about human nature or essence (or whatever), then what part do they play? And what of the claim that they can establish stronger conclusions than their starting points in establishing necessary conditions? Taylor has it that the point isn't to rule out mechanistic or rationalistic explanations of experience, but to show the *form* that any account of agency or experience must take when it involves our own self-understanding. "And this is decisive," he writes, "for the greater part of anthropology, politics, sociology, linguistics, psychoanalysis, developmental psychology, in short, virtually the entire range of the human sciences as we know them."[19]

Human sciences which purport to have human actions or human meanings as their *explananda* – any science which studies concepts that could not be formulated without our own understanding of the meaning of the concepts – must be constrained by these conditions.

We still haven't answered the question of how such arguments are valid. Taylor offers three features of transcendental arguments which allow them to establish valid conclusions. First, they consist in a chain of *indispensability claims*. A transcendental argument moves, that is, from a starting point to a conclusion by showing that the condition in the conclusion is indispensable to the original feature identified in the starting point.[20] Second, these indispensability claims are not meant to be empirically grounded but *in some sense* a priori. They are not merely probable, as if we reasoned by induction or by advancing hypotheses, but apodictic and intended as self-evident.[21] Third, these claims concern experience. This gives the chain an "anchor" in human experience which lends it significance to human beings.[22]

One question here is how reasoning from apparently self-evident features of experience to apodictic claims about the essence of experience is meant to avoid the problems raised for foundationalist arguments. How can Taylor speak here of self-evident or apodictic claims if the basic categories which concern these arguments are not secured in truly invariant features of human life? If we have to *show* that they are self-evident by arguing for it, how likely is it that they are? What about the endless arguments around claims to self-evident truth?

[18]Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 26.
[19]Ibid., 27.
[20]Ibid.
[21]Ibid., 27–28.
[22]Ibid., 28.

The answer to this question depends on interpreting transcendental arguments as articulations of our insights into our activities. Activities have a point to them. We understand the why, the "for what", that directs our actions. For any activity, certain ends are essential to it. Lacking those ends would also negate the point of the activity.[23] Giving articulation to the purpose in our activities is also to say what makes them possible.

Perhaps we cannot establish any firm certainties, but no matter. The point lies in the attempt to *make sense of what we are doing*, not to determine facts behind and beyond all action. Although we express our purposes in language

> What constitutes the point of an activity is not a merely verbal matter. It may, of course, be an arbitrary question of classification where we draw the boundaries between activities, but for any activity once circumscribed and distinguished from others, what constitutes its point is not just a verbal question.[24]

Now the question arises as to just what this activity is that we articulate in this way. Taylor claims that it is an activity of awareness, of being aware of the world, having some purchase on the reality in which we live and act. This rather obviously this begs the question in supposing that there is a reality that we are aware of. Taylor argues for a more minimal description. We are "aware of whatever there is that we can be aware of, whether impressions, appearances, real physical objects, or whatever."[25]

This kind of perceptual or quasi-perceptual activity is not like a consciously-known *explanation* of an activity. Perception is inarticulate. Even when we learn to articulate what we see, we never really get to *what it is to see*. That is left up to philosophy. Thus awareness doesn't suppose *knowledge* of the conditions of error, if that means having entertained some express formulation of those conditions.[26] Awareness is of the sort of activity "where understanding their point is itself part of their point."[27] In understanding the point we also have a grasp of the conditions of success and failure. So there is a self-validating quality to awareness. One couldn't ask the question "Am I aware?" if one weren't aware of the asking. The grasp of things – of the situation, or the reality one has purchase on – lies in the background, prior to explicit formulation in language.

Is there any point to calling this mode of expression an *argument*? Arguments, one might think, are advanced according to the rules governing the use of language and the inferential rules regulating (among other things) the valid inferential moves in an argument and the coherence of propositions. Transcendental arguments don't merely recapitulate express

[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 30.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

rules in quite this way, either as specific propositions or in light of express rules of inference. Transcendental arguments are attempts to articulate the boundary conditions of experience. It is the "exigencies of the philosophical debate" which require us to "*formulate* the limiting success conditions which we cannot but recognize once we grasp the formulation."[28] We have to give arguments in language because language is the only means we have to make the attempt.

What reconciles the paradox between the apodictic character of the argument and its openness to endless debate and revision? While a correct formulation will be self-evident, the question can still arise as to whether we've gotten the formulation right. This is especially so given that these arguments move us well past the ordinary domains of experience and practice into areas "we look through rather than at". Ordinary ways of talking may have no adequate vocabularies for this, and in that event we have to create new concepts in order to make clear the limits of experience beyond the scope of ordinary attention.

There is an unavoidable air of paradox around transcendental arguments. They involve us in a blurring of the lines between manifestation of a pre-existing reality and the creation of new vocabularies which make possible new ways of expressing and clarifying our pre-articulate experience. In asking *what* is proven, the answer is that they prove something strong about the subject and its relation to the world, yet – because they are grounded in experiences of a subject – they give up on answering final ontological questions about the nature of experience. In asking *how* they prove such claims, they do so by articulating a point to the activity which must be self-evident – there can be no awareness without the possibility of inquiring into one's own awareness, say – but, because such things are difficult to articulate (and may not be fully articulable), they also open out into an endless debate.

In other writings Taylor will strengthen this method of transcendental argument into an argumentative principle, the **Best Account (BA) principle**, which he uses as a wedge to dislodge certain mechanistic, materialist, and utilitarian attitudes which he believes to permeate modern moral philosophy.[29] We find an early example of this strategy in a paper comparing the method of analysis of ordinary language to Merleau-Ponty's phenemonological analysis of perceptual experience.[30] Taylor charges that both methods aspire to neutrality, aiming to be modes of inquiry which make no ontological presuppositions. But there is no impartial stance within theory which can exclude metaphysical commitments. Despite being in many ways sympathetic to Merleau-Ponty's account of perceptual experience, Taylor argues that much greater care must be taken in so far as acknowledging what is, and what is not, implied about metaphysical matters.

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[28] Ibid., 31.

[29] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 58–74.

[30] Charles Taylor, "Phenomenology and Linguistic Analysis: I," in *Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology*, ed. Harold A. Durfee (M. Nijhoff, 1976), 217–31.

Absence of express commitments does not entail that there are no commitments at all. Furthermore, the attitude of methodological neutrality leads to complacency, even actively concealing the implicit metaphysical commitments of supposedly 'anti-metaphysical' standpoints. For this reason, Taylor is careful to distinguish a purely phenomenological reduction of experience from the reflection on the transcendental categories which even this must presuppose.[31] Of course we must always take care not to cover over the difference between the capability to make discriminations and knowledge of the essence, or nature, or genesis of the elements distinguished. *Neither* unreflective conscious experience *nor* reflectively articulated propositions in language suffice to provide an ontologically neutral standpoint from which facts can be determined without presupposition. For some concepts the question "what are we *really* distinguishing?" has no sense outside of the point they have in language, for us as subjects who understand that meaning via experience. We are in no position to mount a full-scale skeptical attack on any and all concepts or forms of understanding – at least not without miring ourselves down in the quagmire of philosophical theorizing. The best account we can give is an account which includes our thoughts and experiences, inclusive of linguistic and bodily activities. We simply have no better starting point, and any candidates for such must face the charge that they, too, are *interpretations* which someone has found meaningful.

A final point about inarticulate purchase before moving on. When Taylor speaks of articulating the *limits* of experience, he is not attempting to say what experience *is*.[32] A determinate answer to the ontological question is not so much absent as much as it *becomes unimportant*. The point of affirming a robust realism about the ontological commitments of our ordinary sorts of thought and experience – Iris Murdoch went as far as to call herself a naturalist in this respect – is precisely to bring out the limitations of beings like ourselves having any firm grasp on the nature of things. Certainly Kant's critical turn was nothing short of disastrous in Murdoch's eyes, effectively replacing the ancient and medieval ideal of God with the false idol of the human will. Taylor, though more ambivalent about the moral worth of such changes, agrees with the spirit of the point.

With respect to the ontological issue, it is worth underscoring the central importance of visual imagery and metaphor, the primary significance of perception, in Taylor's moral phenomenology. I don't just mean that he uses the language of perceptual experiences as colorful thought experiments. He takes seriously the notion or image of a self which can apprehend a moral reality as the senses apprehend the world. The image of a 'self in moral space', in his phrase, is meant to draw a literal analogy with moral experience and one's experience of navigating through a three-dimensional terrain on foot. The recurrent use

[31] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 32.

[32] By way of analogy, consider that defining a physical object implies criteria for distinguishing it from its environment and other objects. To say what a box is is also to have a grasp of the boundaries of the box, in order to say what is *not* the box.

of visual words, the "picture" or "image", is not accidental. It calls to mind a certain way of understanding these problems, breaking sharply with narrower attentions to words and their logic by using spatial and perceptual metaphors.

Understanding our moral experiences in this way, the concept of the *horizon* takes on a double significance. It is a 'background' from which explicit thoughts and objects of attention can become significant (imagine the way an all-white sheet of paper makes a vivid patch of red "pop" off the page). But a horizon also appears from a perspective, an artifact of the perceptual field itself, a conceptual limitation as much as a causal boundary. Because logically bound to a perspective, it isn't possible to reach or overcome a horizon. There is nothing to reach nor surpass. To move towards it is to watch it recede. To say what the horizon is, or what might lie 'beyond' it, is to mistake it for a *boundary*. If the human agent is a 'self in moral space', it follows that any journey to reach the horizon, to say finally what it *is*, could only result in endless movement. One tries this way, and now that, using these concepts, now those. One will never find the limit because it is a limit of a finite human perspective.

It is no accident that the key metaphors break entirely with the explicit representations of logic and propositional language, instead centering on the visual image of a landscape, the topographical shape of experiences, the orientation of the agent within a world delimited by spatial and temporal horizons. It can be so difficult to get this, Taylor writes, because

> this is the hardest thing to see. What we are focussing on is the way we grasp the world, become aware of it. This is a form of activity in the world, or is something done by an embodied agent. It is true that it is in a sense an impersonal activity in me… But it is nevertheless my activity.[33]

Yet isn't Taylor trying to give his own anti-historical account of the human predicament? Is it possible to remain consistent in holding both that there is no way to articulate a 'final ontology' of human experience and that *this picture* of the human predicament is correct? After all, he is making claims, in language, about "what is" as it concerns the topic of human beings.

The trivial response is that any account of human essence or nature must be given in language, and that includes *this* (Taylor's) argument. The less trivial answer is that any philosophy which seeks to articulate the inarticulate cannot avoid the air of paradox. This account both is, and is not, an expression of the basic categories of some imagined human ontology. *Is*, because in these matters we are speaking quite seriously of how things are as a basic, if minimal, condition on human agency. *Is not*, since whatever is apodictic and self-evident in these claims is not *on principle* resistant to future revision. This tentative, provisional stance towards a priori claims leads Ruth Abbey to label Taylor's account as a

[33] Taylor, "Embodied Agency," 18.

falsifiable realism.[34] Ontological claims do not need to be either beyond future revision or reducible to a single determinate set of propositions.

That this tension between ontology and history is pressed as a serious worry illustrates how deeply the foundationalist requirement has a hold on us. Because the materials of language are 'metaphor', expressing a tacit, mostly inarticulate sense of (quasi-)perceptual purchase on the world, the conditions of validity for propositions are fundamentally different than the validity conditions of empirical or analytical propositions.[35]

The bounds of sense are always in motion, as the human subject can move. Literally, in the case of perception, and by analogy, when we use expressive language to explore off in some direction (and thus away from others). Any "best account" of human life must take these features into account as methodological constraints. In the next section, I will argue that Philippa Foot's work exhibits arguments which qualify as transcendental in the sense discussed here, making her a fellow traveler with Taylor.

1.2 Transcendental arguments in Foot's ethics

In this section I want to consider where Philippa Foot stands in relation to the transcendental arguments defended by Taylor. I will proceed by considering the two main threads from above. My claims are that (1) Foot's writings, beginning with her earliest papers, demonstrate a concern with philosophical anthropology in ethics and moral philosophy, and (2) the development of Foot's later naturalistic ethics is consistent with the argumentative style and the commitments we find in these early papers. I argue that Foot employs transcendental arguments with the aim of articulating an anthropology of the human person as the basis of her ethics. The account of natural evaluative facts and of living organisms developed in Natural Goodness is not a break with her earlier positions but a refinement of them. Footian naturalism is complementary to the methods and methodological aims we found in Taylor.

Early Foot on the meaning of moral arguments

Two of Philippa Foot's most well-known and influential papers, "Moral Arguments" and "Moral Beliefs", can be understood as attacks on the then-common dogmas of non-cognitivist moral philosophers, who held that moral uses of language were to be understood as practical, action-guiding expressions.[36]

Her argument is that the meanings of moral terms cannot be adequately explained as the choices of an individual subject. A moral word like "justice" cannot plausibly mean whatever

[34] Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, Philosophy Now (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
[35] This raises some issues in the philosophy of language which I will explore in the following chapter.
[36] Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, chap. 7 and 8.

one decides it means. One is not free to choose one's own moral principles. Nor is an individual free to say, as noncognitivist moral philosophers want to say, that the evidence that others have in support of a moral conclusion is not *his own* evidence; or that *what is evidence for him* need not be accepted as evidence for anyone else.

To hold these premises is to seriously misunderstand the nature and the scope of moral disagreements. It is to force all cases of disagreement about what is good and right into the mold provided by a philosophical theory. There are some disputes which simply don't make sense as differences of principle, choice, will, or attitude set against a neutral, uncontested manifold of facts. Moral arguments "break down more often than philosophers tend to think," she writes, but "the breakdown is of a different kind."[37] Arguments about moral concepts, the right, the good, the obligatory, the virtues, are not restricted to "the adducing of facts which can be established by observation, or by some clear-cut technique."[38] Much depends here on experience and imagination, and so it is "quite common for one man to be unable to see what the other is getting at, and this sort of misunderstanding will not always be resolvable by anything which could be called argument in the ordinary sense."[39]

These papers thus reject empiricist doctrines of meaning which impose a distinction between descriptive language and evaluations. In the process, Foot is challenging the premise or assumption that it is the human will, all-powerful in this respect, that is the source and determination of moral meanings. It is not an *act of will* which determines the meaning of moral terms, or delineates the full scope of moral disagreements. This brings her quite close to Taylor's view on the topic, though I think indirectly so.[40]

Although unrefined compared to her later views, about which more shortly, we already see in "Moral Beliefs" the affirmation of a conceptual connection between moral concepts and what benefits or harms a living human being.[41] Despite some of the difficulties with in squaring justice with what benefits the individual, we already find this provocative remark:

> Is it true, however, to say that justice is not something a man needs in his dealings with his fellows, supposing only that he be strong? Those who think that he can

[37]Ibid., 109.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Iris Murdoch again makes for a useful point of contact between Foot and Taylor. Her "Vision and Choice in Morality" was an influential criticism of the centrality of the will to idea of the person, then popular in analytic philosophy and Parisian existentialism. Murdoch argued that this view was motivated by unappreciated Protestant and Liberal moral commitments. This theme recurs in Taylor's writings, and I believe it is also a key insight behind Foot's views that we are presently considering.

[41]This, famously, raises a problem for the rationality of acting by the demands of concepts like justice, which have no clear connection with benefit to the individual. The closing paragraphs of "Moral Beliefs" struggle with just this question. I will say more about this in chapters 4-6.

> get on perfectly well without being just should be asked to say exactly how such a man is supposed to live.[42]

Moral words are meaningful in so far as they relate to considerations of *human need*. To speak here of needs, which can be grasped in this context as constraints on what is intelligibly desirable in a human life, is to suppose a concept of the human person who has those needs, and who lives well in having them.[43] Ethical thought requires reflection on what kind of being we are talking about.

Foot's response to the immoralist skeptic revolves around unmasking Thrasymachus' strong man as an implausible fiction. No one, no matter how strong, could actually live a life of injustice – at any rate not for very long. We shouldn't deny that a person might get away with brutality and duplicity in a single case, perhaps even to great profit. To say that someone lives well by living an entire life this way is a different matter. The human need for justice is a need precisely because we live, qua human beings, with others of our kind, and we cannot expect to dominate or manipulate others as we might animals or inanimate objects. It can seem so difficult to show the advantage of justice over injustice just because it is so easy to consider particular acts of (in)justice in isolation from the whole pattern of one's character and actions over the course of a life.

As we actually are, we do not in general get on well when we live a life of injustice. The sophisticated philosophical theories which aim to characterize goodness on the basis of choice or desire have the consequence of cutting us off from the concrete realities of the human predicament both within – in the 'soul' we might say – and from without, in the ways in which we live with one another.

Justice itself, conceived as a virtue, is also a *reason* for all human beings, no matter his own strength and no matter what profit may seem to accrue from a particular act of injustice. As Foot means it, a reason could not be a moral principle, the meaning of which is fixed by the choices of the agent or the agent's desires. A reason for acting need not be a consciously-held proposition at all. The rationality of moral (virtuous) action is not determined by the accordance of a moral principle with choice or desire alone.

Early Foot, then, is deeply engaged in a reflection on the categories in which we can understand the human person. Her picture of the human person and its human needs forms the basis of her substantive ethical positions. Moral words are not functions of choice, nor is the correct scheme of moral concepts something that one can arbitrarily choose, either by act of will or because one merely desires it.

[42]Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 128–29.

[43]Foot's discussion of this point borrows from Anscombe's discussion of intelligible "wants" in her *Intention* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), secs. 34–40.

It seems plausible enough then that early Foot was working within the same range of methodological aims as we have found in Taylor. That thread of continuity appears more tenuous once we turn to the ethical naturalism that Foot advances in her final book *Natural Goodness*, which is the topic of the next section.

1.3 Later Foot's neo-Aristotelian naturalism as philosophical anthropology

Ever since G. E. Moore's influential attack on the possibility of analyzing the concept "good" into a property, a genuine naturalism in ethics came to seem implausible to many moral philosophers (and still does for many). With some notable exceptions analytic moral philosophy has tended to either ignore talk of goodness, replacing it with the analysis of practical action-guiding language, or else to find some way of explaining the meaning of moral uses of language without reference to any intrinsic notion of goodness. The former sort of program was common in the early emotivists such as Ayer, Stevenson and Hare, the same figures whom early Foot took as her targets.

More recent developments in moral subjectivism are more sophisticated than these earlier attempts to connect moral meanings directly to individual choices. They attempt to explain moral speech and moral behavior by giving an explanation in terms of the attitudes and motivational states of the subject.[44] Because these programs see themselves as closely aligned with biological, psychological and social sciences, they are also, confusingly, called 'naturalistic'. The *methodological* naturalism endorsed by sophisticated subjectivists should not be confused with *ethical* naturalism, which is (among other things) a realist stance about evaluative facts.

Still, Moore's argument has had a lasting influence, and it is for this reason that Foot takes undermining it as her starting point. Moore's argument depends on the premise that the word "good" fills the grammatical role of a predicate. The meaning of a predicate is given by the property or properties to which it refers, so "good" would *mean* whatever quality it picks out, like "red" picks out red, "made of wood" picks out an object made of wood, or "three feet long" picks out a three-foot-long object. It is not a logical error to say "the sun is made of wood" although it is factually mistaken.

Peter Geach once argued that Moore's argument against naturalism rests on this very

[44]Some notable examples include Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977); John L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, Penguin Philosophy (London: Penguin Books, 1990); Bernard Williams, especially in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 1986), chap. 8; and his "Nietzsche's minimalist moral psychology" in *Making Sense of Humanity* (Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

mistake.[45] Moore took propositions of the form "X is good" as exemplars of the logical grammar of "good" in all of its uses. This is an illicit generalization.[46] Moore was quite right that there is no sense to that sort of proposition, as there is no property X to which the predicate could refer without always leaving the question open as to whether X really is good. He was nevertheless mistaken in concluding from the meaninglessness of *such* propositions that *no* evaluative propositions could also be part of a description of natural facts.

Propositions in human languages involve many different grammatical forms, not all of which involve joining a referring predicate to the subject of the proposition. Uses of "good" are one such case. Good is an *attributive adjective* rather than a predicative, property-ascribing part of speech. An attributive word indicates qualities which are relative to the subject to which they are joined. Take the word "tall". There are such things as a tall three year old, a tall NBA player, a tall giraffe, and a tall building. If "tall" were a predicate, it would indicate a common property shared between all of these. But the tallest three year old is diminutive next to a tall basketball player, and neither has any significant height when compared to the tallness of a skyscraper. "Tall" indicates a relative attribute of a thing under that description.

The logic of the word "good" is like this. A judgment of a thing's goodness is relative to the circumstance of the description and the qualities of the thing described. It follows that there is no single quality – no one respect in which a thing is grasped as good – identified by the word. Rather there are a wide range of good things each of which is good in respect of the kind of thing it is. A good knife, a good parent, a good choice, and a good action are all uses of evaluative terms to make distinctions relative to the concepts knife, parent, choice, and action. Propositions of the form "S is a good F" do not analyze into a subject joined to a predicate: "This is a good knife" does not mean "This is a knife" and "This is good".

The first three chapters of *Natural Goodness* explore this thought in connection with moral evaluations. Foot's central thesis is that the evaluation of natural goodness and defect in living organisms belongs to a class of proposition of which moral evaluations of human will and human actions are a sub-class.[47] The evaluative component of the proposition does not imply that something is added to the factual description. A judgment of the excellence or defect of a living thing makes no reference to human desires or interests. Things go well, or not, according to features of living organisms which are entirely independent of the subjective qualities of human beings. There are natural norms which regulate growth, development, reproduction, and all other aspects of an organism's life-cycle. Moral evaluations of charac-

[45] P. T. Geach, "Good and Evil," *Analysis* 17, no. 2 (January 12, 1956): 33–42, doi:10.1093/analys/17.2.33.

[46] Geach is extending an insight from Wittgenstein's inquiries into language. Compare with the *Philosophical Investigations* §90: "Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. Such an investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language."

[47] Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

ter and action are not *logically* distinct from these appraisals, the way we can make factual evaluations of sight and memory, or physical health and wellness. "This is a good oak tree" shares the same logical form as "This is a good human action".

Several points are worth pausing to consider. The general contours of the program are still very much in the spirit of Foot's earlier papers. The methodological strategy of investigating the logical grammar of the relevant concepts and propositions has not changed. The later naturalism does not reject her earlier position so much as refine it: the human needs she spoke of in "Moral Beliefs" are now fleshed out here in a theory of natural norms regulating the flourishing of human beings. Facts about how a human life goes well or goes badly are partial determinants of the meanings of our moral concepts, in so far as these specify certain background conditions on what could count as harm or benefit. But this is a thesis about the meaning of moral concepts as much as it is about the meaning of concepts and judgments of living beings.

This account is (of course) not free of its own problems, but we can already see a point taking shape here in connection with our discussion of transcendental arguments. Foot's arguments for an evaluative aspect in our concepts of living things deploys the *kind* of arguments she employed to defend the autonomy of the meaning of moral concepts in her earlier papers. And this is the same *kind* of argument that points to the explanatory vacuity that results from using concepts of freedom and choice as basic features of our account of human persons, while at the same time being part of a search to ground meaning in human activities of a very different sort.

I will come back to this point shortly. First I want to briefly consider what follows from this evaluative turn in naturalism. If Foot is right, we cannot speak of living organisms as if they were a simply a class of (admittedly very sophisticated) machine assembled out of an assortment of accidentally related parts and processes. This is not what our life-form concepts *mean*. Living things have their own intrinsic significance which is determined by the formal unity of the whole organism. An organ or a part of a living thing is what it is because of the part it plays in the life of the organism whose organ or part it is. Nor would it be right to accuse her of any bare empiricism or (if we can use this term without too much controversy) scientism. The facts determined about an organism, by empirical and scientific means, are surely relevant to our understanding of the nature of that organism. But, as early Foot argued that the *intelligibility* of moral words could not be a function of willing or wanting, later Foot is arguing similarly that the *intelligibility* of life-form concepts is likewise not down to an authoritative method of observation or experiment. The meaning of a life-form concept or judgment is not determined by impartially characterized facts.[48]

[48] Compare this reading with the rather sneering condemnation of Thompson and Foot in Lenman, "The Saucer of Mud, the Kudzu Vine and the Uxorious Cheetah" for their supposed failure to grasp the significance

A fortiori our concept of nature, and of natural facts, could not be the blind mechanism envisioned by materialists, or the manifold of impartial facts conceived by empiricists. At least in respect of living things, the natural world is shot through with purposes and evaluative distinctions, and these are not explicable in non-purposive or non-evaluative terms.[49] This will not be an uncontentious claim (to put it nicely). The Galilean and Copernican revolutions in natural science put an end, it is widely thought, to the plausibility of any 'enlivened' view of nature. Talk of natural purposes and evaluations conflicts with our best scientific understanding of life. Modern biology, resting on Darwin's later revolution, has no reason to take seriously any concept of intrinsic purpose as part of its explanations of the structure or function of living beings. According to evolutionary biology, living things have no essences as Aristotelian natural philosophy once thought. Biological species are fully explicable as contingent assemblages of ordinary physical processes. The formal element of unity once thought to distinguish a living being from an inanimate object or process seems entirely discredited.

As a consequence of this broadly naturalistic – in the anti-purposive, anti-teleological sense of 'naturalistic' – tendency in modern thinking (inside and outside of philosophy), much of the secondary literature has interpreted Foot's neo-Aristotelian account of nature through one of two lenses. In the first case, readers of an empiricist and (methodological) naturalistic stance find the account of life implausible for its neglect of evolutionary biology, either ignoring explanations that ought to be accepted or contradicting well-established facts with discredited 'organicist' and 'vitalist' ideas.

One of the most widely-made criticisms of Foot's argument at this stage is the objection that a naturalistic account of human well-being could not support our considered moral beliefs and intuitions. One version of this objection addresses the patterns of variability we observe within specific species. Internal variation within a species, which can have distinct sub-groups or sub-populations, may result in multiple naturally sound types.[50] For example, there are species of insect that develop into different mature phenotypes according to the time of year that they are born. We wouldn't say that one type is excellent where the other is defective, because both are doing well by the criteria set down by their kind of life. Even if we don't go as far as positing any specifically developmental differences, we see that many animals can adapt to the circumstances of their individual niche, and in ways which

of Darwinism. The point is not that scientific findings *have no bearing on* the understanding of life, but that they do not alone determine the meaning, the intelligible order, of life as a phenomenon.

[49]It is important to make this clear. The orthodox objection to Aristotle is that he erred in moving from descriptions of living things to general truths about nature and cosmos. This is clearly untenable now, for well-known reasons, if it ever was Aristotle's own view. But we need not make the equal and opposite error in concluding that because mathematical physics has no need of purpose that there is no need for purpose anywhere in nature, or for that matter in the sciences. See the introduction to Michael Thompson, *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

[50]Andreou, "Getting on in a Varied World."

depart from the behaviors exhibited in their native habitats.[51] Coyotes in the wild exhibit different patterns of behavior when compared to their cousins who have adapted to city life. With human beings the differences of behavior can be even more significant and occur in a wider range of patterns. What is virtuous for the human form of life will depend on local circumstances, in so far as conditions in which a person lives and acts are partial determinants of what counts as excellence or defect. Yet this entails that a mobster who belongs to a successful gang is doing well, because he is succeeding according to the natural standards of survival and reproduction. What is good, and what is virtuous, depend on how well the organism adapts to its niche rather than any moral claims in the usual sense.

Another worry is that her account contradicts our best scientific account of natural functions and so cannot be a genuine form of naturalism. One version of this objection has it that Foot's concept of natural functions is mistaken because it does not fit with our best understanding of living functions from evolutionary biology.[52] A more scientifically respectable account of function in nature, consistent with the evolutionary-biological story, would be unlikely to show that *moral* goodness is *natural* goodness since it is unlikely that evolutionary processes would select for moral behaviors. Another version of this objection has it that since the natural norms which ground Foot's moral evaluations do not fit with our best biological accounts of function, natural norms cannot also be moral norms.[53] A third version of this worry argues that Foot's account cannot determine what is most important to the flourishing of an organism, between its reproductive success or its own survival and welfare.[54] She cannot make this argument on the basis of natural facts alone, because any such account requires a specifically normative account of what it means to flourish.

In each case, the nature Foot refers to is assumed to be the nature already purged of meaning, purpose, and evaluative distinctions and left to the sciences.

In the second case, readers more sympathetic to Foot's aims within moral philosophy tend to suppose that she is advancing her claims within a broadly neo-Kantian framework, taking as uncontentious an accepted set of categorical distinctions between the rational norms guiding moral judgments and moral actions and the causally-structured world of impartial nature.

One such criticism concerns the incompatibility of moral goodness and natural goodness. If we begin from the thought that what is natural is what is good, the requirement of universality demanded of moral judgments seems hard to defend.[55] We can make sense of altruistic behavior towards kin and tribe, but the considerations of justice, of human rights, equality

[51] Levy, "Philippa Foot's Theory of Natural Goodness."
[52] Millum, "Natural Goodness and Natural Evil."
[53] Odenbaugh, "Nothing in Ethics Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution?"
[54] Lewens, "Foot Note."
[55] Gowans, "Virtue and Nature."

of dignity and recognition of all persons which constitute our considered moral beliefs don't have any place in a naturalized morality. For that matter, it could be that many things we judge as morally bad or evil could be endorsed as morally good on the naturalistic account.[56] Since violence and competition are as much a part of the natural history of the human species, there is no way to justify moral judgments and behaviors as good without bringing in some external normative standard.

Common to all of these objections is the premise that nature means *nature in the sense indicated by the total set of facts or best explanation of the facts as determined by the methods of natural science*. In each case, the nature Foot refers to is assumed to be the nature already purged of meaning, purpose, and evaluative distinctions and left to the sciences. Among the objections in the existing literature, one or both of the following is either neglected or minimized: (1) the grammatical analysis of "good" and the formal continuity of evaluative and descriptive propositions, and (2) the methodological starting point from which Foot begins advancing these claims.

A transcendental conception of the natural world

Point (2) draws our eye here. We can ask just how Foot *is* arguing if she is not beginning from an uncontentious empiricist starting point. The critics have so far supposed that there is only one way to proceed in asking questions about human nature (which is also a question about nature as such). This is to proceed neutrally, without any presuppositions *about* human nature and *the concepts and languages we use to express them*, in the manner of empiricism and methodological naturalism. But any such inquiry involves taking a stand on metaphysical and evaluative questions. By expressly ruling out evaluative concepts and distinctions as parts of nature in advance of inquiry itself, the empiricist and naturalist starting point *already takes a stand* on what can and cannot be natural. This is exactly what Foot is rejecting.

To be fair to the critics, *Natural Goodness* is not exactly clear on this. Some of the terminology, for example her use of the concept 'function', can be misleading even though she is clear that she means the 'everyday' use of the term rather than any technical use of the word.[57] The question "what is it for?" asked of some part or operation of a living thing is intelligible for us because, as human beings, this is how we come to understand living things *as* living things, and not as part of the inanimate processes which make up the physical environment. That we later come to learn that the oak tree and the sparrows flitting about it are physically constituted by this or that physiological operation is not ruled out. Exactly the

[56] Woodcock, "Philippa Foot's Virtue Ethics Has an Achilles' Heel."

[57] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 31–33, especially footnote 10.

opposite: the empirical propositions advanced from within the theories and models of biological science are not somehow made unimportant. It is rather that they are not *sufficient* to fix the meanings of our life-form concepts. Rather, the concept "oak tree" is what makes the empirical propositions of a scientific theory into propositions *about* oak trees.

This debate highlights a philosophical problem in the biological sciences themselves. Attempts to define life in terms of the constituent physical properties or processes of living things, or by way of a causal theory which attempts to express the curious properties of organisms, turn out to be either hopelessly circular or else trivial and so lacking in explanatory power.[58] Yet ignoring the findings of post-Darwinian biology (not to mention its track record of success in improving our understanding of living organisms) in favor of an 'organicist' or 'vitalist' theory seems to introduce some extra-empirical or non-natural qualities into our understanding of life. This doesn't seem any more viable. The antinomy revealed by the lack of a robust definition of life, one which avoids circularity or romantic nostalgia, is a conceptual difficulty *within* the biological sciences, touching on the very idea of what it is to give descriptions and explanations of living beings and their behaviors. The ontological concepts available to talk of living things thus has import *for* science, and consequently it will not be settled by empirical discoveries alone. It must be advanced with the resources of philosophical reflection on the concepts and categories put to work, making the Foot-Thompson account a transcendental argument in the sense discussed above.[59]

Michael Thompson's writings, from which Foot draws extensively, make this more clear.[60] Thompson takes Frege to be his proximate source of inspiration. But Frege himself was interested in the formal structures of thought which exist independent of history or individual psychology. This raises a problem for Aristotelian interpretations. How are we to square a decidedly Aristotelian interest in particular, concrete organisms with a Fregean (or broadly 'neo-Kantian') interest in formal categories and concepts of thought abstracted from any concrete instances? Thompson's answer is to point to a peculiar (by 'naturalistic' lights) synthesis of forms of thought with their subject-matter. Concepts of life capture "a particular type of 'unity'…a unity through which the things united can at the same time in some sense be understood."[61] The form of the concept is already "in" the thing apprehended by the concept.

This might seem a curious idea. Concepts belong to thought, after all, and if they are in things at all they must be put there by the activity of a thinking subject. But let us notice something important here. This is just the difficulty Taylor raises in his explication of the

[58]Thompson, *Life and Action*, 44–47.

[59]I say *alongside* here in order to avoid the temptation to make either reflection or empirical discovery a primary pole in the relation. There is no doubt that empirical science plays a key part here. But this should not thereby denigrate or exclude the part played by human interpreters.

[60]Ibid., 11–14.

[61]Ibid., 11.

embodied and expressive agent: how to advance a self-evident claim on the basis of thought when thought itself opens up the possibility of future revision? Taylor's answer is that bodily action both *is* conceptual, in that it has certain invariant, a priori, and reflectively-available attributes grounded in experience, which (so far as we can reasonably explore) serve as the basis of subsequent experiences or interpretations. At the same time bodily action *is not* conceptual, if that means the sense indicated by the conscious entertainment or linguistic articulation of an explicit thought.

Taylor set out three conditions on the validity of transcendental arguments: they consist in indispensability claims which are *in some sense* a priori, and which concern the human experiences that confer significance on them. The sorts of form-concepts and propositions employed in life-form talk would, if they were asserted as a form of transcendental argument, satisfy these conditions. We would expect them to bear the air of paradox attaching to apodictic judgments which are in principle open to further revision.

This is just what we find. The grammatical analysis of form concepts and teleological judgments begins with a reflection on certain features of human understanding and experience in respect of our recognition of living organisms. The web of concepts and categories which include life-forms, their internal unity of purposes and whole-part relations, are known to us in a weakly a priori sense, being dependent on uniquely human constitution and powers of perception and cognition. The conceptual forms of living things are indispensable to us, being a crucial part of our grasp of the natural world, as well as constituting features of our own experience which cannot be easily doubted. Even young children can tell the difference between a living organism and an inanimate object. Our human-native, intuitive grasp of living things as *not like* rocks or dirt or the sky or rushing rivers is a basic feature of human thought and experience which cannot be done away with.

The concepts employed in talk of living things – life-form, organ, reproduction, and so on – need not fit into the molds laid down by the vocabularies of physics or the mechanistic biology inspired by physics. The mold itself was put into place by empiricist theories of meaning, not by any scientific theory, and only philosophical inertia keeps it in place. If I am right, Thompson's claim that life-form talk concerns a different *subject matter* – not merely a distinct *way of talking* – amounts to the claim that systems of concepts in one way do, and in one way do not, provide us with access to the natural world beyond mere perceptions or concepts. Apprehension of life both *is* a human cognitive operation distinct from other modes of human cognition, and *is not* strictly speaking reducible to human thought independent of its objects. The ontological claim cannot be so cleanly separated from the subjective apprehension, not without introducing a philosophical theory precisely where the key question is raised. There are such things as rabbits, oak trees, and orcas, no matter if there are human beings to give them names; but the name is how these become part of the human world.

The transcendental features appear at a second level. We apprehend ourselves, qua human beings, as objects of life-form cognition. That we are natural beings who seek to understand their own natural history is itself a part of our natural history, the kind of claim captured in natural-historical judgments about the human species. Thus the concept of *life-form* and the propositions employed in speaking of living things are also indispensable to our self-understanding *as* human agents. We make sense of ourselves as a kind of animal among other animals, as distinct from inanimate physical processes, as beings with a body, with certain ways of acting, and so on. Such judgments have the status of a priori judgments about the human understanding of human existence.

That we make such distinctions does not, of course, imply any ontological conclusions about the distinction. But we can already forestall this objection. Thompson argues that we are entitled to stronger speculative conclusions about the contents of life-form concepts and teleological judgments. Not only are these speculations indispensable in a subjective, phenomenological sense, as we reflect on and grasp what we are. They are also essential to getting on with scientific study of living things (contrasted with a 'physics of squishy motile things'). The transcendental part of the argument lies in this explanatory power: if we did not take seriously these features of our grasp of living things, then we would not even have a science able to describe and explain living things. The stronger philosophical claims, the ontological commitments, the universal and invariant features of life, are not the interesting question here. Following Taylor, the point being made is that there is no neutral scientific standpoint which we can adopt which frees us from philosophical reflection. Philosophical reflection is essential, indispensable, even in scientific practice. Those theories – concerning language, and concerning the philosophy of science – which lack the resources to grasp this are also weaker explanations.

Doesn't this account only beg the question by giving priority to pre-philosophical understanding over sophisticated scientific explanations of nature? For one thing, pre-theoretical intuitions are highly variable and mutable. Modern physics has transformed many of our "intuitive" understandings of motion, for example, by giving us a new framework of concepts by which to understand movement. Scientific explanations routinely conflict with human intuitions about nature. Maybe we could plausibly grant that moral concepts resist analysis into non-moral concepts. Even if we do, nothing requires that we grant the same status to nature itself. Consider how many things in nature that human intuitions have been shown mistaken about, from motion to cosmology to the workings of living things. Why should we take ordinary forms of experience (should there be any such thing) to have any special epistemic privilege in our understanding of nature? If I'm going to draw on a transcendental argument for the explanatory power of a theory as a defense of Footian naturalism, why shouldn't we say that a scientifically-consistent form of naturalism provides us with a better explanation

over philosophical argument?

Consider the standpoint from which these worries are pressed. Philosophers of an empiricist or naturalistic inclination suppose that there is a robust, conventionally agreeable and largely uncontentious understanding of what nature is, or at least what it could be given our total body of scientific findings. Such claims must be advanced dogmatically. Ontological claims about nature or the systems of concepts through which we understand it are not themselves part of any scientific theory. Materialism, physicalism, and mechanism are all philosophical doctrines advanced and defended by philosophers, using the methods available to philosophical reflection.

We don't have to dispute the spirit of the critical point in order to reject such doctrines. Human experiences and intuitions *are* highly variable between cultures and even between individuals within a culture. Explanations advanced from experience and from reflection *are* often wildly mistaken. The present point is more modest: We don't make any progress in resolving these difficulties by affirming another form of dogmatic speculation. Methodological or scientific naturalists insist that they are doing no such thing, that they have hitched their wagons to natural science. If my discussion of these points is even approximately right, that response is a non-starter. Scientifically respectable metaphysics is still metaphysics, with its own unquestioned presuppositions, just incapable of recognizing itself as such.

One final point on this. There is nothing *unscientific* in the field-work of a botanist or a zoologist. The study of living things began as a taxonomic classification made by observation of different kinds of living things and their behaviors. Subsequent, and to be sure much more sophisticated, observation and experiment has added great depth to our knowledge of living things, but – without metaphysical speculation – it is not possible to say that biological science has shown us that the black bird we see digging for food is *not what it appears to be*. What else could it be?[62]

From this discussion, I conclude that we can plausibly read Footian naturalism as advanced in the spirit of a transcendental argument (even if Foot herself never put it this way). This becomes even more defensible given the arguments in later chapters of *Natural Goodness*. Foot is quite clear that even *rationality* itself must be oriented to the human good if it

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[62]Although I don't have the space here to even properly survey the point, it is worth mentioning the recent revival of interest in neo-Aristotelian ideas within metaphysics and the philosophy of science. Essentialism found a new lease on life with Kripke's notion of the necessary a posteriori, challenging the long-held assumption that essences must be brought to things by subjective activity. Alongside some parallel developments in the philosophy of science, notably in the work of Nancy Cartwright and John Dupre, the general "Humean" tendency of eliminating causes and powers from the fabric of nature has found some potent resistance. See Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980); Rom Harré and Edward H. Madden, *Causal Powers: A Theory of Natural Necessity* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1975); John Dupré, *The Disorder of Things: Metaphysical Foundations of the Disunity of Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Nancy Cartwright, *The Dappled World: A Study of the Boundaries of Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

is to count as a virtue in human life.[63] The human grasp of moral reality depends as much on how things are with us, and what we can plausibly say about that condition, as with the reality that we perceive.

1.4 Conclusion

To summarize, there are three points which support my reading of Footian naturalism as a form of transcendental reflection on the basic categories of human life. One, on Foot's account the concept of nature itself is already partly constituted by a range of evaluative distinctions, which find expression in our ways of making articulate the various aspects of our human experiences and thoughts about the natural world. Natural reasons precede the human articulation of them, though in another way they depend on their being human articulations. Two, the human understanding of nature cannot pretend to the requirement of neutrality of method that the empiricist, (scientific) naturalist, or neo-Kantian interpretations have supposed. Three, the method Foot uses to arrive at her evaluative conception of nature is consistent with the methods her earlier works used to defend the autonomy of the meaning of moral concepts from private acts of will. Both early Foot and naturalistic later Foot offer arguments which fit with Taylor's account of a transcendental argument.

There are some lingering worries. For one thing, we could worry that the categories involved in Footian naturalism are mistaken. Perhaps a story about an organism's life-cycle suffices for members of the plant and (nonhuman) animal kingdoms, but this won't do if we are to accommodate human abilities to choose and pursue our own ends. A reflection on a kind of life-form seems to 'fix' the possibilities of human goodness within much more limited, ahistorical boundaries than we might expect from a reflection on the possibilities available to a human agent.

In the following chapter I will address the philosophy of language as a crucial part of Taylor's and Foot's accounts of the person. This will help us to clarify further details of the philosophical anthropology.

[63]Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chaps. 4–5. I will discuss this point detail in chapters 4-5.

Chapter 2

On language and meaning

In the previous chapter I argued that Philippa Foot's ethics can and should be read first as a philosophical anthropology, with her ethical views understood alongside or as a part of that account. Foot's Aristotelian naturalism is comparable in this respect to Charles Taylor's account of human agency as essentially ethical, oriented toward a sense of the good disclosed through a range of fine-grained qualitative distinctions of worth. In this chapter, I want to explore some further parallels by turning to the importance of language in both accounts.

The main purpose of this chapter is to underscore the parallels between Taylor's theory of language, inspired by writers in the Romantic and counter-Enlightenment traditions, and the blend of Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy and analytic philosophy which forms the basis of Foot's neo-Aristotelian ethics. There is more than a historical interest here as language itself is an essential feature of both accounts, and in two ways. First, human beings are rational animals, the *zoion logon ekhon* or "animal having *logos*", which in modern thinking indicates our unique powers of acquiring and speaking languages. Second, as the previous chapter indicated, language and philosophical method are closely connected to questions about human nature and human action.

I will proceed by first elaborating on Taylor's interest in the philosophy of language and the problem of meaning. Taylor is critical of theories of language inspired by Hobbes and Locke, along with the Cartesian program of epistemology, which together have shaped the contemporary landscape of ideas. This might seem to move in a different direction than a naturalistic ethics like we find in *Natural Goodness*. Though in turning to Foot's writings, we find comparable anti-Cartesian and anti-empiricist commitments which contest this reading.

Taylor's linguistic expressivism might seem hard to reconcile with the theory of natural norms which Foot develops in the first three chapters of *Natural Goodness*. For reasons indicated by critics in the secondary literature, as well as objections which follow from Taylor's worries about the scientific study of human beings, this account of moral norms and evaluations can come off as implausible. However, I argue that what is *naturalistic* in the later

Foot has little to do with a scientific or quasi-scientific explanation of living organisms. Because she rejects the outlooks of empiricism and scientific naturalism, and because her view of nature is inspired by the naturalism of Aristotle and Aquinas, most of the extant objections miss the point. Moreover, I argue that Taylor's linguistic expressivism has under-appreciated affinities with neo-Aristotelian views on language and meaning.

2.1 The problem of meaning and modern epistemology

Although he is perhaps best known for his writings on social and political philosophy, Taylor's work in these areas develops alongside and out of his interest in the problem of meaning. In several papers, and most recently in a book, he is highly critical of what he calls *designative* and *instrumental* theories of language.[1] Such theories hold that the essential function of words is to name or designate the objects which are their referents in the non-linguistic world; that the relation of designation between a word and the object it names is the fundamental unit of meaning in language; that the relation of a word and its object is an intentional creation of a thinking subject rather than any intrinsic features of the object or the word-object relationship. Words are signs which signify something else, and as signs they are instruments put to use by a mind which precedes them.

The family of designative and instrumental theories descended from Hobbes, Locke, and Condillac (henceforth "HLC" theories) support and are supported by a range of erroneous epistemological and psychological assumptions.[2] Taylor's writings after *Sources of the Self* become increasingly critical of *representational*, or what he has more recently termed *mediationalist*, epistemology.[3] When I think of a rock, it is the *thought of* a rock that I am entertaining, not the rock itself. The thought belongs to the intellect, whereas the rock is a material thing. Representationalism itself is an ancient doctrine, having roots in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. Taylor's concern, however, is with the modern development of the representationalist doctrine in connection with HLC theories of meaning.

Taylor's real target is the account of meaning that first appears in Descartes's *Meditations* and Locke's first *Essay*, in the context of the psychological and epistemological theories advanced there. The Cartesian or rationalist has it that there are innate ideas not acquired through experience, while the empiricist denies that there is anything in the mind that is not

[1] "Theories of meaning" and "Language and human nature" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*; "Overcoming epistemology" in Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*; Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016) *passim*.

[2] "Ovecoming epistemology", "Lichtung or Lebensform" and "The importance of Herder" in Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*; Hubert L. Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Taylor, *The Language Animal*, chaps. 1–3.

[3] Dreyfus and Taylor, *Retrieving Realism*.

first in the senses. Where Descartes sought to secure knowledge in the certainty of a class of indubitable ideas, the empiricists were more interested in a psychological doctrine from which the faint 'ideas' could be determined by more vivid and lively 'impressions' from the senses.

Yet this difference is comparatively uninteresting, from Taylor's perspective, given that both agree that the mind is akin to a background or container in which mental activity takes place. Disputes over a priori knowledge notwithstanding, the subject's access to or contact with reality is mediated through, and *only through*, the element of the cognitive representation. Representations of the world or some of its contents are formed within the mind and given to the subject of the experience. These representational units, called 'ideas' in the Cartesian-empiricist tradition, have as their objects some feature of reality much as a photograph aims at a faithful representation of its subject.

Instrumental-designative theories of meaning and representationalist theories of knowledge mutually support one another. They receive further help from a third party, the psychology of ideas and impressions. For words to be the handmaidens of thought, there must be thoughts prior to language. The meaning of meaning and the meaning of truth are to be determined by inquiries into the form and function of the human mind.

From here we are only a short leap from Kant's critical turn and the anti-metaphysical doctrines which held so much power in the 20th century. If meaning itself is subjective, then there is little to be gained from speaking of the world "in itself" beyond human experience or comprehension.[4] Even more recent variants of philosophical naturalism, aimed at achieving continuity and consistency between philosophy and the natural sciences, take as their methodology an investigation of psychological process which takes no metaphysical or ethical stand.[5] I have already canvassed the arguments that this unlikely to be either plausible or logically consistent, as any stance which concerns making sense of human life, or what is important in it, cannot avoid metaphysical or ethical presuppositions.[6]

The pretense of neutrality of method persists, and not without further consequence. The epistemological turn to the operations of the mind as the locus of meaning and understanding results in the exclusion of subjective or anthropocenteric qualities from serious, respectable accounts of reality. When the topic is mathematical physics or chemistry, or engineering,

[4]This leaves us roughly where we found ourselves in chapter 1, with various attempts at describing the basic categories of human existence from a neutral standpoint outside of all human experience.

[5]Notable examples include W. V. O. Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized," in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (Columbia University Press, 1969); Philip Kitcher, "The Naturalists Return," *The Philosophical Review* 101, no. 1 (January 1, 1992): 53–114, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2185044; and Hilary Kornblith, ed., *Naturalizing Epistemology*, 2nd ed. (Bradford Books, 1994); in moral philosophy, extension of this method can be found in Harman, *The Nature of Morality*; Mackie, *Ethics*; and chapter 8 of Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*.

[6]See Chapter 1

leaving out what cannot be measured is part of good practice. But on what grounds can we make the same assumption about the study of human beings? Leaving out secondary qualities like colors, experiences of temperature, or the taste of salt is not a harmless assumption. It touches on features of life which are essential to our ways of living and understanding.[7]

Empiricist and naturalist theories of cognition confuse matters on two levels. They aim to explain the features of human life and experience, but without essential reference to those features. A color is not a color. It is a causal chain of events occurring in the light reflected off an object, encountering the eye, and processed into a visual image in the brain. This amounts to a change of subject, as descriptions of causal processes are not descriptions of visual experiences. At the same time, the explanation itself is not meaningless. We are interested in explaining color perception (say) because it tells us something about ourselves which is worth knowing, which is part of what we understand ourselves to be. If the causal explanation is taken as a sufficient explanation of colors and color perception, though, it contradicts the central premise of the method. The causal explanation attempts to say what color experience *is*, and it does this by eliminating the category of color.

We are left with a methodology which (1) aims to explain properties of human experiences and observations while denying their reality; but (2) which itself arises out of human sense-making activities, as an attempt by human beings to understand ourselves. The whole program is confused. Empiricist and naturalistic theories cannot help us make sense of our lives precisely because they exclude *sense* (meaning) itself as a feature of reality that we ought to take seriously as a legitimate part of reality, not just something put there by arbitrary human wants or interests or delusions.

While such an account would eliminate the mystery of meaning should it come off, if Taylor is right, it still wouldn't leave us with the best explanation of our lives.[8]

The interesting question is not how a consciousness forms representations, leading us off down the rabbit-hole of justification in the face of skepticism. It is: how things are *intrinsically significant* for human agents?[9] Why, in other words, are things meaningful for us at all? How are we to account for intrinsic meanings? This is indeed mysterious. And being the sort of question unsuited for empirical investigations, this sort of mystery is just the kind of thing that contemporary naturalists are eager to set aside as superstition or phony mysticism.

After Frege's important contributions to philosophy of language, the HLC family of theories are complicated in several regards.[10] Even so, the basic thought that language's proper function is to accurately depict features of non-linguistic reality, and that a theory of meaning is to be given by explaining correlations between linguistic expressions and the features

[7] I will have more to say about this in Chapter 3.

[8] This being a version of the Best Account argument which we discussed in chapter 1.

[9] "Self-interpreting animals" and "The concept of a person" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*.

[10] Taylor, *The Language Animal*, chap. 4, sections 3-4.

of the world that they depict, remains in force. Various aspects of language which are as least as important as depiction or descriptive accuracy are left out.[11]

So the question remains unanswered: why are things meaningful for us? Why should we accept the natural-scientific conception of explanation as our sense-making principle when these tell us that sense itself is an arbitrary product of blind process? These are the questions that the HLC/mediationalist outlook prevents us from asking, let alone answering. These questions, Taylor argues, are better addressed by a very different family of meaning-theories.

2.2 Expressivism as an alternative to designativism

The alternative lies in what Taylor labels the *expressive-constitutive* family of language theories, or HHH ('triple-H') theories of meaning.[12] Expressivist theories of meaning challenge the central premises of the HLC dogma: that naming is *the* basic function of language rather than one thing speakers do with expressive speech; that the relation of designation can exist within, and due to the activity of, a single reasoning mind independent of any further facts about the speaker or her context; that linguistic meaning consists solely in the relation between word and object, and requires nothing further from other forms of symbol use or expression such as gesture and dialogue.

Unlike the HLC view, which conceives of the mind as a site of mental operations, the HHH view understands meaning as a form of activity done by an agent who is competent with a language. Uses of symbolic language are meaningful because they express thoughts or ideas. We must take care here, however, because what is expressed is not a pre-existing thought or mental state, as an HLC theory would put it. The act of expressing a thought or an experience partly *constitutes* the thing so expressed. For some concepts there simply is no "thing", no state or event, within a person which is independent of the realization of the experience in language. Take for example an experience of shame. To feel shame is to judge that one has not lived up to a standard, and that in the failure one has acted shamefully. This requires having the concept of shame, which in turn requires having a language. There is no "shame circuit" that we might locate in the brain (for example), which would explain what shame *is* without reference to the comprehension of the agent who feels shame.

A key feature of language involves the opening up of a semantic dimension of human activity in addition to the dimension of causal events.[13] The semantic dimension, as the

[11]One key aspect of language Taylor calls the "Cratylist" or "figuring" dimension, this being the notion that names are not arbitrary, a view set out in Plato's *Cratylus*. The name belonging to a thing exists as an intrinsic relation of word and object, not due to a private act of naming by the thinking subject. See ibid., 108–11, 169–73.

[12]This abbreviation is shorthand for the names of the three figures whom Taylor takes as the leading lights of the expressivist tradition, Herder, Humboldt, and Heidegger, about whom more later. See "Theories of meaning" and "Language and human nature" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*

[13]"The importance of Herder" and "Irreducibly social goods" in Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*.

name indicates, is constituted by an intrinsic feature of meaning that cannot be reduced to, or explained away by, merely syntactic, rule-governed, explanations specified from an impartial observer's point of view. A causal theory developed within cognitive science or neuroscience could not fully account for feelings of shame. While a causal theory could in principle show how certain mental or neurological processes come about when one feels something shameful, the meaning of the concept "shame" would not be part of the theory, nor explained by the theory. Intelligibility is not explicable by reference to causal properties or processes, in the way natural science can explain chemical reactions or the astrophysicical processes of star formation. To explain human feelings and actions is necessarily to locate an agent in a field of meanings. The human world is structured as much by interpretation as by causal or physical happenings. We understand one another, not only in words but in actions, because of this feature of significance. You see me carrying a metal instrument and moving my hands quickly. When you ask me what I am doing, I respond that I am chopping onions. Now my movements are comprehensible as *doing something*, not just purposeless motion.[14]

It's worth pausing here to underscore again that this is not a thesis about meaning advanced within an otherwise uncontested methdological or conceptual framework. The irreducibility of meaning challenges the central dogma of representationalist epistemology, that we begin with designation (or any suitable criterion of descriptive correctness) as the basic unit of meaning from which subsequent knowledge is derived by inference. The subject is not the arbiter or the creator of meaning in its acts of naming and representing. Other forms of expressive, communicative, and creative uses of language are not thereby derived from foundational mental acts of meaning-creation. By Taylor's accounting, knowledge, meaning, and the human cognitive orientation to the nonhuman world are each transformed, profoundly, from the accepted mainstream view. Intelligibility is an ineliminable constraint on even philosophical empiricism and naturalism, which claim to get by without it.

Put in positive terms, expressivism indicates that there is a cognitive stance that human beings take to the world which is neither empirical, deriving meaning from unintepreted sensation or observation, or logical-analytical, arriving at truths by inference from other beliefs or thoughts or ideas.[15] Our orientation to the world transcends the scope of mental representations in the mind because it consists essentially in expressive activities.

Spoken and written language are paradigm examples of expression (in no small part thanks to the intellectual leanings of philosophy in Western history), but so are physical

[14]Of course, it need not have occurred to me that I was chopping onions in that moment. I could well have said "I'm getting dinner ready", having moved into the onion-chopping phase without consciously realizing that I was doing so.

[15]It is important then that we distinguish Taylor's variety of expressivism from the programs under that name which *deny* that the target domains of an expressive theory of meaning are cognitively valid. A moral expressivist is not asserting that moral judgments are or involve a cognitive attitude toward a domain of moral facts.

posture and gesture – for example the expressiveness of the face and hands during a particularly animated conversation. The same for aesthetic expression, in visual or language arts, and for metaphorical uses of language. We can classify the different forms of expression into different forms of significance: (1) descriptive rightness, which is how philosophy in its traditional form conceives of meaning (meaning as designation); (2) enactive or expressive rightness, which involves gestural and dialogical forms of activity that also convey or constitute meaningful expressions; and (3) artistic forms of portrayal, in written works like poetry and literature, but including performing, musical, and visual arts.[16] With the second and third types of validity, we find valid assertions (a) which do not fit any pattern of regimented norms determining the meanings of words, as we would expect for the 'rules' governing hypotheses and theoretical terms in a scientific theory; and (b) which are *nondepictive*. Both sorts of assertion belong to the capacity to use language as sure as the norm-regulated and depictive uses of language.[17]

Speech is only one part of language, and the declarative sentence is only one part of speech. The variety of activities within language, and with which expressive language is interwoven, reveal another crucial fact. Speech is one component of a *dialogical* stance taken by two speakers communicating with one another. Where HLC theories imagine that the basic use of language is an inner monologue carried out within a private mind, the HHH model conceives of the conversation as the primary locus of language use and meaning. We first learn words by interacting with others. The accuracy of description, assertions and declarative sentences, remains part of the story, but only a part. Descriptive rightness belongs to expressive action, rather than the other way around.

Expressivism and moral cognitivism

It's this aspect of Taylor's objection to naturalistic explanation that is worrying for a neo-Aristotelian. A form of moral cognitivism, in which moral judgments and beliefs are meaningful and capable of being appraised as true or false, is consistent with an expressivist theory. Ethical naturalism is a different matter. Expressivism poses troubles on two fronts.

First of all, one might take naturalism as an attempt to force evaluative meanings into the form of assertions which can be assessed according to criteria of descriptive rightness. Moral facts would be like natural facts in that each could be understood objectively, without reference to an intrinsic sense of worth or desirability for the agent. The problem is that the worthwhile is part of the meaning of moral concepts, so we aren't getting any closer to understanding them by dispensing with evaluative aspect for a purely descriptive account. Ethical naturalism comes off as an attempt to explain moral properties or moral facts without

[16] Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 234–36.
[17] Ibid., 125–27.

any need for reference to the semantic dimension of meaning. If that is so, then it isn't clear how impartially-characterized moral facts or moral properties could be significant for us, without turning back to a subjectivist theory of meaning.

That latter problem was one of Foot's motivations for affirming a form of moral congitivism in the first place. She is quite clear that she means by "cognitivism" that propositions about good human beings and good human desires and intentions and actions are meaningful descriptions of how things are with human beings.[18]

Yet the solution seems to lead her into representationalism, with all of its problems. Where are these properties? We don't find any use for them in empirical investigations, from the impartial standpoint taken by the sciences. Furthermore, we can't guarantee that two different human cultures, or two different individuals in the same culture, will share the same moral beliefs. If moral judgments can express moral truths, then we wouldn't expect to encounter a plurality of conflicting and incompatible schemes of moral beliefs and intuitions. Alternatively we might be able give a causal or genetic/genealogical theory which explains why we have moral beliefs and moral feelings, though in that case we haven't gotten to an explanation of the evaluation itself. These problems have a comparatively straightforward answer. Moral cognitivism *simpliciter* does not entail fidelity of representations or descriptive accuracy. A cognitive stance toward some domain only means that talk about that domain involves meanings or intelligibility independent of the meanings that the speaker gives to the words, whether directly (say, in choosing what the words mean or having certain attitudes toward them) or indirectly (say, by reference to a scheme of shared cultural meanings).

The more pressing worry is that a naturalistic story doesn't ask the real question, which is how and why moral beliefs and intuitions are *significant for* human agents. In the sort of view considered above, talk of *good* in a genuine, non-derivative sense is hard to make respectable. HLC theories of meaning sacrifice meaning for transparency of psychological theories. In ethics, the concept of goodness is exchanged for an account of the *valuations of the subject*. Value, not the valuable, is the stuff of morality, and we get to that by understanding the will and consciousness. With that move made, the difference between Kant's claim that the good will is the sole unconditionally good thing in existence and Hume's explanation of moral judgments as the expression of pleasing feelings of sympathy scarcely seems important. The subject matter of moral philosophy concerns not the good, the worthwhile, the valuable, the admirable, the desirable, but how things are with the moral agent. Disputes in modern moral philosophy are disagreements over the best way to understand or explain moral agents.

This problem is more persistent. If the cognitive content of moral concepts and propositions is fixed by facts about the nature of the human organism, Footian naturalism begins to look an awful lot like the kind of objective causal theory that Taylor warns us about. We may

[18] "Moral reason and moral dilemma" in Foot, *Moral Dilemmas*, 58.

be able to speak of goodness in living things, but does this get us to a concept of significance for us?

2.3 From Aristotle to Wittgenstein and back

In this section I will argue that Foot's naturalism, whatever else it might involve, does not involve or rest on a theory of meaning in the HLC tradition. We can put it point this way. Foot is a *cognitivist* but not a *representationalist*. Footian naturalism is not the sort of theory that Taylor attacks, not the sort of naturalism which aims for a causal theory of meaning or value by hitching its cart to natural science.

To elaborate, I want to briefly survey the importance of the later Wittgenstein to both Taylor's form of expressivism and Foot's version of neo-Aristotelian philosophy. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* helped to catalyze recent developments of Thomas Aquinas's metaphysics of being and philosophy of nature, the so-called 'analytic Thomism' which has been identified with G. E. M. Anscombe, Peter Geach, and Anthony Kenny. Many of Thomas Aquinas' non-Cartesian claims about mind, morality and action anticipate key anti-Cartesian pillars of the expressivist tradition.

A good place to begin is with the lines of attack against the pervasive influence of Cartesian internalism in the philosophy of mind and empiricist theories of sense-impressions as the ground of meaning. In his inaugural lecture, "History of the Corruptions of Logic", Peter Geach argues that logic, only barely begun in Aristotle, began a centuries-long decline in the latter's *Prior Analytics*.[19] That work introduced a pernicious doctrine not found in earlier works of logic like Plato's *Sophist* and Aristotle's own *De Interpretatione*. The logic of predicative expressions – "S is P" being the most basic form – had previously maintained a distinction between the *onoma*, the named subject of the proposition, and the *rhema*, the predicable element(s) attributed *of* the *onoma*. In the *Prior Analytics* Aristotle dropped this requirement. It became logically possible for the *rhemata* of one proposition to stand as the *onoma* of another proposition.

The logical distinction between *names* and *predicates* is vital, as Geach saw it, to the integrity of thought itself. Without it we slip into the errors that Geach labeled with the cumbersome term *quantificationist* thinking: the belief that there are no *things*, in the proper sense, only terms and classes and the like which are imposed on reality by the human mind. Consider the statement "The man standing behind us is not an athlete". The person who *is not an athlete* is that man, the man standing behind us. It wouldn't make sense to ask "which athlete is he not?". This is a badly-formed question, as the word "athlete" does not function here as a name. It indicates a property or attribute of the man standing behind us.

[19] P. T. Geach, *Logic Matters* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1980), 44–62.

In modern times, Frege's distinction between concept and object, and Russell's distinction between proper names and definite descriptions, made some headway in undoing this mistake. Although Geach does not mention them by name here, Aquinas and Wittgenstein seem to have appreciated this point.[20] The identity or non-identity of two distinct things is determined by the thing or things and not *what is said about them*. For Aquinas, as Herbert McCabe writes,

> words in the subject place are there essentially to name, to pick out what it is you are talking about. His phrase is *tenetur materialiter* – as we should say, 'are names used to refer to something'. They have meaning as well, of course (for Aquinas, all words, even proper names, have meaning quite apart from which thing they are naming or refer to), but their essential job in the subject place is to indicate the subject, the thing talked about. Words in the predicate, by contrast, are not names and do not refer, but only have meaning; they *tenetur formaliter*.[21]

The meaning of a word, the concept that the speaker of a word has in mind, is not an individual thing but a *nature* – in the medieval term, a universal. When Wittgenstein argued against private ostensive definition in the *Investigations*, he had this worry in mind. Meaning cannot be explained by *pointing at* an individual. It isn't as if there is a special meaning-object hovering behind an individual animal when one says "there's the cat" and points. To understand meaning is to exercise a capacity for using symbols or signs. Aquinas thought that to understand an individual required more than just having a mind, since understanding the meaning of particular individuals requires our bodily involvements and sensory awareness. Again anticipating Wittgenstein, the very act of pointing *at something* supposes a whole range of background capacities which must be present and exercised if the pointing is also to be an act of understanding.[22]

The part played by the body and sensual experience must be very different from that imagined by the empiricists. For the same reason we cannot point at a chair to determine the meaning of "chair", we cannot explain the meaning of mental words by naming or referring to private events or sensations within the subject. To understand by pointing is already to have "pointing at things" as part of one's repertoire of skills. Aquinas and Wittgenstein agree then that meaning requires a body and its experiences, but that meaning is not identical with sensory qualities or anything else given to the subject in sensation. As Roger Pouivet writes, for Thomas and Wittgenstein

[20]Herbert McCabe, *On Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies (London: Continuum, 2008), 37–39, referencing the *Tractatus* 4.241 and 5.53.

[21]Ibid., 37–38.

[22]Ibid., 38; Roger Pouivet, *After Wittgenstein, St. Thomas* (St. Augustine's Press, 2008), 40–42.

> Language does not reveal the existence of a private interior process to which the subject alone has access. That we speak demonstrates the opposite: our intelligence consists in the use of language, and thus in the mastery of a linguistic common good. The linguistic capacity is not a indication of interiority, but rather an indication that the intellect is related to one's social and linguistic membership… It is not because each of us has an interior life that we can learn to speak, but because we have learned to speak that each of us can have an interior life.[23]

The use of concepts requires bodily life and sensation, though not for the reasons traditionally given in support of empiricism. Hume tried to ground meaning in mental qualities, contrasting between vivid and forceful impressions received from the senses and the ideas in the intellect, which were dim copies of live experiences. Aquinas and Wittgenstein challenge the premise that meaning can be this kind of *something*.

Elizabeth Anscombe pointed out that the empiricist's error found its way into theories of perception advanced by ordinary-language philosophers.[24] Both attempt to explain the feature of intentionality, the 'directedness' of mental elements, by treating mental qualities as named entities which are (somehow or other) in the possession of the subject. Where the empiricist locates meaning in an impression or a sense-datum delivered from the sensory organs, the linguistic philosopher gives cognitive function an organizing role. These philosophers never consider the grammar of intentional verbs. The objects of verbs like "see", "hear", "think", or "doing" need not be *names*. The logic of verb-phrases like, to think *of* a dog, or to see the thing *as* a book, or to feel anger *toward* a wrong, does not indicate that the intentional objects – dog, book, a wrong – are named subjects.[25]

This repeats a point advanced in Taylor's critique of the Cartesian inward turn. The error lies in the move from talk of minds and mental things to the ontological thesis that there are mental entities which we could locate, just as talk of chairs might imply that there are chairs. We are led to believe that mental verbs are primarily the contents of a mind, consisting in inner mental events or acts.[26]

This curious result is itself another consequence of the shift in the logic of predicative expressions. The modern usage, which Geach warned of, takes the subject of a statement about mental activity as the named subject of a proposition. "I have a pain in my leg" means that there is a named subject referred to by the pronoun "I", to which predicates can be ascribed. The object referred to by the predicate is the pain in my right leg. Lacking a distinction be-

[23] Pouivet, *After Wittgenstein, St. Thomas*, 40.

[24] G. E. M. Anscombe, "The Intentionality of Sensation: A Grammatical Feature," in *Vision and Mind: Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Perception*, ed. Alva Noë (MIT Press, 2002), 55–76.

[25] Pouivet, *After Wittgenstein, St. Thomas*, 63.

[26] G. E. M. Anscombe, "The First Person," in *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind*, vol. 2, The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1981).

tween *onoma* and *rhemata*, predicate expression "the pain in my right leg" indicates a real entity which can in principle be the subject of its own proposition, e.g., "The pain in my right leg has 10 fingers".

The older usage of the words 'subject' and 'object' suggests a very different interpretation. The subject is the named entity, the thing about which the proposition speaks, with the object – in cases of mental talk – being the object *of* whatever is spoken of. When one says "I am afraid of that man with the knife", the man with the knife is the intentional object of the fear. But no claim of ontological significance need follow from the expression. Someone could just as well say "I am afraid of the anxiety that haunts my dreams". We would not feel compelled understand her as meaning there is such a thing as anxiety haunting her dreams, at least not in any way analogous to the existence of physical objects or properties.[27]

The point here is that in the expressivist tradition, the Cartesian divide between the domain of the knowing, perceiving agent and the world of objects which is known does not get off the ground. The logic of mental or intentional language does not carry the metaphysical significance attached to it since Descartes and rendered part of common sense by the force of empiricism. The assimilation of intentionality, the "aboutness" of mental concepts, to a private inner realm of conscious activity results from a misunderstanding of the logical grammar of mental words.

The intentionality attributed to the mental representation is not so much the property of a named entity as it is the exercise of a skill. This was all ordinary for Aquinas, who conceived of intellectual operations according to linguistic modes. As Pouivet reminds us, Aquinas wrote long before there was any notion of consciousness as a *place* where meanings reside.[28] Wittgenstein, writing well after this interiorizing move crept into common sense, had to confront the internalist prejudice. Yet for both, the use of words is an exercise of a uniquely human (so far as we know) capacity for language. A person can have a *concept* much as a person could have any intellectual or physical skill. Though having a concept is not itself a bodily skill, to use a concept does involve skills in speaking or writing or other kinds of symbolic expression (a dancer or an athlete could be plausibly said to use concepts). "The meaning of a word is not mine in the sense that my having this skill, this concept, is mine and not yours," Herbert McCabe writes.[29] The mind qua capacity for using concepts is part of *this* body, its life activities, whereas meaning belongs to the whole of a language.[30]

This brings out some fascinating parallels with Taylor's expressive-constitutive theory of meaning which, so far as I can tell, have not been explored in the secondary literature. Tay-

[27]Whether there is anything of unique importance resting on the sort of existence attributed to physical objects and properties is, of course, an interesting question.

[28]Pouivet, *After Wittgenstein, St. Thomas*, 40.

[29]McCabe, *On Aquinas*, 60.

[30]Ibid.

lor acknowledges his debt to the later Wittgenstein, treating him as an honorary member of the HHH tradition, though Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas receive only passing mentions in his work. Nevertheless, there are some clear parallels between the triple-H expressive-constitutive theories and the modern readings of Aquinas we have considered. Let us conclude this discussion with three such cases.

The first point of comparison lies in the importance of *activity* to the understanding of linguistic meaning. Aquinas anticipates Wittgenstein's claim that meaning in language consists in not only the words uttered but in the whole assortment of practices and activities into which the words are woven.[31] The meaning of a word is not something that someone has, or creates by an act of will, but rather creates in and through acts of expression within an intersubjective space of dialogue. The agent's competence with the use a language both depends on and constitutes the dialogical space between agents.

This leads to two sub-points. First, knowing how to use a language is something that a person *does*, implying that the language user has a bodily life. Aquinas wrote of the necessity of bodily life and sensual awareness for having concepts, anticipating Taylor's engaged agent.[32] Human beings are already in a world, a world structured as much by our concepts and the significance things have for us as by impartial causal processes. Our activities in this conceptually structured world are in one way requirements on intelligibility; in another way human activities are also responsible for that structure. Second, the dialectic of expression and creation introduces the paradoxical reciprocity of creation and discovery, which we have previously noted.[33] The appearance of paradox is due to the relationship between tacit understanding and explicit articulation in symbolic language. The background of practices and activities in which language becomes intelligible is always *background*. Any potential hypothesis advanced as a complete description of the background necessarily supposes a tacit background which is not itself made articulate in the act of expression.

Taylor's reading of Wittgenstein alongside Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty discerns in all three figures a logical connection between activity and meaning, on the one hand, and a holism of meaning which makes full articulacy impossible, on the other.[34] Frege's distinctions between concept and object, and between sense and reference, brought this point into

[31]Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 7.

[32]Anthony Kenny, "Body, Soul, and Intellect in Aquinas," in *From Soul to Self*, ed. M. James C. Crabbe (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999); McCabe, *On Aquinas*, especially chapters 4-8; Taylor, "Embodied Agency"; Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*; Charles Taylor, "Merleau-Ponty and the Epistemological Picture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 26–49; Charles Taylor, "Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 202–21.

[33]See Chapter 1

[34]"Overcoming epistemology", "The validity of transcendental arguments", and "Lichtung or Lebensform" in Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*.

modern thinking, anticipating several features of Wittgenstein's thinking.[35] Yet Frege's own active and holistic view of meaning finds a precursor in Herder.[36] For Herder expression in language could not be the outer manifestation of an inner thought. Expression, at least for many important parts of language, constitutes its objects in the activity of expression. The naming or designating of objects in speech could not be the basic activity of language. As Herder saw, the capacity for designating and naming depends on the range of expressive capacities including bodily movement and speech. Thinkers preoccupied with the intellect in the abstract, having little interest in the body or in emotion, considered these mundane aspects of life irrelevant, or at best servants of the mind. For Romantic writers like Herder, the rediscovery of feeling and bodily life lies at the root of the semantic dimension of meaning. Because meaningful expression is an operation of bodily action and sensual awareness, it cannot be analyzed into basic units, individual words or even individual propositions, conceived as acts of a private intellect alone. Meaning belongs to the whole of language, where language is conceived of as an activity.

The second point of comparison lies in the new possibilities which constitutive expression and holism of meaning open up for us. Herder saw that in considering more than simple designation language also opened up new spaces of possibility:

> If language serves to express a new kind of awareness, then it may not only make possible a new awareness of things, an ability to describe them; it may also open new ways of responding to things, of feeling. If in expressing our thoughts about things we can come to have new thoughts, then in expressing our feelings we can come to have transformed feelings.[37]

Language serves to express/realize ways of feeling without identifying them in descriptions.[38] Doesn't this contradict Anscombe's claim that intentionality is an activity under a description? Not at all. It doesn't follow that the agent has, or must have, awareness of the intentional description of her experience for it to *be* such-and-such experience. The agent does have a special access to her experiences. Anscombe called this *nonobservational knowledge* to distinguish it from the observational knowledge of introspection and sense-perception. The agent knows her experiences and actions without the intermediary of observation, because they are hers in the first person. But introspective infallibility is not part of the account. She can be unware, or even mistaken, as the meaning is in the public language.[39]

[35]"Language and human nature", in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 251–2; Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 111–20.

[36]"Language and human nature" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*; "The importance of Herder" in Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*.

[37]Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 97.

[38]Ibid.

[39]See Anscombe, *Intention*, secs. 8, 28; also her "The First Person."

I have often had the experience of confusing a sparrow for a green finch when looking at the birds in the tree outside the window of my office. I *see* a green finch when the sunlight hits just so, only to learn a few moments later that no, it is actually a sparrow. By analogy, consider a momentous life-event, a marriage or the birth of a child, and the range of confusing, sometimes conflicting feelings that such moments can evoke. We can say quite seriously that we don't know what we feel in these situations, even if we later come to understand that we felt an immense sense of joy, or hope, or a bittersweet sense of lost possibilities. It is partly because the feelings themselves are vague before they are put into words. It has at least as much to do with the way that new experiences can open up new kinds of feelings, or radically transform those we take ourselves to be familiar with. Giving an intentional act of perception or action a description, "seeing that G" or "doing F", does not entail that the agent who sees G or does F thereby has in mind a proposition expressing the description. The stronger point is that giving an intentional description of some event as an act *of* or experience *of* does not exhaust all that there is to say about the occurrence.

The third point is that the logic of constitution in expressive language cannot be forced into the logic of description. Besides the difficulties surrounding the distinction between named subjects and predicative objects (or its absence), there is the additional issue that feelings and desires and other intentional concepts cannot be analyzed according to the logic of efficient causation. To experience a feeling of shame is to feel that something is shameful. But the shameful is not a *cause of* the feeling. Shamefulness is a sense of what merits the feeling of shame, being the object of the feeling, what makes it comprehensible as a feeling of *shame*.[40] Cause and effect, at least as these are understood within the modern contexts of empiricist and naturalistic philosophy of science, are not readily applicable here. Indeed many attempts to apply them to human actions and experiences face substantial difficulties. Emotion and sensation being intentional concepts are not circumscribed by the words we use to speak or write of them, despite language being the vehicle for their expression and indeed essential to their being the feelings that they are. The words themselves constitute our emotions and sensations, creating them in the act of expression. Yet this cannot be interpreted as giving their meanings in bare descriptions, as if a description of a feeling must make it intelligible to any observer whatever, regardless of the meaning it holds for the individual. Without the HLC picture to hold us captive, nothing requires that we force the expression of a feeling or a sensation into the Procrustean bed of accurate descriptions.

[40]Compare with Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 476; Wittgenstein, *Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations"*, 15.

2.4 Meaning in Foot's naturalism

With all this stage-setting in place, let's turn now to Philippa Foot. The previous chapter considered two of her most influential papers, "Moral Arguments" and "Moral Beliefs". As I argued there, these papers can be usefully read as a moral-philosophical development of Wittgenstein's warnings about the dangers of philosophical theorizing without proper attention to language.

The wider point being made is that, first of all, we have no good grounds for drawing any logical or analytical distinction between facts and values, that the grounds given are inadequate. Second, we cannot thereby conclude that moral arguments are conducted according to the canons of ordinary inference to which is then added a special moral feeling or choice. We are in no position to know that we cannot infer an 'ought' from a descriptive 'is'. No logical proof has been offered for the premise that a series of descriptive premises could not entail an evaluative conclusion.

Moral words have appropriate objects determined by criteria which do not belong to the subject. A person who described a harmful act as a moral virtue would not just be idiosyncratic. We would say he did not understand what a moral virtue is, that he is mistaken in the use of the concept. The virtue concepts, such as prudence, temperance, courage, and justice are moral terms just because of their connection with harm and benefit to human beings.[41]

What I want to draw out of this line of argument is its consistency with the logical-grammatical mode of analysis we considered above. My claim is that Foot's denial of the logical distinction between description and evaluation, and of its consequences for inferential and evidential considerations in moral reasoning, is not consistent with her holding an HLC-style of designativism about meaning. It is worth having this background in mind because it continues to hold as the basis of later Foot's naturalism.

Early Foot only tentatively explores the connections between human needs and moral concepts, notably in the closing paragraphs of "Moral Beliefs". There she makes some moves toward grounding the rationality of justice in the needs of human beings. At that stage her concern with the criteria regulating the correct use of moral words made no special reference to the properties of the human being as such. Talk of human needs entered into the story as a set of constraints on what could be intelligibly desired by a human being. Of course moral words concern benefits and harms to human beings, but these criteria are not found *in the human life form*. Up until *Natural Goodness*, Foot quite famously held that moral considerations must act through a person's desires.[42]

[41] Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 2.

[42] Notoriously in her "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," *The Philosophical Review* 81, no. 3 (July 1, 1972): 305–16, doi:10.2307/2184328. I will say much more about this in chapters 3-5.

Natural Goodness advances a more radical thesis. In the idiom of her early papers, we could put it as the claim that the benefits and harms to which the meanings of moral words are internally related are determined by the characteristic features of the *human life-form*.[43] The concept of the life-form used here is not an empirical concept, the kind of thing associated with the notion of a species in evolutionary biology, or a statistical generalization about a population of individuals. The life-form is a rather bizarre concept in this sense, being neither empirical in the usual way nor a strictly analytical notion derived from observation or from the natural sciences.[44]

Life-form concepts are found in the special contexts involved in the recognition and description of living organisms.[45] There is a certain way that we speak of living things which is unlike the way we speak of inanimate objects or processes. For example, we speak of *this kind of thing* reproducing in the spring or eating some other things as part of its diet. Such expressions involve peculiar uses of verbs and predicates in connection with a rather unique set of identity conditions. Saying "the blackbird forages for worms in the late winter" is not a statement about any individual blackbird. It is a general fact about the blackbird *kind*. Statements of this kind, with the paradigm form "The S is F" or "S's are/do F", are *natural-historical judgments*. The sentences expressing such thoughts in English, or any other natural language, are called *Aristotelian categoricals*.[46] So a life-form concept differs from other concepts in that it can be the subject of a logically special form of predication.[47] That is to say,

> a concept is a life-form-concept if it provides a possible subject for [the natural-historical] form of judgment. A *life-form* or *species* (in the broad sense) is anything that is, or could be, immediately designated by a life-form-concept or a life-form-word.[48]

Aristotelian categoricals express thoughts of a special logical form, exhibiting unique kinds of generality, temporality, and teleological predication.[49] When we assert facts about the 'natural history' of a kind of living being, we are saying how thing are with that kind of creature in a way that can also express normative truths about it. Natural norms indicate

[43]Introduction to Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

[44]In this section I am following ibid., chap. 2; Foot herself draws heavily on two of Michael Thompson's papers, "Apprehending Human Form," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 54 (2004): 47–74, doi:10.1017/S1358246100008444; and "The Representation of Life," in *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Harvard University Press, 2008). Though my discussion in what follows attends more to Thompson than Foot, I am still treating the position Foot herself entertains in *Natural Goodness*.

[45]Thompson, *Life and Action*, chap. 4.

[46]Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 29–36.

[47]Thompson, *Life and Action*, 76.

[48]Ibid., 76–77.

[49]Thompson, *Life and Action*.

ways that things typically and in general go well with the life-form. Individual organisms can be evaluated as good or defective by reference to the kind of life-form that they instantiate. When organisms have the features characteristic of their kind, and they function as they should, the organism is doing well. To lack these features is to be defective in virtue of their absence. As it is for *E. coli*, for oak trees, for bobcats, for sunflowers, so it is with human beings. The patterns of a life-form's life-cycle, especially in connection with its survival and reproduction, constitute the natural normativity of that species. Human beings differ in the range of things that count toward our benefit or harm, in virtue of our social natures and our powers of language, but this is a difference of content. Formally, there is no difference in the kinds of thoughts entertained or expressed, nor in the meaning of "good" in the move from expressions like "The good oak tree has deep roots" to "The good human being is courageous".

Finding meaning in nature

I mentioned in the previous chapter that nearly all of the criticisms of *Natural Goodness* take aim at this thesis in at least one of two ways. One points to Foot's reliance on her account of the life-form and the associated concept of biological function, with commentators drawing attention to the incompatibility of this account with our best accounts of species and biological functions in evolutionary biology.

The other attack comes from the moral point of view itself, pointing out that many of our moral beliefs and intuitions point us at certain ideals of the good and the right, and our investigations of the kingdom of nature don't show us anything like that. Tigers and termites don't live by morality. A morality of *natural* human behaviors, inclinations and motives could turn out to be as brutal and callous as cooperative and altruistic.

Finding meaning in the form and function of living things, and then squaring that with the meanings of moral words, might seem doubly impossible. But why must that be the case? The philosophical basis of Foot's philosophy of nature, grounded as it is in an inquiry into the logical grammar of our conceptual apparatus for speaking of living organisms – the concept of the life-form, natural-historical judgments, functions in living organisms, and so forth – has a quite different philosophical ground than that of contemporary empiricism and scientific naturalism.

Taylor's historical analysis of HLC language-theories and representational epistemology go a long way towards illuminating the sources of these problems *as* problems. What we have here, if I am right, is not a conflict that occurs within a pre-existing agreed-upon system of concepts and propositions about nature. We have what is fundamentally a conflict between ways of coming to understand nature, which is itself a deep question about what philosophy is for, and how it is best done.

My concern then is not so much any particular criticism or objection to Foot's views *but the background of philosophical theories which make a position like Foot's seem implausible or philosophically dubious*. Given this, I am less interested in the specific objections raised by critics than in the philosophical basis of these criticisms. To ask again: why is it that an Aristotelian concept of living nature seems so unlikely to us? Why does living nature seem alien to morality (and vice-versa)?

I believe that we find some clues to this in our discussion above of Taylor's inquiries into the historical basis of meaning and its contributions to an "epistemology first" way of doing philosophy.

If we may briefly revisit a point made in chapter one, the matter here does not so much concern whether the philosophical story – Foot's in this case – can or must meet standards introduced from an external authority. Here, it would be evolutionary biology, or cognitive science, or information theory (say) that would provide the facts to determine just what can and cannot be rightly asserted about living nature. The more interesting question, left unasked, is exactly why, and on what grounds, this sort of speculative naturalism grounded in scientific findings should be the proper place to begin.

What I want to draw attention to here is that attending to the facts as determined by natural sciences as *constraints on* a philosophical account is putting the cart well before the horse, at least as far as a Footian-Aristotelian is concerned. It is somewhat surprising how much critical attention focuses on the quasi-scientific account of living things (along with a peculiarly modern understanding of morals and moral agency, about which I will have more to say later) while ignoring that Foot only gets to this as a later step in an argument that begins with an analysis of the grammar of evaluative language. That she finds descriptions of natural facts to be continuous with the category of evaluations is not a bit of trivia that one can ignore to press a hard empiricist or scientific-naturalist line of objection.

As I have stressed in the previous chapter, Foot's grammatical analysis itself is not just another move in the meta-ethical game, so much as a reflection on the categorical framework within and through which any such moves are made. Seen this way, Foot's ethical naturalism plausibly extends the methodology of her earlier papers to the subject matter of living things. As 'pride' and 'justice' have their meanings irrespective of human will or thought, so it is with concepts like 'sunflower', 'oak tree', 'housecat', and more abstractly, 'life-form', 'species', and 'function.'[50]

The analysis of the logical grammar of life-form concepts and propositions has what I previously called a 'transcendental' aspect, being a reflection on what must be the case in human life for life-form talk to be intelligible. This being the case, the meaning of such concepts does not find its grounds in passive, objective, ethically-neutral observations of living

[50] Thompson, "Apprehending Human Form"; Thompson, "The Representation of Life."

things. It's quite the opposite: objectivity in matters of living nature supposes and requires such a conceptual apparatus.

If this is right, then it is not clear that a critic can suppose that living nature is empty of meaning, purpose, or (non-derivative) normative patterns. Nor is it clear, then, that morality is something alienated from nature and requiring further justifications (in the motives of the agent, or in some higher notion of practical reason, for example).

The point can, admittedly, be opaque, and Foot herself only peripherally explores it. It is easier to see in Michael Thompson's writings, on which Foot draws heavily in *Natural Goodness*.[51] Thompson tells us, in the prefatory remarks to *Life and Action*, that his project is concerned with an inquiry into the forms of thought available to human beings, in specifically human ways, in specifically human spheres of activity and involvement.[52] His program joins a 'neo-Fregean' methodology, an inquiry into the meanings of concepts and thought-forms, with an Aristotelian subject-matter, that of living things. The kinds of concepts, categories and judgments under analysis are the admittedly un-Fregean sort that belong to specifically human forms of cognition. It is the domain of 'ordinary common sense', where immediate notions like experiences and actions as well as more sophisticated social concepts, such as persons and social practices, that is of interest here. The analysis then is deliberately intended to draw out certain a priori features of thought, though as I have cautioned, this is (I take it) a kind of 'transcendental' reflection on how things must be for human beings.[53] The necessity at work here is advanced on tentative, provisional grounds.[54]

I've already mentioned that this offers a response to the objection that the Footian or Thompsonian naturalist endorses an unscientific form of vitalism or apriorism about living things.[55] Nothing in the neo-Aristotelian account rules out, or intends to rule out, the need to learn about organisms by observation and more sophisticated empirical studies. Life-form concepts indicate the particular kind of thing – as individual organism and as distinct kind – that we speak about, whether in ordinary talk ("The cat is over there on the mat") or in the sophisticated hypothetical propositions which belong to biological theories.

One might still resist the conclusion. After all, the forms of cognition in question are human peculiarities, being forms of thought that we in fact learn and demonstrate as competent adults. But these are just the kinds of ordinary common sense thoughts that can be, and

[51] Foot's account of the logical grammar of life-form languages is, so far as I can tell, identical to Thompson's. There is nothing in *Natural Goodness* which is inconsistent with this interpretation, in any case, so I take Thompson as a reasonable proxy for Foot's own views.

[52] Introduction to Thompson, *Life and Action*, 13–22.

[53] As I argued in chapter 1.

[54] This connection is made even more firm, I think, with Thompson's explicit references to the Kantian orientation behind the more proximate Fregean influence.

[55] Lenman, "The Saucer of Mud, the Kudzu Vine and the Uxorious Cheetah"; Lewens, "Foot Note"; Odenbaugh, "Nothing in Ethics Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution?"

historically have been, supplanted by subsequent scientific investigations and historical processes of cultural change. Why shouldn't we expect the same for our understanding of living things and their actions? Why isn't this just another form of provincial or overly conservative excuse-making?

For one thing, natural-historical judgments about living things are all contingent claims. Any of them could have turned out otherwise, and any of them could in principle be replaced by a better explanation. It just happens that as things are with us, and as things are with our understanding of life, we have no self-evidently superior explanation.Furthermore, since natural-historical judgments include judgments about human beings and their characteristic functions and activities, *this account itself* is a contingent, empirically-discoverable explanation of human cognition.[56]

The point of the exploration of logical grammar is not to insulate the account from a better empirical theory. It is to show that so far as things currently are and as we best understand them, we make better sense of the kinds of truths and facts that observation and science determine about living things by accommodating their special features. To this extent natural-historical judgments are what I called in the previous chapter *grammatical propositions*, neither empirical nor analytical propositions but exhibiting a special form between the two classes. Thompson's discussion strongly suggests that life-form concepts reveal or express an aspect of experience accessible to neither observation nor conceptual analysis. Meaningful talk of living things (as with talk of actions and persons, as we will see later) has its own logical 'shape', with its own families of concepts and criteria for their application, and this is supposed in observation and description, and thereby in natural science. It is part of the conceptual background for these activities, rather than a philosopher's armchair theory intruding into 'pure' scientific practice.

One further point. By bringing the argument back to the level of philosophical thought, discussing different modes of language use beyond the empirical and the logical-analytic, I am trying to bring out a connection between what Foot and Thompson are doing and Taylor's historical critique of what he calls the family of HLC theories that color contemporary philosophy. The problem I am trying to foreground here is less to do with this or that objection raised by any particular critic.

Rather, I am trying to show how there is a whole background of assumptions, concepts, ideas, theories (etc.), many of which are so deeply entrenched that they are effectively tacit, that have made it appear that nature and morality (as just one example of a range of modern

[56]See Thompson, "Three Degrees of Natural Goodness" for an elaboration of the different logical "stages" of the naturalistic argument made in *Natural Goodness*. The logical-grammatical level, in which talk of concepts and forms of judgment enter the story, contrasts with the substantive judgments made about species and individuals. Both the grammatical and substantive judgments are contingent in this sense. If I am right, this is also the sense indicated in the transcendental arguments I have discussed in chapter 1.

dualisms) must be mysteriously opposed to one another. The opposition of the two elements need not be taken for granted, and I believe that this aspect of Natural Goodness is generally overlooked.

What then is meant by 'having concepts' in this context? If we take a broadly representationalist thesis as a starting point, having concepts means something like having the right mental states, being a subject with 'ideas' before one's awareness or having a belief that such-and-such is the case.[57] This is a mistake. The possession of a concept is the realization of a capacity in a kind of activity. This much is as true for Frege as it was for Aquinas. Concept-using activity is an activity which belongs to the human kind of life. Thoughts about about having and using concepts are of the same sort as thoughts about digestive processes, hair growth, the workings of the immune system, the reproductive life-cycle, and all the other propositions which make reference to the characteristic operations, functions, and activities of the human species.

Representations are part of the story, but we must take the concept of a representation to mean what it means for Foot and Thompson. Talk of representation figures into a shared background of mutual, mostly inarticulate, purchase on the world, which is itself grounded in the form and function of human life. To make sense of conceptual thought first requires a form of practical involvement, being engaged with the world and active within it. The notions of a 'concept' and a 'representation' are not intended to be the mediating 'ideas' or 'beliefs' of empiricist psychologies, or any other private mental entity or operation.

When Thompson and Foot speak of descriptive propositions which include evaluative content, and seriously set these out as the basis of our understanding of living things, they are speaking from a standpoint which already challenges the empiricist doctrine of meaning and its associated psychology. And this Taylor's point as well.

2.5 Two issues about representationalism

At this point it is helpful to distinguish two separate issues raised by Taylor's criticisms of representational epistemology and HLC theories of meaning. The first question is, what part does language play in the life of the human being? Does language primarily depict or represent objects and properties, or is this one capacity among many? To the latter we can answer affirmatively, and I hope to have made plausible that this is the answer Foot would give. We seem on pretty firm ground in holding that the neo-Aristotelian and neo-Thomist worries about the corruption of logic, and a partial reversal of this trend in Frege and Wittgenstein, maps pretty well on to what Taylor lays at the feet of Descartes and the

[57]By "broadly representationalist" I only mean working with some account of cognition with the properties discussed in sections 2-3 above.

HLC trio. These two apparently distinct trajectories agree that the modern transformation of meaning into the subjective property of the mind, language into its instrument, is a serious error. Likewise there is agreement that forms of thought or cognition exhibit a dependence on bodily and sensual life, in a way which cannot be brought fully into explicit intellectual awareness or descriptive propositions.

The second question is, what does this grasp of the language capacity as an essential part of human life imply for ethical or moral concepts, beliefs, and intuitions? Taylor's most recent book, *The Language Animal*, is an extended treatment of this question. The development of language in the *homo sapiens* species is deeply connected with our practical involvements in the world as well as our ability to enter frames of joint attention with other human beings. That thought and meaning mirror our bodily and sensual forms of activity and awareness is, perhaps, the central insight shared by both the expressivists and the Aristotelians – along with the rider that active bodily life is realized in a public, expressive, linguistically-mediated dimension. Philosophy itself is understood as a special form of reflection on the mystery of this condition, and on the various features of our activities and involvements which observation and experiment, or the analysis of concepts, are not suited to undertake.

So far this chapter has concerned one question: are moral concepts and expressions, and (for Foot at least) the life-form concepts which help determine their meanings, ultimately depictive, predicate-attributing, or descriptive uses of language? Or do their meanings rest on a non-depictive cognitive stance?

I have drawn attention to the non-depictive forms of expression (plausibly) involved in uses of the word 'good' as Foot describes it. The logic of the word does not indicate a proper name or a property in the usual sense. The point I am making is that "good" doesn't pick out a sort of object or class or set of objects, though it remains a component of meaningful, valid uses of language. We do take a cognitive stance toward goodness, and toward the class of evaluative words which we use to express finer grains of evaluative distinctions. But this does not entail that the meaning of "good" is a consequence of having an accurate depiction of an object or class or whatever. Goodness is meaningful to human beings in an altogether different manner. It is not something philosophers can contort into this or that theory.[58] The intelligibility of goodness to us occurs in a different manner, perhaps through our uniquely human activities such as speaking and writing, or certain gestures and movements, or in the structure of our perceptual experiences. This is as meaningful to us as any explicit proposition depicting this or that state of affairs.

This all greatly complicates the worries about what is *natural* here. Is any philosophical naturalist, or any biologist for that matter, in a position to say that human powers to learn

[58]Again we find in Foot an echo of Wittgenstein's remarks on logical grammar, and a certain resistance to the temptation to generalize meanings from particular cases of use.

and use language are not part of our nature? It isn't clear how they could be. It isn't possible to even deny the claim without implicitly affirming it, since any denial would be expressed in symbolic language. Beyond that trivial point, it isn't clear what grounds could be marshaled for the skeptical point. That humans have powers of language is not a truth known thanks to reflection, with a prior philosophical theory in hand, without reference to details of experience. It is an observation, and not one with merely strong weight of evidence: it is true if anything is true. What is natural, then, is not easy to separate from how things are for us, in a very deep sense. This is the lesson of Taylor's BA principle, the explanatory attitude that it asks us to take.

A plausible account of the processes underlying the development and operation of language capacity will involve facts about the *homo sapiens* species, many of which will be determined in the usual way by psychological, neurological, and sociological explanations about said organisms. But we should take care here, for it is easy to slide from the discoveries of empirical science into much stronger philosophical claims which are not part of any scientific theory. Materialism and empiricism are such claims, and they must be supposed by philosophers of science (and perhaps by some practicing scientists) in the interpretation of scientific findings. Philosophical claims are advanced by argument and accepted or rejected within reflection, not on the basis of empirical evidence alone.

We don't need to affirm pre-modern vitalism, let alone reject the findings of modern science, in order to agree with Thompson or Foot about our concepts of living things. What is at stake is not any particular discovery or scientific theory but the framework of concepts and categories by which we understand them. It is in and through language that we can do any of this, science or reflection. To believe otherwise is incoherent.

However, even if we can agree that the Foot-Thompson account of living nature is viable and not some attempt to run roughshod over biological science with a quaint philosophical theory, we haven't addressed the question of how the norms of living things could also be moral norms.

2.6 The meaning of natural norms

To summarize the argument so far, I have argued that Foot's neo-Aristotelianism and Taylor's expressive-constitutive HHH theory lead to agreement that meaning is an irreducible and ineliminable part of human understanding and experience. I have argued that Foot attempts to extend her grammatical method of inquiry from moral concepts to the concept of the human being, and to thereby draw out a connection between moral meanings and human benefits.

Some of Foot's critics have charged her with failing to account for the difference between rational norms of human choice and human action and the sorts of norms that we could

plausibly locate in an account of living beings.[59] On the one hand, one might worry that natural norms lack the right connection to voluntary action. A moral action cannot be merely caused in us if it is to be of moral worth, the objection goes, because moral actions must be freely chosen by the agent. An action done out of mere inclination, from a desire, or by an egoistic motive cannot count as a good action. The moral worth of an act depends on its connection with duty. This claim, asserted most famously by Kant in the *Grundlegung*, reveals a historically peculiar and hard to defend preoccupation with the purity of the moral motive.[60] Foot needs to show that the reasons that a human being has for acting morally are not only part of the facts of about the life cycle of the human being, but that the facts of a life can also be reasons for a human being who is capable of choosing and acting for his own ends.[61]

On the other hand, one might worry that we find lots of examples of norms and laws in nature, and none of them have anything to do with moral motives and moral actions. We have no guarantee that the norms of human beings qua living organism will get us to the norms of morality. One need only the briefest survey of nature to find that, in Tennyson's memorable phrase, it is red in tooth and claw. Natural norms could license self-interested calculation, violence, and competition just as well as compassion, altruism, or justice. It is the latter which is most of all in doubt, for a sense of universal fairness seems to be a uniquely human quality with no obvious analog in nature.

It is an influential point, nearly a platitude for many modern moral theorists, that the distinction between norm and fact is justified due to the special logical connection between norms and subjective states or acts. We are now 60 years past "Moral Beliefs" and "Moral Arguments", as well as Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy", all of which posed serious challenges to the moral philosopher's preoccupation with the specially moral use of 'ought'. Even so there remains a powerful tendency to conceive of moral philosophy's subject matter as the duties and obligations which emerge from something called "morality", which has a power to rationally bind and even compel an agent's will as if issuing a command. The obligation to do F carries the force of an imperative: 'one ought to do F' means 'do F!'.

This is what Foot challenges, of course, but if I am right, it is the image of the agent and the theory of meaning which motivates it which is really at stake. Not just because moral reasons are 'inert' and so lacking the required practical connection to actions, but that what this practical force amounts to, and how it becomes practical, must be determined on very different grounds from the assumed picture of the agent and the concept of motivation. We

[59]This objection is discussed, in several different forms, in Millum, "Natural Goodness and Natural Evil"; Gowans, "Virtue and Nature"; Lemos, "Foot and Aristotle on Virtues and Flourishing"; William J. FitzPatrick, *Teleology and the Norms of Nature*, 1 edition (New York: Routledge, 2011), @Odenbaugh_Nothing_2015.

[60]Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, chap. 1 and 10.

[61]McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism"; Lott, "Why Be a Good Human Being?"

get to this, says Foot, by re-thinking our whole approach to the understanding of human agents, and doing without the conceptual apparatus of the freely-choosing person which has found its way into the foundations of modern ethics.

Most of the objections raised above I will return to, in one way or another, in subsequent chapters. My purpose here is to indicate that there is no difficulty in connection with the *meaning* of moral languages, even interpreted as a part of the larger class of descriptive and evaluative propositions. The norms for a kind of living thing are determined in connection with the processes, activities, functions, and operations of its kind, and have no dependence on human desires or interests.

It is important to clarify that this does not entirely remove natural norms from the space of meaningful events, occupied by desires, intentions, and actions. Worries about heteronomy of causes as determinations of the will notwithstanding, it is part of the Footian story that the norms of human life extend to include our psychological and sociological characteristics. It is part of the human life that we want, wish, intend, and act.

Consider a desire, for example being hungry and wanting to eat. If you happen to ask me if I'm hungry, I will probably say yes (say, if I expect you'll ask me to have lunch). My affirmative response is a judgment expressed in language. But it is not a judgment made by the intellect alone. I may in fact judge it so, as we often do, as evidenced by my assertion, "I'm hungry and I'd like to eat lunch now". But knowing that I am hungry and desire food does not consist in my having the judgment nor in the act of intellect which forms it. The wanting is in one way prior to the judgment. At the same time, the cognitive appraisal of the desire, that part of the intellect's activity that enters into the wanting, is part of what it is for human beings to want.

The object desired cannot be fully specified independently of the agent's activity which brings it about. Such activity often includes cognitive judgments which clarify and make the desire intelligible (though it need not), and this is especially so in cases where something important hangs on that understanding. It can make sense to speak of a dog wanting to eat without expecting that the dog has formed a judgment that he is hungry. That is the form that desire takes in dogs. For adult human beings, to speak of being hungry is to invoke the *concept* of desire, and so to speak of intelligible objects of desire: in this case, that one wants to eat food. In humans the desire precedes, but is also given its full articulation in, the formation of the judgment. So it is for the norms governing action. Whatever non-cognitive or pre-conceptual dispositions belong to our animal bodies are given their full realization in the medium of language, from the standpoint of a cultural interpretation.

It is not right to say that the naturalistic component of the Foot-Thompson story is a story about a nature which excludes the logical space of reasons.[62] The aspect of meaning is

[62]The distinction been normative reasons and causes as distinctive logical domains is made in Wilfrid

part of what nature consists in. There is no unqualified sense of natural facts independent of the human language capacity. It is entirely possible for a Footian naturalist to talk of descriptions and criteria of descriptive rightness even in respect of natural ethical norms. Her account of nature is not the empiricist's or philosophical naturalist's account of what is observable or what figures into the best explanations provided by natural science. What makes a natural evaluation true or accurate as a description of a human attribute depends on a form of understanding which is available *to human beings* in respect of their human-*being* – their essence or nature.

The neo-Aristotelian philosophy of nature does not exclusively involve descriptions of non-normative and non-evaluative facts given from an objective third-person perspective, referring to properties or objects available to any observer without regard for the observer's point of view. The perspective of the agent is part of the natural world, but this agent is a very different being than the impartial spectator of the Cartesian-empiricist tradition plays no part here.

Couldn't Taylor's expressivist still press an objection here? The words expressing moral emotions, or certain relationships with others, require articulation in language, and thereby imply a social form of living. A person speaking of his feelings of shame, or the value of a friendship, is not giving a description of features of the world independent of his own grasp of the significance that attaches to shame and friendship. That significance in turn is mediated in the shared language.

Even the sophisticated Aristotelian naturalism I have tried to defend here doesn't seem to to get this point. The Aristotelian naturalist locates the feature of significance not in the constitutive dimension of language but in the life-processes and activities given in description of the *homo sapiens*. With the objection raised above, the difficulty was to say how to avoid characterizing the significance feature in terms which make no essential use of the sense things have for human agents. I have argued that the Aristotelian account does make use of a qualitative feature of significance for human agents. The present difficulty turns on just how that feature of significance is explained. The expressivist says that no descriptive account will do at all, because significance for us cannot be accounted for by descriptions in the third person, even if those descriptions concern the understanding of human actions and social practices by a human being exercising a linguistic capacity for practical reasoning. The difference between a third-person description of human goods and the constitutive meanings that things have for us in their symbolic expression in language is qualitative. It cannot be bridged even with a richer account of what description amounts to. In ethical or practical

Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy*, 1962, 35–78, http://www.ditext.com/sellars/psim.html; its application to ethical naturalism is made in McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."

thinking, this amounts to a very different conception of what human goods consist in, and thereby what things count among someone's own goods.

What can we say about this? Taylor's latest writings introduce a distinction between meanings of this sort, which he calls *life meanings*, and meanings which exist in the medium of language and its cultural interpretations, which he labels *metabiological meanings*.[63] Human powers of agency and intention-formation, mediated by the lived life of bodily action mediated in language, are responsible for the difference. The language capacity introduces a radical break with human feelings and inclinations compared to other animals. Even those basic motives and feelings we plausibly share with other mammals, fear and anger, or the need for food and companionship, take on a special significance for us because they *are significant for us*. For a rabbit or a wolf the question never arises, "why do I want this?"

I will argue in the following chapter that this qualitative transformation of natural human inclinations and feelings in respect of language is also a central part of Foot's account of the human being as the animal with *logos*.

2.7 Conclusion

I've argued that Foot's neo-Aristotelian naturalism complements Taylor's interest in language as a definitive human capacity. My claim is that the Foot-Thompson philosophy of nature develops from an analysis of the logical grammar of certain specially human domains of thought, which, methodologically speaking, attempts to answer the same question as Taylor: what is the place of the human capacity for language in our lives? The dispute, if it we can still call it a dispute, turns on a second matter, how norms, values, moral properties and moral discourses figure into language and human life.

[63] Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 90–93.

Chapter 3

Metaethical naturalism and the best explanation of human agency

In the previous chapter, I discussed Taylor's arguments for the limitations of the Hobbes-Locke-Condillac (HLC) theories of meaning and the representationalist tradition of epistemology which (Taylor argues) accompanies it. I argued that Philippa Foot, working from a neo-Aristotelian synthesis of Wittgensteinian and Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy, can be read as advancing a similar resistance to this tradition of philosophy as a part of her positive vision. In this chapter, I will consider some of the implications of that discussion for the study of *the self*. Taylor argues throughout his writings that the modern conception of personal identity – that view which is developed out of a motley collection of early modern thinkers from Descartes to Locke, Hume, Kant, and more besides – is closely connected with, and indeed even inconceivable without, certain moral commitments. The influence of HLC-inspired thinking on the matter has obscured this connection. Ethically-neutral conceptions of the self and its actions have found their way into the human sciences, entrenched in certain methodological attitudes concerning the study of human actions. This has been an unavoidable influence on moral philosophy, lending support to certain metaethical doctrines while telling against others.

One popular metaethical doctrine in recent decades holds that psychological and sociological explanations of human action support an anti-realist interpretation of moral evaluations.[1] A good psychological theory would show that evaluations are part of human ways of living and acting, perhaps even indispensable to those explanations, but ultimately not what they appear to be. Moral intuitions and beliefs do not really track any objective distinctions of goodness and badness. The perception of moral reality will be ultimately explained by a

[1] Harman, *The Nature of Morality*; Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*; Mackie, *Ethics*; Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, "Toward Fin de Siècle Ethics: Some Trends," *Philosophical Review* 101, no. 1 (1992): 115–89.

psychological theory of belief-formation, which has no requirement for moral properties in its explanations. Much of Taylor's argumentative strategy aims at this family of naturalistic metaethical theories by taking aim at their use of reductive, meaning-eliminating methods and explanations in the human sciences. Such methods rule out the very concepts that they set out to explain, he argues, eliminating or distorting our notions of actions, agency, and persons. Evaluations in a stronger sense are part of the meanings of these concepts, and that is exactly what reductive explanations exclude.

Philippa Foot also defends a naturalistic metaethics, arguing that evaluations are indispensable for understanding the moral lives of human beings. Yet Foot's naturalism is a very different position from the views endorsed by the sort of scientifically-oriented metaethical naturalist mentioned above. This leads to one important point of departure in her moral philosophy, for the self is at best an attribute, or better, the realization of certain capacities of *the human being*. Foot quite seriously wants to do moral philosophy without any special concept of *the self* or *the person*, instead taking a particular kind of animal, of the *homo sapiens* species, as the proper subject matter of ethics.

Foot defends this point against the well-trodden criticisms of ethical naturalism by way of a linguistic argument for the continuity of evaluation and description.[2] On that she basis argues that the natural norms of a human life, even in respect of desire and choice and action, are the norms of a kind of organism. This raises two questions. First of all, how can we speak of a human being as an agent who acts? Talk of agents and actions locates us within the 'normative space of reasons' structured by rational norms, not causality. It is meaning, not brute facts or cause-effect relationships which concern action and the evaluation of action. Even if we find Foot's naturalism plausible in its own right, we have not yet said how a human being can be an agent capable of *meaningful* desires or actions.

Second, to talk of moral goodness is to refer to the motives of, and actions done by, *someone*. When we speak of good desires and good actions, we are speaking of how things are with the states or activities of an individual person. The view that motives, desires and intentions, and actions belong to *the person* rather than *the human being* is, we will see, one bit of contemporary doctrine that Foot's entire approach rejects. The possibility of doing ethics without the Self – a term which, as a first approximation, means to focus on the disembodied intellect which is logically distinct from the physical or bodily aspects of a human being – is exactly what she is aiming for.

Taylor's central concept, in contrast, is the *human agent*, which he describes as a being for whom things have intrinsic significance in respect of human powers of interpretation in language.[3] To speak of agents and their actions is to speak of a space of meanings structured

[2]See chapters 1-2

[3]Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, especially chapters 1, 2, and 4.

by *qualitative distinctions of worth*. Qualitative distinctions track objectively real features of human existence, but because they are 'meaning events' no causal or naturalistic scientific theory can account for them without an unexplained remainder. Our best account of human life will not likely be found in such theories alone. Despite Foot's agreeing with Taylor that vulgar scientific reductionism has no place in practical philosophy and ethics, it also seems that the Footian human being and the Taylorian human agent occupy fundamentally different conceptual territories.

In this chapter, I want to elaborate on this difficulty. My claim is that there is a way to defend the Footian view without cutting against Taylor's important insights about human agency and its place in the human sciences and ethics. In what follows I will argue that Foot's view set out in *Natural Goodness* upholds Taylor's thesis that there are certain moral experiences which we cannot eliminate from our human lives, and these are indispensable to understanding ethical life. By contrast with a vulgar reductionism, Foot's naturalism indicates the need to recognize the irreducibly evaluative dimensions of human life. The human *person*, when that word indicates a capital-s Self, is a contingent, perhaps even a dispensable category in certain important respects. It is human *agency* that concerns Foot and Taylor.

3.1 The Best Account of the self and its actions

Given the explorations of the previous chapter, I might be expected to proceed as follows. With a theory of language in hand, it is possible to construct a background theory of human psychology and then elaborate a theory of human actions. Further down the line, we can imagine this larger apparatus involved in the construction of a practical philosophy, bringing in a theory of rational action and then finally proceeding to the materials of ethics, perhaps in the expected form of a moral theory consisting in the rules, principles and norms laying out the "oughts" of a morality that binds the will of our rational agent.

This isn't the path I will take. The discussion of theoretical matters in the previous two chapters indicates more than a dispute between rival theoretical programs. The dispute there could not be so simple as difference between two rival attempts to explain the meaning of meaning within a philosophical theory of cognition or epistemology. Rather, it came to rests on two very different ways of conceiving of the nature of human beings and the qualities of human thought and experience, two distinct sets of background commitments and methodological attitudes. As Taylor argues, the concept of the self (and our methods for exploring it) cannot be so neatly untangled from our moral commitments.

What is missing, then, in the expected move from theory to practice is an elaboration of the part that these philosophically-conceived theories of the self play in our basic explanations

of human existence. Even the opposition of theoretical philosophy to a practical counterpart requires a certain way of conceiving of human agency, of our motives and actions, and the evaluation thereof. This widespread picture of human agency (more precisely, several not entirely consistent *pictures*) is, Taylor argues, a historical product of human activity, though often left tacit. If he is right, then the expected move from theory to practice requires accepting a picture of human agency (and so on) which runs up against the methodological worry, which we have discussed as Taylor's Best Account (BA) principle.[4]

The categories and the methodological strategies which are invoked (even implicitly) to produce explanations of agency and action can themselves be queried: are they in fact up to the task of providing *good explanations* of the phenomena in question? Stating Taylor's position briefly: Any explanation of human life which requires that we do without or dispense with features of experience or action which are indispensable to them cannot be a good explanation.

A key piece of Taylor's position on this matter is in his historical analysis of the modern identity. Though we now ("we" meaning at least those of us with northern European cultural heritage) find it easy to think of *having* selves or *being* a self, in fact this is a rather peculiar historical development with a particular cultural pedigree.

The modern identity, what it is to be a person, has one paradigmatic form in the *disengaged self* familiar from Cartesian and Lockean empiricist philosophy.[5] The disengagement attributed to this self-concept indicates a certain distance between the individual person and the world. A disengaged self encounters the world as an observer or a spectator who knows the external world only through the impressions left on his senses, his own mind through introspective awareness. The agent acts on the world by choosing and acting as it desires in order to bring about the desired events or states of affairs. This is the self known to us through the writings of Descartes and Locke, the self which consists essentially in its powers of *self-control* – a view which has more distant antecedents in St. Augustine's turn to the inner conscience.

Another equally familiar mode of self-understanding finds its modern origins in Montaigne. Like the Cartesian and Lockean view, Montaigne also found a special place for the inner world of personal experience distinct and at a distance from the world of things. Unlike them, Montaigne's notion of the self traces its existence to acts of *self-discovery*, with conversation between good friends standing as a paradigmatic form of expression.

The pervasive sense that we each *have selves* as one has eyes and hands, that one *is a self*, conceived as something distinct from our concrete bodily involvements, feelings, desires,

[4]Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 58–59. Also see my discussion in chapters 1 & 2.

[5]The discussion in this paragraph and the next is a much-compressed reconstruction of Charles Taylor's argument in chapters 5-10 in his *Sources of the Self*.

or interests, borrows something from both of these conflicting threads. Our modern self-understanding has been shaped by each of them, each in tension with the other.

This has its own implications for morality. That we so easily take the difference between "inner" and "outer" worlds as a basic feature of our existence, is (Taylor argues) a historical accident in the history of European civilization. Both the Cartesian-Lockean and the Montaignean threads of self-understanding leave our languages, our cultural beliefs, even our visual art, poetry, and literature shot through with ideals of *radical reflexivity*. I am not merely a self with private thoughts and feelings. My self, and its contents, this whole "inner" world of mind, stand at a remove from the "outer" world of physical, objective reality. The act of self-objectification is a limiting case, where the self becomes an object to itself.

The now deeply-entrenched sense that there is a schism between the self and its world leads easily to the thought that morality cannot belong to nature, but only to the subject who experiences it and values it. The objective goodness which was plausible in the view of ancient writers becomes a subjective mode of valuation for us moderns who conceive of the Self as something apart from the world.

The problem runs deeper than this, Taylor argues, for the cultural grip of the disengaged self compels widespread assent because of its connection to certain moral goods, ideals, and standards that we already find worthy. The self is already a morally-laden ideal. But because so much of our modern ways of thinking have relegated values and norms to the sphere of subjectivity, and because this vision of ourselves is so tightly bound to cherished moral beliefs, we find it difficult to conceive things the other way around. The latent moral standards contained in our self-understanding become opaque to us.

The modern tendency to conceive of the self as disengaged from the physical or natural world unites two central ideas: that morality is the domain of subjectivity, and that human agency and action can be sufficiently explained from a non-subjective and therefore ethically-neutral standpoint. If we were to reject this prevailing conception of human agency, we would be in a position to also reject its methodological orientation. Practical philosophy, including moral philosophy as well as the wider fields of ethical and practical thinking, cannot be properly understood as a discipline delimited by a distinctive form of theoretical description or cognitive activities, framed as an ethically-neutral inquiry into the nature and capabilities of some form of disengaged agent. We are not *progressing into* practical domains of human action *from* a 'pure theory' developed in advance of practice.

Recall that the BA principle is not part of a form of argument that rests on, or advances, foundational empirical or logical propositions.[6] Taylor's concern is with the genesis and lingering power of the conceptual frameworks through which we may best interpret human experience and meaning. So interpreted, the BA principle is a form of abductive argument

[6] As argued in Chapter 1

against the sufficiency of reductive explanations in matters which involve human meanings, purposes, or feelings. It is an open question whether (say) a physicalistic science purged of all evaluative meaning could in fact say all that is worth saying about human actions, as contrasted with accounts that leave room for intentional or evaluative properties. Strong physicalist or mechanist accounts might or might not be able to play the part of exhaustive and exclusive accounts in the human sciences, but a positive answer will not come from merely affirming physicalism as an a priori truth (even when couched in the terms of methodological heuristics). Any such position must be argued for, as they will not come from empirical or logical propositions alone.

If the best account of human life should turn out not to involve the picture of the disengaged agent, then the methods which produced, and which in turn depend on the plausibility of that account, have considerable weakened their claim to authority as well as their grounds. The epistemological or methodological divisions between fact and value and between subject and object come along with the conception of the self as disengaged, distinct from nature, and are in part motivated by the persistence of that self-image.

The claim then is that classically empiricist or more recent naturalistic methods put to use in philosophy fail to explain something they ought to explain, whether this is the point one sees in doing ϕ, or the inestimable worth in a feeling of awe. Reductive explanations are *bad* explanations when they are advanced as sufficient in domains in which they are inappropriate. With these remarks as prologue, let us now consider the two images of human agency in more detail.

The machine paradigm: the reductive study of human beings and actions

Throughout the 20th century, philosophy and the human sciences were both considerably influenced by HLC-inspired pictures of disengaged agency. The motivating image is that of a machine, a designed artifact engineered for some purpose determined by the intentions of the designer or the user of the machine. Key to this is the thought that meaning for the machine is derivative, put there by the designer or the operator. Proponents of the mechanistic view argue that natural phenomena are events and processes which lack any intrinsic purposes. As such natural phenomena are sufficiently explained, explained without mysterious remainders, with the resources of intention-free description and explanation of the kind we find in physical science.[7] Since human beings, and all of their parts and properties, belong to the natural order, it follows that we best understand human beings as a kind of, admittedly complex, machine. What distinguishes human beings from other animals and from inani-

[7]Although *mechanism* is generally thought of as a metaphysical or ontological thesis, I am using the term in a topic-neutral sense, without pronouncing on whether it entails some form of materialism or physicalism, or whether it is an epistemological doctrine or methodological heuristic.

mate processes and events is a difference of degree, or we might say, of organization, rather than a difference of kind. To use the idiom of ancient and medieval thinkers, the form of the human soul is, at least in principle, explicable solely in terms of its material realization or efficient causes. The explanation of human behaviors with the methods of reductive natural science should allow us to understand these defining marks of the human being, our powers of communication in language, or our unique cognitive abilities of memory and flexibility of thought. A good psychological or neurophysiological theory will explain the appearance of meaning in terms which make no recourse to meaning, purpose, or intentions on the part of the agent.[8] Let us call this the **machine paradigm of human agency**.

The machine paradigm extends the HLC's basic premise that *meaning is not mysterious*.[9] Explaining the significance or importance that things can have for an agent does not require involving any properties which go beyond those which belong to our best scientific theories. These would include intentional properties, invoking the feature of "aboutness" relating (say) an inner mental act or state to its non-mental content. Instead, meaning is a transparent quality. What is difficult is giving an adequate account of mental or psychological processes which can explain the features of human agency, especially those first-personal experiences which have so confounded materialists.[10]

In this respect, the psychological doctrines of the 20th century, from behaviorism to computationalism to the cutting edges of cognitive science and neuroscience, can all be understood as modern-day outgrowths of the familiar mechanistic psychologies familiar in the works of Hobbes and Descartes and the associationism of British empiricists. The basic picture of the mind as discrete corpuscular 'bits' acted on by ratiocinative processes has not fundamentally changed for all the advances of science. The empiricist psychology of 'ideas' and 'impressions' lingers on in ever more sophisticated forms.

Taylor's early skepticism about the prospects of the machine paradigm took aim at psychological behaviorism.[11] With behaviorism's decline and the ascension of its successor programs in the cognitive sciences, we might worry that the present line of thinking is attacking the straw man of a long-dead project. The cognitive sciences are anti-behavioristic. They affirm mental elements as part of the explanatory scope of cognitive psychology, with mental concepts (or at least some functional equivalent) being part of a good theory of internal psychological processes and outward expressions of behavior. Yet the two main methodological approaches in cognitive science, the computational approach and the connectionist (or

[8] Harman, *The Nature of Morality*; Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, chap. 8; also see his "Making sense of humanity" in *Making Sense of Humanity*.

[9] "Meaning not mysterious?" in Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays*, 2014; *The Language Animal*, chaps. 2–3.

[10] "The concept of a person" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*.

[11] "Peaceful coexistence in psychology" and "What is involved in a genetic psychology" in ibid.

dynamical systems) approach, both share in the machine paradigm's central conceit. They each set out to explain human agents and persons using the explanatory terms and ontological resources of physical theory which do not include essentially intentional properties in their explanations.[12] Mental and rational phenomena can be sufficiently explained by causal properties offered as part of an objective theory spelled out in third-personal, non-intentional predicates. The essentially qualitative difference between the human agent and inanimate things, between human actions and inanimate physical processes, is excluded from the proposed scientific theory on a priori grounds.[13]

The machine theorist's approach to the human sciences recapitulates the constraints on meaning and knowledge familiar from the HLC tradition's disengaged agent. A good scientific explanation must draw on unambiguous, interpretation-free data available (in principle) to any observer; any theoretical entities posited in explanations of patterns or regularities in the data must be, likewise, free of observer bias or interpretation.[14]

It might seem that worries about *mechanism* are misplaced. After all, the state of the art in cognitive psychology has come a long way since the post-behavioristic physicalist theories of the 1970s.[15] Contemporary cognitive psychologists have available resources not only from empirical psychology and sociology, but also artificial intelligence, information theory, computer science, and a range of explanatory resources from the neurosciences.[16] This opens up the prospects for *naturalistic* cognitive-psychological theories which are not beholden to materialist or physicalist ontologies.

For all these advances, the general methodological orientation of the cognitive sciences has not overcome the essential difficulty. The worry is not a concern about the ontological status of agents, persons, feelings, and other distinctively 'anthropocentric' qualities. Ontology is at best an issue of secondary importance. The question of *meaning for the agent* is the

[12] "Cognitive psychology" in ibid.

[13] Proponents of cognitive science's ambitions would not happily agree with this characterization. They would see the exclusion of qualitative or intentional properties as a part of good methodology. The difference between good methodological grounds and implicit a priori grounds is one issue in contest according to the BA principle.

[14] "Peaceful coexistence in psychology" in ibid.

[15] Donald Davidson's "anomalous monism" being one well-known version. See his "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," in *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford University Press, 2001), http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0199246270.001.0001/acprof-9780199246274; "Mental Events," in *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford University Press, 2001), http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0199246270.001.0001/acprof-9780199246274.

[16] Hume is probably the modern starting point for naturalism of method in philosophy of mind, though Quine's "Epistemology Naturalized" is undoubtedly the most influential modern statement of this intersection of philosophy with cognitive psychology; Daniel Dennett is one of the more prominent contemporary defenders of the continuity of cognitive psychology with philosophy of mind. See his "Real Patterns," *The Journal of Philosophy* 88, no. 1 (1991): 27–51, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2027085; "True Believers: The Intentional Strategy and Why It Works," in *Mind Design II*, ed. John Haugeland (MIT Press, 1997), http://cognet.mit.edu/book/mind-design-ii; "The Part of Cognitive Science That Is Philosophy," *Topics in Cognitive Science* 1, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 231–36, doi:10.1111/j.1756-8765.2009.01015.x.

central issue behind Taylor's objections. The development of new techniques and theoretical resources in the cognitive scientist's toolkit hasn't challenged the premise that meaning is a technical problem to be explained with a good theory of human cognitive functioning. In the explanation of action, the concept of intentional action can be neatly replaced with a causal theory of behaviors or physical movement. In the social sciences, persons and actions can be substituted with functionalist descriptions of impersonal processes. In ethics, moral goodness and evaluative meanings can be translated into theoretically neutral terms which are in principle continuous with psychological and sociological explanations. Taylor's methodological worries about interpretation-free science have not been seriously addressed by the main stream of cognitive psychology.[17]

The personal paradigm as the Best Account of human agency

If the machine paradigm is not up to the explanatory task it sets for itself, what can be said about the nature of agents and persons and their qualities? Theories of mental representations and conscious minds which frame them are, at best, of lesser importance in accounting for agency. Whatever an agent or a person might be, it will not be identical with a disembodied 'blob' of pure conscious awareness, or with discrete representing elements contained somehow within it. To explain meaning, we must look somewhere besides the mind conceived as a representing subject.

One difficulty is how deeply the disengaged self has entrenched itself as a default starting point, even as reaching into our common-sense schemes of guiding metaphors and concepts. It is difficult for us to imagine things otherwise, even before philosophical or scientific theorizing begins. To even bring this point into clarity requires a different methodological stance, and this is an uphill battle. The remedy is to show how even the disengaged picture of agency is itself formulated on 'phenomenological' grounds, without yet ceding the point that the structure of subjective awareness can itself be a neutral starting point or method.[18]

What we need then is a way to navigate between the horns of reductive objectivity, on the one hand, and a subjectivity opposed to objective reality, on the other. Taylor finds the resources for this in the tradition of expressivist thinkers, discussed in the previous chapter. Because meaning is something *done*, being the realization of capacities belonging to an inarticulate bodily and sensual life, the 'private' inner world of subjectivity is intimately bound

[17]This claim should not be read as asserting that no human sciences have adequately responded to these difficulties. As we will see, Taylor is hardly anti-scientific, or even unwilling to draw on scientific resources in addressing human actions and activities. It is a particular tendency or family of tendencies within these sciences, and in the philosophy of science, which he believes to be the problem.

[18]Taylor makes this point against Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, comparing it (unfavorably) against the ambitions of logical analysis to a similar sort of neutrality. See Taylor, "Phenomenology and Linguistic Analysis."

up in the 'public' outer reality of observable speech and action. The relation between inner and outer is not causal but *constitutive* and *expressive*.[19]

Besides offering a critique of what is lacking in the disengaged picture of agency, expressivism offers a different positive vision of the human agent as an engaged and expressive being.[20] In Taylor's work this appears in a minimalist form: the human agent is the being for whom things are intrinsically significant.[21] It matters to us that we are fed, sheltered, keep good company in friends and family, and much else besides. This constraint on agency is permissive enough to include, in principle, non-human animals and perhaps even plants and micro-organisms.

We can say, perhaps not too controversially, that all human beings share in a range of experiences, feelings, and desires. All human beings need to eat, breathe, sleep, drink water, take shelter from the weather. A *human* agent is distinguished from other kinds of agent in that the former is a sub-set of agents which can count as a *respondent*. A respondent is a being who can offer an intelligible response when asked a question and, in turn, respond to reasons given.[22] Human agency differs from agency *simpliciter* because of the human capacity for language.[23] Within a human life, language cannot be imagined as an optional extra tacked on to an animal body. The power of expressive language transforms human agents in a double sense. It distinguishes us, qualitatively, from other kinds of living beings. There are no house cats or grey wolves for whom the question, *what kind of thing am I?*, can even be intelligible. Questioning has no meaning for any beings (so far as we presently know) except human beings. Language also realizes an internal transformation, in relation to our own natural needs and wants. The human need for even such basics as food, water, and air is not like that of other animals. For us these needs are qualitatively transformed by our powers of reflection in language, even when we are not actively exercising them.[24]

Interpreted within the machine paradigm, human feeling and action are objects or processes to be explained in objective terms with a causal theory, without the kinds of irreducible distinctions that belong to an agent's experience or understanding. The meaning of a feeling or an action just is some measurable, quantifiable task at which the agent's state or act aims.[25] This is purpose, of a sort, though it is a derivative purpose which can be translated

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[19]See Chapter 2

[20]See Chapter 1

[21]The term "things" meant in the widest sense possible. "What is human agency?" and "The concept of a person" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*.

[22]"The concept of a person" in ibid.

[23]"What is human agency?" and "Self-interpreting animals" in ibid.

[24]In his most recent book, Taylor distinguishes between "life goods" of nonhuman organisms and the "metabiological needs" which arise from our animal natures, but are radically transformed in the light of language and the awareness it opens up. See Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 184–90, 194–96.

[25]See, for example, "Hegel's philosophy of mind" and "The concept of a person" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, for a discussion of the difference between intrinsic significance and the criterion of adequacy to a

into non-teleological terms.[26] It is possible for a theorist who has no access to the meanings that the feeling or action has for the person involved in them to offer up a description of them which leaves nothing out.

The difference between Taylor's account of the irreducible agent and the machine paradigm's task-adequate explanations of behavior turns on this feature, or range of features, which he terms qualitative distinctions of import or worth. The machine paradigm excludes by design the concept of the good, what is *desirable* about a desire, or what is *the purpose* of an action, or what is *shameful* as revealed by a feeling of shame. The machine paradigm asks us to dispense with these notions of intrinsic qualitative worth for an account of agency and agent qualities which is couched in terms of non-qualitative physical responses. Something is evoked within a human organism by something else, where both stimulus and response can be characterized in ethically-neutral terms of a causal theory, and that is all there is to say. To have a desire just is to experience a desire; there is nothing else that needs to be added to that story.

One epistemological consequence of this is that the agent can have no knowledge of her actions or feelings in a way distinct from her grasp of external objects and events.[27] Agent-knowledge is just a variety of ordinary empirical or observational knowledge. The agent is a disembodied observer who discerns, through introspection, a certain mental state or act which is responsible for the outward movements of the body, or an equivalent state which the agent recognizes as a feeling of wanting or of shame. What confronts the agent within itself is structured like the external field of objects, properties, and events, and known via an analogous mode of access.

The BA principle poses a formidable challenge to the machine paradigm in respect of each of these features. The concepts of actions, or feelings, or agents, which naturalistic theories take as their *explananda* are not what someone *means* when speaking of voluntary action ("I'm going to the store"), or feelings of shame, or a desire to be courageous. Offering a description of properties or events from a third-personal standpoint, using only the purpose- and value-neutral terms available from the observer's perspective, does not give us an adequate account of the experiences themselves. The epistemological perspective of the agent, who knows her actions and feelings in a way which is not like the observer's empirical knowl-

task.

[26]Though we might well wonder whether even efficient causation as mechanists conceive of it is is so easily understood without reference to final causes. Geach argues otherwise in his "Teleological Explanation," in *Explanation: Papers and Discussions*, ed. Stephan Koerner (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), 76–93; recent work on neo-Aristotelian metaphysics and philosophy of science poses further challenges to the idea, for example in Harré and Madden, *Causal Powers*; David S. Oderberg, *Real Essentialism*, Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy 11 (New York ; London: Routledge, 2007); Edward Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, Editiones Scholasticae 39 (Heusenstamm: Ed. Scholasticae, 2014); John Greco and Ruth Groff, *Powers and Capacities in Philosophy: The New Aristotelianism*, 2017.

[27]"Hegel's philosophy of mind" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 80.

edge, cannot be put aside in understanding the meaning of action, or shame, or desire, or any other psychological concept caught up in what Taylor calls *strong evaluations*.[28]

A strong evaluation involves evaluative discriminations made by an agent with respect to the agent's own desires and feelings. We often feel conflicted when base experiences conflict with higher, reflective considerations. I feel a strong desire to eat the piece of cake in front of me. But I'm trying my best to eat better food, and to avoid junk food. The second desire is a desire *about* the first-order wanting. Strong evaluations involve us in second-order desires of this sort, where the object of the desire is a standard of higher, intrinsic worth. Sticking to a diet isn't (for most of us) an intrinsically worthwhile end in itself (rather than a means to some further end). Standards like courage, hope, faith, or authenticity may well be.

Strong evaluations make trouble for an epistemology that rests on observational knowledge. If strong evaluations are essential and indispensable for understanding human motivations and actions, then this – says Taylor – is a *reductio* against the sufficiency of reductive methods in the study of human beings. In the human sciences, Taylor's argument amounts to a call for a methodological difference between the classical model of science, free of interpretation or other observer-relative properties, and a viable methodology for studying human agents and actions. The study of human agents requires a *hermeneutic* approach, capable of including an agent's interpretations of the meanings or purpose of an action as part of the explanatory toolkit.[29] In moral philosophy, these are grounds for a defense of full-blooded realism about the ontological commitments that the contents of our moral feelings and desires and beliefs reveal to us.[30] Feelings of shame indicate that something *really is* shameful, a desire to be courageous reveals that courage is *desirable*.

Naturalists will protest here that this is bad science, that it is involving us in 'spooky' supernatural entities or 'metaphysically queer' properties, that no good scientific theory could make use of 'anthropocentric' qualities as primitive concepts (i.e., without requiring any further elaboration in the terms of a subsequent theory which can do without them). The hermeneutic strategy seems to commit us to an unavoidably subjectivist approach, which betrays the kind of objectivity we want from a scientific or ethical theory.

There is a crucial difference between this claim about the irreducibility of persons and anthropocentric qualities and the modern current of subjectivism. Modern moral subjectivism rests on psychological doctrines that relegate the meanings of moral expressions to noncognitive states or acts of mind. The agent's response alone, irrespective of what brings it about, is thought sufficient for a moral feeling or belief. Subjectivism *presupposes* the naturalist's

[28]"What is human agency?" and "Self-interpreting animals" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*.

[29]"Peaceful coexistence in psychology" and "What is involved in a genetic psychology?" in ibid.; "Interpretation in the human sciences" in Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Philosophical Papers 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[30]Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, chap. 3.

distinction between respectable 'cognitive' elements in the mind which do carry ontological weight, and the contingent, even arbitrary feelings and choices of the agent.

Taylor certainly does not aim to cede authority to incorrigible and irrefutable knowledge of an agent's private inner states. Rather, what the agent knows, she knows through the *activity* of reflection. She first reflects on some observationally-known fact or experience, which is thereby transformed through the exercise of thought. It follows that an action or a feeling may be unreflecting, done or experienced without full awareness and only later becoming the object of conscious attention. A conscious desire or intention is not simply given to the agent who passively receives it in her introspective awareness. Nor is it simply an incorrigible fact about her. Awareness of what one wants or intends must be worked out in reflection.

In Taylor's idiom, we must become articulate about feelings and desires, and this requires language. Achieving reflective awareness thereby transforms the activity itself – the direction of the action or feeling moves from an unreflective animal response to a consciously formulated purpose. Reflective thought is (1) thinking which occurs necessarily in a symbolic medium, that is, in language, which is (2) a second-order recognition of (1) as essentially connected to bodily activities and life-processes.[31] Point (1) already involves a radical break with the Cartesian proclivities of the machine paradigm. Thinking occurs in the medium of symbolic language, in the 'semantic dimension' that opens up between the speakers of a shared language.[32] It is already outward, belonging to the public space of speakers, and active, consisting in dialogical activities of speaking and listening. Conversation, in other words, is the defining instance of thinking; the inner monologue of first-person consciousness derives from this. Point (2) brings out how closely connected expressive speech is with the postural, gestural, and vocalizing capabilities of the human body.

Human agency is realized in bodily activities which express, and expressively constitute, the activities called thinking and feeling (and so on across the range of mental concepts). The feature of reflective thought which qualitatively transforms human life and human needs and wants and actions does not require that we speculate about some mysterious supernatural property that somehow hangs around the human animal like an angelic halo. Thought is something that we do, something that we achieve, in the ordinary forms of life-activity and practice that make up a human life.

This introduces an important consideration. The concept of human agency precedes and is a necessary condition on the disengaged self. One must be capable of strongly valuing and, through giving articulations of the ideals to which one is most deeply committed, giving reasons in response to the "why?" question. This is how a notion of the rational person can

[31]"Hegel's philosophy of mind" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*.

[32]Ibid., chaps. 9–10; "The importance of Herder" in Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*; Taylor, *The Language Animal*, chaps. 1–2.

enter the stage. As we will see later, the reason-responsive person is not irrelevant but it is not the basic concept. I believe that this is the case in Foot's naturalism as well.

3.2 Human beings as human agents: Foot on naturalizing human agency

Taking the expressivist's defense of intrinsic persons and agents as a starting point, one serious problem facing Foot's account of human beings as the centerpiece of practical philosophy is to say how a concrete individual organism who belongs to the species *homo sapiens* can also be an agent, a being for whom things are intrinsically significant. It seems that to talk of natural organisms, though, is to place us within the bounds of the machine paradigm. Though we may talk of intentional actions or goal-directed behaviors in such a context, these must be ultimately explicable in terms of some non-intentional and non-teleological physical process or function.

The problem here is that an account of living organisms, belonging to the same category as oak trees, *E. coli* bacteria, and lions, cannot also be an account of intrinsic significance or meaning. But as we saw above, Charles Taylor raises some serious problems for any account of human agency and human actions which excludes intrinsic significance. One must understand the point in one's actions if one is to be a proper human agent. An action must have an intrinsic purpose if it is to be an action and not a bit of physical movement.

The difficulty facing a Footian naturalist, then, is to say just how human beings, a category which may be sufficiently described and explained in the non-intentional, non-evaluative categories and predicates, can also be bearers of intrinsic purposes in the way that Taylor argues must distinguish agents and persons from inanimate objects and events. How can a Footian move from the level of living beings, where causal-mechanistic theories of behavior are the only serious option, to the subject of meaning or purpose which is required to speak of persons, agents, and actions?

We must take care to disambiguate two senses of the question, otherwise we risk begging a key question. The question can be asked from within the standpoint of the disengaged ideal of the Self, assuming that an animal or organism could not be an agent because it could not be identical with the radically reflexive being which is already at a remove from the natural world. The worry would be that there is a crucial difference of kind between the self, whatever that may be, and ordinary material things governed by natural laws. Perhaps the agent is a disembodied 'thinking substance', or perhaps it is a normatively-structured rational intellect. Either way, the distinction between agents and things involves an uncrossable metaphysical or logical gulf. Such theories make the agent seem remote from any plausible

attribute or capacity of a living thing. The only viable options seem to be either introducing some metaphysically-dubious, even supernatural quality that distinguishes an agent from the merely natural order, or simply doing without. These options correspond roughly to the distinction between a non-naturalist, who affirms, and a naturalist, who denies, that there can be an autonomous moral agent set apart from the natural order.

It is possible, however, to discount the disengaged self in its various forms and still press the question from an expressivist standpoint. If a human being is a human agent, then it must be the subject of qualitative discriminations, a being for whom things hold intrinsic significance. But Foot is talking about an animal, and animals make all manner of discriminations in their environment which have no special intrinsic worth. Human beings don't give any special weight to a tree sloth's distinction between tree branches and edible leaves, or to a bacterium's sensitivity to chemical gradients. If Taylor is right about the essential importance of strong evaluations in characterizing human agency, the sense of the incomparably worthy cannot amount to *just* the bare drawing of distinctions. The distinctions themselves must reach beyond; they must involve ontological commitments to real standards of worth. But now we seem outside the scope of an account of living things.

The point of contention between the machine paradigm and the person paradigm cuts across the distinction between the disengaged self and the expressivist's embodied and engaged person. Thus, it is not enough by the expressivist's lights to simply defend or even to dispense with a notion of disengaged self-hood in order to *get to* an appropriate notion of an agent or a person.

The puzzle for Foot's naturalistic approach is in the question, How could a human animal's discriminations between different psychological states, or physical movements, or socially-relevant speech, entail qualitative discriminations in the strong sense required for human agency? The question is intended to ask both, (1) how could these discriminations have qualitative significance to the individual? and (2) how could these discriminations be real and natural features of the world inhabited by the human animal?

This dispute then is not just about where the Footian human being can be located within the divide between naturalistic and non-naturalistic theories of the disengaged self. It is also about whether the Footian human being can be an essentially evaluative subject of qualitative distinctions. (Which need not be, to stress the point again, a "self".) If we jettison the concept of the disengaged self, then at least one source of trouble can be defused. But there does remain a difficulty even so.

This is one point at which Taylor's historical critique of the Self may be marshaled in support of what Foot is arguing, *provided* her account is appropriately qualified. This is because Taylor's own expressivist account of human agency, if we may grant it, already accomplishes two things: One, it provides a potent critical alternative to the disengaged model of the self

and the corresponding machine paradigm of action. Two, it provides a way to situate a reason-responsive person within the embodied life of a human animal as a contingent development and result of a more basic notion of human agency, in the sense of being a strong evaluator.

Foot, as I read her, is not looking to establish a foothold for a disengaged self in the natural order of living beings. But I want to argue even more than this, that what she does say about human agency is capable of accommodating even intrinsic standards of worth in a manner consistent with Taylor's expressivist defense of the personal paradigm of action explanation.

One source of difficulty here stems from just these ambiguities surrounding the concept of the agent, the person, and their connections to morality. At a minimum there are confusions between two different issues. First is a metaethical question, concerning the meaning or ontological significance of moral judgments and intuitions and beliefs if some form of naturalism is true. The question of the agent, or the Self, is not a neutral assumption in the disputes surrounding ethical naturalism. The second concerns the account of human agency itself, insofar as our notions of freedom and responsibility are closely connected to our moral beliefs. Yet these ideals seem to be incompatible (in some way or another) with ethical naturalism. Let us now discuss these issues in turn.

3.3 Naturalism as a metaethics

Metaethical naturalism in its most common form begins with a methodological aspiration for continuity with natural science, excluding from serious consideration such entities as a subject of moral experience or a will defined by its capacity to make choices.[33] The methodological aim is to explain the genesis of moral feelings and beliefs and moral actions using the languages of impartial scientific inquiry, making no reference to the excluded intentional or qualitative properties that belong to the realm of normatively-constituted agency. So-called non-naturalists who reject the methodological aims of ethical naturalism deny that such methods can be sufficient to explain rational agency, and so morality, without remainder.[34] The human agent and its valuations must be somehow distinct from the world of nature. Otherwise the rational capacity to choose and act, and to choose and act for reasons, would be inconceivable. These are not capabilities which belong to inert objects or properties which fit into physical theories, or any other properly scientific description of inanimate events or processes.

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[33]Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton, "Toward Fin de Siècle Ethics"; Jonathan Jacobs, "Naturalism and Non-Naturalism," in *Dimensions of Moral Theory* (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2008), 110–52, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9780470775899.ch4; Susana Nuccetelli and Gary Seay, eds., *Ethical Naturalism: Current Debates* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Lenman, "Moral Naturalism."

[34]Michael Ridge, "Moral Non-Naturalism," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/moral-non-naturalism/.

One difficulty is that there is no single and uncontentious doctrine we can identify with the word “naturalism”. The word connotes a range of distinct views, not all of them consistent with one another.[35] The naturalism under fire so far can be described as involving methodological and speculative attitudes. Methodological, because the natural sciences are held as paradigmatic of a rational explanation-generating process. Speculative, because the findings of the sciences are taken as the best starting point for further philosophical explorations. Stated as a negative thesis, naturalism in this sense excludes from its proposed ontology and explanatory theories any entities which play no part in our best scientific theories. Metaethical naturalism or naturalistic ethics so understood involve applying speculative or methodological naturalism to ethical theory.[36] A naturalistic metaethics would show how moral properties could be part of a scientifically respectable ontology, or how the methods of science could be used to illuminate the truth (if any) of moral judgments, or in lieu of that, how moral judgments could be explained as part of a larger theory of human behaviors. Among moderns, Hume and Nietzsche are perhaps the most conspicuous advocates. Hume’s skeptical turn to experimental method and Nietzsche’s keen eye for unsentimental psychological observations both exemplify a distinctly realistic, impartial, uncompromising attitude towards human motives and the actions they explain.

There is something agreeable in this attitude, but at the same time it leaves out something important. For one thing, to characterize naturalism in this way is to exclude properties which are not scientifically respectable as ‘non-natural’, as if this is meant to be informative (much less non-pejorative in tone). Of course there is a widespread and long-standing tendency to identify the natural with what is *not anthropocentric*, a belief which implies that human feelings and desires and the qualities that they commit us to could be no part of nature. Short of the empiricist and reductive-naturalist dogma we have discussed so far, there is little justification for this view outside of pre-existing philosophical theories. The reason anthropocentric qualities seem outside of nature is because nature itself has been defined as that which excludes them.[37] If one is not already committed to such doctrines, the distinction between the natural and the non-natural can seem ad hoc and arbitrary.

This is the same line of reasoning that makes human agency seem something mysterious and outside the bounds of nature. If Taylor’s analysis of the history of the self is right, then

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[35] Mario De Caro and David Macarthur, eds., *Naturalism in Question* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008); Bana Bashour and Hans D. Muller, eds., *Contemporary Philosophical Naturalism and Its Implications*, Routledge Studies in the Philosophy of Science (New York: Routledge, 2014); David Papineau, “Naturalism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2015, 2015, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/naturalism/.

[36] Jacobs, “Naturalism and Non-Naturalism”; Lenman, “Moral Naturalism.”

[37] Philippa Foot, “Moral Arguments,” *Mind* 67, no. 268 (1958): 502–13; Philippa Foot, “Moral Beliefs,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 59 (1958): 83–104; “Self-interpreting animals” in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*.

the philosophical aftermath of Enlightenment rationalism and the Romantic and Modernist revolts against it have left us with a not entirely consistent understanding of ourselves. We are both living human beings, subject to explanation by mechanistic sciences, and we are also as the possessor of a mysterious thing called "the Self" – a notion which is itself inconsistent between its competing rationalist and expressivist threads. The indispensability of the self (with or without capitalization) as an object of moral concern and the basis of epistemological reflections, on the one hand, sits in an uneasy tension with the apparent absence of selves from the observable, measurable reality that is the stock and trade of post-enlightenment science, on the other. The peculiar disengagement of the self from the world of things, coupled with its radical reflexivity, appears to leave us with a paradox. Science and moral progress both suppose a self but in the end leave us with no place for it.[38]

Such paradoxes might seem to be an unavoidable conclusion. Perhaps it is not possible to talk about the essence or nature of human persons without discussing whatever it is that distinguishes us from inanimate things and nonhuman organisms. Yet it is not so easy to say just what any exceptionalist claims must involve without appealing to the same philosophical background that generates the problems in the first place. Partly because of that ambiguity we are led easily to the thought that an ethical naturalism *just means* whatever excludes agency and agent-relative qualities *in the sense indicated by the concept of the disengaged and radically reflexive Self*. Yet it also seems that the self is a requirement on moral and ethical discourses. What else are we talking about as objects of moral concern if not other selves? What is doing the talking if not a self that is distinct from merely living animals?

This move – if a more ambitious word is not called for here – begs the question in identifying the agent with the disengaged self of the post-Enlightenment tradition, if only tacitly. Nature just is that which is left after human agents and anthropocentric qualities are set aside. This widespread notion of human agency as the Self, and the subsequent denigration of moral talk as a serious cognitive stance toward reality, go hand in hand. Because the Self is apart from the world and a part of morality, the human agent must be some admixture of the two distinct worlds of experience, one as a living animal, the other as a distinctive self.

Given all of this, there is an important implication for any reader of *Natural Goodness*. The Self, both part of and partly responsible for the dualistic appearance of human nature, is part of what Foot's philosophy of nature contests. I have previously stressed that Foot's naturalism begins *first* with a reflection on the basic categories of human life and only *then* proceeds into specific ethical claims.[39] But even this must be situated within her 'enchanted' philosophy of nature, given that living nature is continuous with evaluative meanings and normative facts. This has important ramifications not only for ethics but *for the place of the*

[38]Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 175–6, 177–8.

[39]See Chapter 1

subject in ethics.

The metaethical division between naturalistic and non-naturalistic takes on morality requires that one ignore this crucial background. One reason that metaethical naturalism seems a faulty doctrine to many is just because of the tendency to conceive of distinctions of worth *as properties*, as the kind of entities picked out as the referents of predicates or schemes of predicates, within a regime of language in which the ascription of referring predicates to a subject is the only cognitively meaningful use of language. The requirement that the properties referred to in predicate-ascribing assertions (or whatever) find a home somewhere within an ontology continuous with natural science comes in a later step. To claim this is to assume that we've got a good handle on what can count as natural, and what must be segregated off into a non-natural ghetto. The division itself derives from an uncritical (and doubtless unknowing in many cases) acceptance of the disengaged self as the grounding system of metaphors for understanding the meaning of our concepts of agency.

Without those bits of linguistic doctrine we have no good case for thinking that moral judgments and feelings must track objective *properties* at all, much less those which could be plausibly part of the ontology of the natural sciences. (Nor, for that matter, is there any good case for taking named objects and referring predicates as being the final say on the contents of reality.) This point is central to Foot's attack on the fact-value distinction in the opening pages of *Natural Goodness*.[40] She is quite explicit there: *"good" is not a predicate*. It is an attributive adjective which is used as an evaluative qualifier or modifier of the subject of the proposition in which it is found.

The point of all this is to highlight a persistent theme throughout Foot's work: that goodness is not derived from choice. Goodness is in things, independent of human will and interest. From the standpoint of a 're-enchanted' nature, there is no need to posit a remote Self and assign it responsibility for the meaning of evaluations (of life or, as Foot argues, of moral conduct).

When she does turn to the matter of human agency in chapters 3-5 in *Natural Goodness*, we find the mirror image of this naturalizing move. There, she has much to say about the concepts of moral agency, reasons for acting, and practical rationality. As we will see, whatever Foot is doing there, it cannot neatly fit with the received form of metaethical naturalism. Both of these facts will call for a revision not only of human agency and rational action, but of morality's status as a necessary part of good human lives.

Moving forward, it should not be lost on us that Aristotle was an ethical naturalist, as was (arguably) Thomas Aquinas.[41] Although the Aristotelian vision of the natural world

[40] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, introduction and chapter 1.

[41] See inter alia McCabe, *On Aquinas*; Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2008); Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics*.

has ample flaws to the eyes of the modern reader, it is also striking that Aristotelian and Thomist methods of inquiry are not significantly different in spirit from the empirically-driven investigations of Humean or Nietzschean naturalists. The basic starting point, the notion that the human being is a creature among other creatures inhabiting a shared world, and the methodological orientation to the study of observable concrete things rather than flights of ungrounded metaphysical fancy, is not at all alien to even a contemporary scientific naturalist. The most important difference here seems less the method and more the contents of the mechanistic sciences that appeared in the time between us.

Teleology in nature

Perhaps the greatest problem facing an Aristotelian naturalism is the concept of teleological causation. Aristotle generalized too easily, we might think, from his observations of the development and functioning of living things to the physical principles governing the cosmos. Of course with the discrediting of Aristotelian physics during the scientific revolutions in the 17th and 18th centuries, it became too easy to throw out any concept of purpose or final ends as part of a respectable account of nature. Whatever was right in the Galilean revolution, this moves too quickly to the equal and opposite error. Aristotle found purpose in life and saw it everywhere; post-Galilean naturalists saw no need for purpose in physics and believed it could be nowhere else.

This is compounded by the systematic prejudices wrapped up in the HLC family of language theories we discussed in the previous chapter. Because of these doctrines restricting meaning to the domain of human cognitive activities, the credibility of metaphysical speculations about the world gradually eroded. Scientific knowledge and the self-transparent reasoning processes of the representing consciousness came to be the measure of all things. What can be known can be known by its availability to the rational powers of human beings. What cannot be known in such a way is, by definition, meaningless or unknowable.

The plausibility of Aristotelianism suffers from both sides of this modern dualism. Natural science has no need for purposes or minds or intentions and it asks us to set them aside. Subjectivists, naive and sophisticated, define meaning as the states or activities of the human will and intellect. Both sides of the dualism have agreed that whatever mind might be, it will not be a part of nature as we best understand it.

Yet all this moves too quickly. Nature cannot be conceived on this story without essential reference to specially human powers of reason and observation.[42] The great divorce of mind

[42] Taylor develops this aspect of his philosophy in a recent book co-authored with the late Hubert Dreyfus, *Retrieving Realism*; similar points are developed by John McDowell in his “Gadamer and Davidson on Understanding and Relativism”, “Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective”, and “Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity” in *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009); Feser, *Scholas-*

from nature occurs in reaction to modernity's radical turn inward. Seen from this historical perspective, without yet accepting the conceptual frame of the inward turn, essences and purposes are not the central difference marking off the modern methodological naturalist from the Aristotelian naturalist. Rather the difference is in the possibility of affirming a world which transcends human powers of rational discernment and cognitive apprehension. To be an Aristotelian naturalist is to reject the premise that human cognition is the measure of all truth and meaning.[43]

Those inclined to the (modern) naturalistic attitude might scoff at this. What are we to do, retreat into ancient superstitions or scholastic metaphysics? There's a reason Hume called for those books to be burned after all. The experimental and observational methods of science at least give us some measurable and repeatable results. Philosophers can speculate about anything they like, and one need only read through a precis of the Western canon to see all the ways this can go wrong.

This is a fair criticism, and I am sympathetic to it. By way of a reply, let us note a fact of interest. The word "naturalism" has another, non-philosophical, meaning which we have not so far considered. Set aside for the moment the philosophical debates around metaphysics, supernatural properties, the logic of moral words, the role of science, and so on. In those debates it has largely escaped attention that we use the term "naturalist" to speak of the occupation of figures like David Attenborough, who are keen and systematic observers of different species' life-cycles, anatomy, characteristic behaviors, habitats, and other features of the distinctive lives of these organisms. What in this activity – which we could as well call *ethology* – is non-scientific? Furthermore, what part of biological science could be done without initially and necessarily adverting to this kind of interaction and study of living organisms?[44]

Wittgenstein once wrote that "Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing."[45] We recognize, to the point of taking for granted, that *how we live* involves all of these uses of language, in the practices and social contexts where we live and act with other human beings. This is natural in our way of life, as natural as flight for bees or running for cheetahs. Furthermore, it is natural in a manner that precedes any particular contents of our languages, such as – for one notable example – philosophical doctrines and explanations.

This by itself doesn't get us to the truth of teleology or any sort of normative realism, of

tic Metaphysics, especially chapter 1, develops a neo-Aristotelian argument for the incoherence of naturalistic philosophies that exclude subjective qualities.

[43]This is the point Iris Murdoch was making in the closing paragraphs of her "The idea of perfection", with her remark that to be a naturalist meant to understand that one occupied a world that extended vastly beyond one's powers of comprehension. See *The Sovereignty of Good*, essay 1.

[44]See the introduction to Thompson, *Life and Action*.

[45]Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 25.

course. What it does show is that any basis we might have for offering a sufficient scientific account of ourselves could not proceed without accepting these facts, and accepting them *as facts* – and not because of reflection within pure reason, or the logical analysis of ordinary language, or a phenomenological reduction of experience, or any particular philosophical theory. It is because, in one way nothing could be more obvious, and in another way, we have nothing else to go on. Any candidates for a better option could only present themselves within that range of the obvious, that which cannot be done without.[46] We have no choice but to assent to the reality of the world, the human-independent reality, we inhabit and to credit it in some way for the meaning and the logic of the languages we use in attempts to make sense of ourselves. Just what that entails opens up a very different matter, and the anti-realist is right that we must be cautious in moving from the fact that we draw distinctions to the strong claim that we know the nature of what we distinguish. For all we've said so far, Nietzsche's answer could as well be right, and that is no comfort for a realist about intentional agency or received moral values.

Speaking critically we can say that this objection applies just as well to the anti-realist's position. Not because of any metaphysical or logical worries, but because of the dubious position from which the skeptical doubts themselves emerge. The doubts themselves are products of a philosophical reflection on agency and meaning, and if I am right, skepticism is advanced on grounds that are themselves subject to skepticism. There is a methodological case for accepting the pedigree of at least some anthropocentric qualities.

It would follow that attempts to give 'a scientific account of human nature', which really means a sufficient reductive theory that excludes all of these mysterious aspects of human life, is mistaken. The reductive ambitions of the classical model of science, if these do indeed aim to eliminate the role and significance of meaning and interpretations from their concepts of human nature, are unattainable. Any plausible sociological or psychological theory of human beings must include this ethological dimension if it is to succeed. To exclude it would mean excluding the very parts of human existence which make it possible. It would also entail that the very notion of *objectivity* would itself be necessarily conditioned by human forms of intelligibility.[47] This follows from defining the factual as what is *not anthropocentric*, since to define the natural as what is not subjective is to acknowledge that the very distinction

[46]Although with the caveats that must be added to this sense of obviousness, as argued in Chapter 1. This account is quite clearly indebted to the mode of transcendental argument discussed there.

[47]Warren Quinn presses this point against Bernard Williams in his "Truth and explanation in ethics", in *Morality and Action*, ed. Philippa Foot, Cambridge Studies in Philosophy (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Williams makes for a fascinating foil in this exchange because he agrees with much of what we have said here, and still resists the moral realist's conclusions. Quinn points out that if objectivity worked this way, the truth even of hypotheses in theoretical physics would depend on the consensus of the beliefs produced in practicing physicists. Truth would be the *best explanation* of the consensus belief. As interesting as Williams' sophisticated naturalism is, this is a serious problem for the assumptions behind his form of anti-realism.

between subject and object occurs *within subjectivity*.

If the neo-Aristotelian position on this is right, then a robust ethology of human life is not merely a component of our otherwise impartial theories of human beings. It is rather their starting point. Understanding the phenomenon of life in general requires a situated standpoint within the living world. Otherwise, nothing distinguishes the study of living things from the study of inanimate events and processes. But we should notice something crucial. In being a non-negotiable starting point, it is also a mode of description which gets at parts of human existence that cannot be done without, and which indicate a great expanse of reality that is not conditioned by or subordinate to a human form of understanding. This appears, to me, as a version of Taylor's Best Account principle; that is, as a condition on what we should accept as our best explanation.[48]

An important thought falls out of this. To call a view non-naturalistic, as Taylor is sometimes called, is to accuse it of introducing something exceptional, which does not belong to the natural order and cannot be studied by the ordinary methods. The 'non-naturalist' label carries with it some unfortunate semantic baggage. Whether intentional or not, the term evokes ideas of the supernatural, of ghostly forces lying in mysterious relations to the ordinary causal order knowable through experiment and observation. It connotes an anti-scientific bias, as if one must retreat into the private 'humanistic' realm apart from scientific understanding and, increasingly, from plain good sense. Why believe in such extravagances, unless one has ideological or moralizing reasons for doing so?

This makes it too easy to defend scientific-naturalistic thinking by aligning it with a common sense attitude. It also needlessly polarizes the differences between the two positions. It is profoundly mistaken to interpret Taylor's thoughts on the human sciences as *anti-scientific*. To the contrary his work is if anything marked by an enthusiastic support of scientific inquiries into human activities.[49] The dispute here should not be framed in terms of pro- or con-attitudes towards the scientific study of human beings. It is a dispute about specific doctrines within the philosophy of science. These doctrines concern (a) the methods by which human actions and activities are and ought to be studied, and (b) the lens through which the significance of scientific discoveries about human beings is best interpreted. Hume's experimental method already rests on its own assumptions about the mind's operations; looking upstream, there is more than a whiff of metaphysics in that construction; looking downstream, those assumptions transform into constraints on the possible descriptions, contents and procedures

[48] Following the same line of thought as in chapter 1.

[49] This is quite clear even in his early writings on psychology, which speak well of scientific inquiry as such while resisting the philosophical implications of methodological practices and specific discoveries. See "Peaceful coexistence in psychology" and "What is involved in a genetic psychology?" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*; his more recent work shows a sustained engagement with the work of Michael Tomasello, Alison Gopnik, Jerome Bruner, and Merlin Donald, all of whom are engaged in the study of human communication and its development. See Taylor, *The Language Animal*, chap. 2.

of thought. The classification of mental states into ideas and impressions, and the division into motivating 'passions' and the cold calculations of reason, are philosophical impositions, already supposing a certain view of the mind's functioning if not pronouncing on its exact nature, and a certain view of the mind's relation to nature; neither of these being determined by empirical observation alone.

If my present line of thinking is right, two points follow which undermine the received opposition of 'naturalist' and 'non-naturalist' ethics. First, it is not possible to presume in advance of inquiry that we've sorted out the question of what is natural and what is not. Should it prove true that we cannot reach a perspicuous understanding of human action, in psychology and sociology, without involving concepts of purpose and action and value and the like, then these will have to be admitted as part of our understanding of human nature.[50] Second, any decision of this kind could not be made on a priori grounds. It would be made through the same explanatory accounts or arguments that are used to qualify any entity as part of a serious ontology. The Best Account principle, a requirement on the explanatory power of our basic concepts and categories, would require us to admit actions and intrinsic purposes as part of a better explanation than that offered by the reductive naturalist.

3.4 The animal with reason

The problems raised in the above discussion range beyond the old worries about 'naturalistic fallacies'. They concern whether, and in what way, ethological descriptions of human beings can accommodate a satisfactory (i) concept of agency and (ii) account of rational action. In giving descriptions of such-and-such as part of human goodness, the Aristotelian must also say how goodness *matters for us*.

In the previous section, I tried to show that Foot's approach to naturalistic ethics does not require any special contribution from a disengaged Self. While I believe this is right, there is a second matter raised by Taylor's critiques of naturalism. This is the question of whether such descriptions of natural evaluations and natural normative patterns can be given from outside of the understanding of the agents, or the peoples as a whole, for whom they matter, and whether this is a commitment that follows from what Foot has said about living nature.

Even if Foot's naturalism can get us to a plausible account of re-enchanted, intrinsically normative nature, what can she say about the part of the *person* as a reason-responsive agent? Can we make sense of rational thought and action without importing the ideal of the disengaged Self, or at a minimum, explaining the Self as a natural product of human action? Given the discussion in the preceding section, I believe the answer is yes, and I will attempt from here on to sketch my case.

[50]"How is mechanism conceivable?" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*.

To begin with, what does it mean to say that human beings are rational creatures? Foot draws on the classical Aristotelian and Thomist traditions:

> The best way to understand [the claim that human beings are rational animals] is, in my view, to consider what Aquinas said on the subject. That rational choice is possible for human beings is, of course, an ancient doctrine. Aristotle spends much time in expounding the idea of choice 'on a rational principle' or *logos*. And Aquinas, following Aristotle as he so often does, explains this by contrasting animals and men.[51]

Animals differ from adult humans (and are in this sense like children) in that they do not exercise choice. Of course animals often do choose, or at least make the sorts of distinctions between options that we call by that word. Animal movements of this kind only " 'partake of choice' in so far as they show 'appetitive inclination' for one thing rather than another."[52] Animals may even do what they do for an apprehended end. Yet Aquinas still takes it that in so acting for an end, animals cannot *apprehend the end as an end*. Knowledge is necessary for volitional action, and though we can credit even animals with this, the kind of knowledge involved in human choices is of a special sort. Human choices involve apprehending the thing which is the end, and in knowing it under the aspect of the end, and the relation of the means to that end. Animals do not have knowledge of the relation of means to ends as humans do. A cat or dog can go for one thing to get another, but they don't have knowledge of the relation between the means and the end. Only human beings can know ends *as ends* and know means *as means* to ends.

I want to pause here to draw attention to something important. Foot's talk of seeing reasons and knowing ends as ends is, I think, open to a certain distortion due to the influences of the Self on contemporary beliefs and intuitions. When St. Thomas wrote of a human being's power to know ends, he was not referencing an entity called a "Self", distinct from the particular human animal, to which that power belonged. It is vital to keep this in mind: reason recognition and reason responsiveness are attached to a Self for many of us moderns, because of a sequence of contingent historical developments. But, as the psychologies of Aquinas and Aristotle demonstrate, nothing necessarily connects rational agency with a Self.

Because so much of this history is left implicit, or even deliberately set outside the bounds of good philosophy, what it could mean to be a reason-responsive agent tends to be heavily skewed by the way we moderns think of persons, selves, or agents as being uniquely distinct from the natural order of things. There is a strong temptation to account for reason-responsive agency in a peculiar way so that it accords with the dualistic ideal of the disen-

[51] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 34–35.
[52] Ibid., 54.

gaged self. If I am right, Foot is attempting to step away from these dualistic peculiarities, not work within them.

Before getting to that, I want to say a little more about the Aristotelian characteristics of Foot's account of agency which I believe support this reading.

First of all, the human capacity to comprehend ends and means to ends as such need not be explained as a peculiar ontological or psychological quality. As Foot colorfully puts it, it is not that we see our ends "as glowing in a special way, or with 'E' for End over it like the Hollywood sign."[53] Ends and means-ends relations are not visible to the mind as a quality available to perception or introspection. Rather, seeing ends as ends belongs to the mind as the expression of human cognitive capacities, realized in certain surroundings, a kind of socially-situated activity in which we first learn to see and give reasons for our actions.[54] Speech, and the activities and situations in which speech is acquired and used, are the background against which reason-recognizing and reason-responsive actions occur.

When one judges an action as good, the goodness of action relates to the choices of an agent due to "the fact that moral action is rational action, and in the fact that human beings are creatures with the power to recognize reasons for action and to act on them."[55] There is an intrinsic connection between rationality and morality, as one would expect. Importantly in this context, however, that connection does not *run through* the personal, private, interior life of the individual person. That is to say, the human power of reason-recognition and reason-responsiveness is not primarily or essentially a conscious power of reflective thought in the individual – it does not immediately invite a concept of a Self into the story.

For one thing, Foot is speaking of reason-responsive agents as bound to a community and its shared form of life. For another thing, even the connection with the interiority of the rational human being is not a matter of a special connection with a practically-rational will. She writes that reason-responsive agency must include "the part played by 'sentiments' such as (negatively) shame and revulsion or (positively) sympathy, self-respect, and pride in motivating human virtue."[56] The role of sentiments is crucial, for "there is a way in which a good person must not only see his or her good as bound up with goodness of desire and action, but also *feel* that it is, with sentiments such as pleasure, pride, and honour."[57]

The connection to language in a particular communal setting and to the individual's feelings and desires suggest a self-concept different from a disengaged self. Both the "outer" activities of speech situated within a shared community and the "inner" experiences of emotion and desire are conditions on reason-responsiveness. This suggests strongly that *whatever*

[53]Ibid.
[54]Ibid., 55.
[55]Ibid., 24.
[56]Ibid.
[57]Ibid., 98.

the human agent turns out to be, it will not be a disengaged self in the sense we've discussed above. The distinction between inner and outer itself is perhaps contentious here; I will say more about this shortly. It is worth highlighting this point, for it sets her (like Taylor) at some distance from orthodox accounts of rational agency as a function of a disengaged self, a point which is vital for understanding her ethical point of view.

Foot's human beings, and, crucially, their virtues, are going to be intimately grounded in the real, concrete kinds of lives that we actually live. Concrete human individuals are messy, emotional, desiring, often tragically conflicted beings. It isn't so easy to simply step away from these actual conditions into a purified ideal of reason that can also unconditionally bind our wills and move us to action.[58]

Foot is taking a more traditionally Aristotelian stance toward the human power of reason. Besides the ontological significance of dropping a strong distinction between inner and outer worlds, the lines between rational thought and non-rational feelings and motives are not drawn in quite the same way as much of modern moral philosophy would draw them.

Consider that Aristotle himself argued in the *Ethics* that deliberation about action requires that one also experience right desire, where right desire itself is subject to rational discrimination.[59] It is not enough merely to *think*, as if abstract thought alone could concern our human ends and actions without also touching our motivations. Thought becomes specifically practical only when it has right desires in its view. Furthermore, the notion of a right desire itself supposes distinctions between right/wrong or better/worse desires. Practical thought concerns right ends in part because it is motivated by right desires. Only in part, however, as right ends and right desires are both subject to rational scrutiny.

For the Aristotelian, the rational aspect of human life is inextricably caught up in our feelings and desires, in the symbolic structure that language presents to us, and by extension the whole structure of qualitative distinctions of worth that these open up for us. Practical thought for human beings cannot be a matter for a disinterested being dispassionately entertaining its options by means of intellect alone. Intellect alone does not suffice; moreover, the contents of the human intellect do not stand at arm's length from the rest of our mental lives. Recognizing and responding to reasons involves a specifically human kind of purchase on the world. Our emotions and feelings exemplify one way in which human beings find a unique kind of purchase on the moral reality we inhabit. Language and the shared forms of life that it mediates between human individuals in a community are another.

[58] I will say more about the matter of rationality and moral dispositions in the next two chapters. For now, I point the reader to Foot's remarks in chapter 5 of *Natural Goodness* to the effect that, on her view, morality cannot be seriously understood as a category of reasons which are specially distinct from other sources of practical reasons. Nor does morality have a universal and overriding power over other sources of reasons for acting.

[59] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Lesley Brown, trans. David Ross, Revised edition (Oxford University Press, 2009), bk. VI.2.

This raises an interesting question for the whole aim of naturalization. If Foot is *not* trying to naturalize human agency by showing how a disinterested reason-responsive intellect – and this is true whether that phrase is interpreted as a non-cognitivist or a Kantian/constructivist would read it – can be brought into accord with a natural order structured by cause-effect relationships, then what is she doing?

If the opening chapters of *Natural Goodness* mount a challenge to the prevailing dualistic conception of living nature as belonging to a neutral manifold of facts which excludes values and norms, then chapters 4 through 6 frame a parallel challenge to dualism from the opposite direction, from the perspective of rational human agency.

I believe, furthermore, that this account is only strengthened when understood against the context of Taylor's historical elaboration of the Self as a contingent and communal ideal. In the following section I will unpack this claim.

3.5 What does Foot mean by human rational agency?

Before proceeding, I want to distinguish two slightly different questions in play here in order to head off possible confusions:

1. The ontological naturalization of human agency, which concerns the question of how a living animal or organism can be a rational agent.

2. The concept of the human agent, which may or may not be a Self, that is the target of naturalization.

Much of the present chapter so far has concerned primarily issue (1). In that discussion, certain questions were raised about (2), insofar as there are reasons to think that *who* or *what* we are trying to naturalize is subject to certain ambiguities and confusions.

These topics both invite further reflection on potential downstream consequences for ethical and moral ideals given our replies to them. What it could mean to be a rational human being, and the value attached to rational autonomy as a part or constituent of morality, are unavoidably colored by our responses.

Beginning with Taylor's argument that the concept of a disengaged self has been so strongly though invisibly influential over modern philosophical thought, I have a concern that certain assumptions about point (2) make it possible to affirm that human animals are rational agents, thereby resolving problem (1), while leaving open a certain set of ethical problems concerning rationality and moral ideals.

Thus it is possible to succeed in naturalizing human agency in one respect while nevertheless failing to contend with Foot's thoughts on freedom, standards of worth, and reasons

for acting. This situation stems from the fact that much contemporary thinking on morality is concerned with the *Self*, in Taylor's sense of the disengaged and radically reflexive ideal of a person.

Foot does not envision (I argue) either human agency or, as I will come to in the following chapter, human practical rationality, as the province of a disengaged self. For her, it is the human being, not the self or the rational person, that is the central concept of ethics. But this human being is not the mere organism or animal that we find in the usual dualistic story about reductive-scientific nature. What she has to say about human agency shares much more in common with Taylor's own standpoint given the human being's essentially linguistic, communal, and experiencing form of life. These facts are part of our natural history as sure as our upright posture and bilateral symmetry.

The influence of the Self nevertheless holds a powerful grip. Consider the significance of Kant's influential argument in the *Critiques* that individual persons straddle two different and incommensurable spaces of action. On the one hand, we are beings with empirical bodies which must behave according to the laws of nature. On the other hand, we free beings who can choose and act as we will, constrained by the norms of practical rationality. The ontological problem of naturalizing agency appears here in the difficulty of showing how the normative and causal worlds can enter into relations in such a way as not to set aside naturalism or transform it into a tacitly non-naturalist theory.

One problem for ethical naturalism would then be a problem of showing how the manifold of causality can also be a rational source of authority over the rational subject's desires, choices, or actions. This version of the problem has been brought into the secondary literature on *Natural Goodness* by critical and sympathetic readers alike. In an influential paper, John McDowell applied the basic pattern of this Kantian norm-fact dualism to raise a problem for one form of ethical naturalism, and to respond to it on behalf of a neo-Aristotelian naturalism.[60] McDowell points here to the strong historical influences that lead us into "disenchanted" natural order cut free from any evaluative or normative contents. He proposes a second "re-enchanted" form of naturalism as a remedy, through which the category of the natural is enlarged so as to distinguish between a non-normative "first nature", the kind of biological life that constitutes the lives of plants and nonhuman animals, and a contingently-acquired rational "second nature" which is inculcated in individual human beings through the course of a life.

Although this has been an influential argument, "Two sorts of naturalism" was written several years before the publication of *Natural Goodness*. As such it isn't clear that McDowell's way of addressing the problem of natural rationality in human beings adequately takes into account the contributions of Michael Thompson's representations of life or Foot's argu-

[60] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."

ments for natural normativity which draw on that account.[61] If living nature is already normatively constituted, rather than being an inert world of objective causal facts which places norms and values at arms length, then drawing a sharp line between first and second natures may be an unwarranted retreat from Foot's actual views, not only about nature but about human agency.[62] Thus, McDowell's contribution to an enlarged conception of nature which can accommodate normative characteristics may, in one respect, be too confining to account for Foot's position. She is not affirming a second nature *in addition to* a disenchanted (non-normative) first nature. Rather, it is first nature itself that is enlivened on her account.

But it is worth drawing out an ambiguity on this point. For McDowell, our second natures *are* natural (the phrase itself suggests it). I mean to ask the question not in the terms of point (1), the ontological issue, but in the spirit of point (2). What is this agent that we are naturalizing, and what does its naturalization imply for ethics? Because of the issue raised in the previous paragraph, I suspect that there is a hidden dualistic residue at work here. Because of it, human nature is saddled with a lingering residue of the disengaged self, itself contributing to the persistent need to associate the norms of practical reason with the cognitive activities of the *Self*.

John Hacker-Wright helpfully summarizes the problem stemming from the dualistic tendency and attempts to offer an amendment to Foot's position on her behalf. Given the dilemma "between a bare biological account of human nature, on the one hand, and an ethically informed, historically contingent account, on the other"[63] a Footian can recognize a third possibility, that

> what it is to go well can be timelessly valid and universal, yet still dependent on our nature as rational animals. The idea is that there is a certain way that we must conceive ourselves if we are rational and certain reasons that must be reasons for us, given how we necessarily conceive ourselves.[64]

This characterization contains three important details. First is the dualism of a biological account of human nature and the contingent, normatively-constituted, idealized self-concept which stands at a remove from merely biological nature.

[61] Although Hursthouse indicates that McDowell was aware of Foot's later thinking on this topic, and indeed wrote his paper in the spirit of a friendly amendment. See Hursthouse, "The Grammar of Goodness in Foot's Ethical Naturalism", in Hacker-Wright, *Philippa Foot on Goodness and Virtue*, 39–40.

[62] Michael Thompson suggests that McDowell has not adequately contended with a certain constriction of the concept of "first nature" in his (McDowell's) thinking on this matter. Thompson considers his own view a *naive Aristotelianism* which contrasts with McDowell's sophisticated two-natures account. Michael Thompson, "Forms of Nature: 'First', 'Second', 'Living', 'Rational' and 'Phronetic'," in *Freiheit*, ed. Gunnar Hindrichs and Axel Honneth (Stuttgarter Hegels-Kongres, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2013), 702–3, https://www.academia.edu/9666637/Forms_of_nature_first_second_living_rational_and_phronetic.

[63] Hacker-Wright, *Philippa Foot's Moral Thought*, 126.

[64] Ibid., 126–27.

Second is the ensuing dilemma for rational agency. There is a certain way that we must conceive of ourselves if we are rational reason-responsive agents. Reason-responsiveness is identified with a certain self-conception which, though a natural part of the human life-cycle, is necessarily constrained by certain facts about its biological existence. The biological first nature manages to 'reach up' to the rational second nature by providing certain necessary, universal and timelessly valid, conditions on that self-concept.

Third is the prescriptive aim of this account. The goal attributed to Foot is to get us to the universal validity of moral reasons from their grounds in the contingency of our biological animal natures.

I don't contest that Hacker-Wright's characterization may succeed as a form of ontological naturalization per (1) above. It is a normal part of the human life cycle that we acquire rational natures with certain normative attributes, e.g., responsiveness to certain kinds of reasons, and subject to certain necessary constraints on our rational, qua human, ways of thinking.

This is fine so far as it goes. But again: Exactly what is this agent that we are trying to naturalize?

One way into this question is through the notion of *necessity* in play here. It is not entirely clear how *any* attempt to derive certain necessities from living nature – even "enchanted" per Foot – can also be, or provide, rational constraints for a human agent. Kant's original problem seems intact: how is it that heteronomous determinations of the will can still be admissible as necessary or rational conditions on reflective thought? Kant could get away with this because he had a strong concept of autonomous rationality to work with. A naturalist does not, not even with an enlarged concept of nature.[65]

What I am trying to suggest here is that the *approach* to naturalization understood as showing a path *to* the universal, timeless, and necessary *from* the particular, immediate, and contingent is a mistake. Likewise, the enlargement of the concept of nature to include evaluations and normative properties must *also* take into account what this implies *for human agency*. The mistake here is one of method, and one which is closely connected to the account of the agent which is subject to naturalization.

In the following chapters, I discuss Foot's remarks on *human* practical rationality, *human* virtue, and the connection of both of these to our standards of morality. On the view I am contesting, morality finds itself aligned with rationality, and both of these are set against the "human" term, where this indicates a particular, empirical, contingent mode of being. As we will see, Foot challenges the thought that morality has a special independence from

[65] Of course both the naive Foot-Thompson nature and the sophisticated McDowell nature do include rational standards, but the point here is that insofar as these are natural, they must also be substantially curtailed from the kind of thing Kant had in mind.

specifically human ways of being and living. Rationality, virtue, and morality share in a certain kind of necessary relationship, though one which *does not* run through an rational agent or impartial standards of rationality.

Given this I am concerned that readings like McDowell's and Hacker-Wright's, well-intended as they are, have not fully contended with these thoughts. There seems to be a persistent assumption that a Self is an essential part of the story, with its autonomous acts of reflection bearing a special connection with moral reasons and moral judgments. This whole domain of rationality is uniquely apart from living nature; autonomous from nature, furthermore, in part because of the expectation that rational norms and moral norms must be universal and timelessly valid and thus no part of changing empirical reality. The autonomy at stake here is agnostic on the ontological question. It is a question, rather, of the independence of the human agent from the remainder of the concrete human condition.

This kind of autonomy is not entirely consistent with what Foot says about either human agency or the rationality of (moral) human action.

Furthermore, drawing out some of the implications of Taylor's arguments canvassed at the beginning of this chapter, the concept of the agent at work (*not* the Self) has unavoidable implications for our moral ideals as well as our philosophical elaboration of them. Especially on the latter issue, Hacker-Wright's proposed amendment to Foot's views on agency strikes me as contributing to two further mistakes. First, it emphasizes a moral foundationalism that is not part of Foot's approach to ethics. She is not looking for *grounds* for the virtues, at all, much less in the practical intellect. Second, to succeed in forcing moral goodness into such a foundationalist mold, one must neglect vital features of Foot's account of practical rationality and the virtues.

The second issue is the topic of the following chapter. I want to conclude here by saying more about the first.

Who or what is naturalized?

Hacker-Wright tells us that "there is a certain way that we must conceive ourselves if we are rational and certain reasons that must be reasons for us, given how we necessarily conceive ourselves."[66] In one respect this is hard to disagree with. There is a way that a human agent must understand herself if she is to be a rational being, and this "certain way" is specified by our natures as individuals bearing the species-kind of the human being. So far so good.

The problem is that Hacker-Wright also tells us that "human agency is a crucial aspect of human nature for providing the sort of timelessly valid foundation for virtues that Foot was seeking."[67]

[66] Ibid., 126–7.
[67] Ibid., 130.

Foot's discussions of the role of practical rationality, and of the relationships between rationality, the virtues, and human goodness, suggest strongly against such an interpretation of her ethical views.[68] In chapter 5 I will show that Foot's virtue-ethics does not seek anything like a foundation for the virtues; if anything, the arrow runs in the other direction (though even this is not quite right). She does not say that (for example) human nature fills in for practical reason as a rational foundation for virtuous acts or judgments. The schema itself is faulty, and she posits a different basis for ethics.

Given the preceding discussions of the Self, I cannot but wonder just *who is* this "we", in Hacker-Wright's claim above, such that we must conceive of ourselves in such-and-such way.

To first return to an issue raised above, what can we make of the concept of necessity at work here? Given what Foot has to say about the natural-historical judgments which provide our basis for natural and moral evaluations, it seems unlikely that any strong, universal or timeless, concept of necessity will suffice. There is an alternative, however. Foot makes reference to "Aristotelian necessities" for human beings, what is necessary to secure our good *given how we actually are*.[69] This is a much weaker standard of necessity than that of timeless and universal validity.[70]

My concern emerges then from the account of reasons for acting and reason-responsive agency that is latent in the characterization, *not* with the mere question of whether rational agency per se can be brought into the natural lives of human beings. Mainly I am not sure that such a characterization fully escapes the orbit of a Kantian theory of practical reason, complete with its self-concept of the person as standing at a distance from the natural world. There is a certain value attached to disengagement, as Taylor argues, where rationality provides a special and "higher" sort of motivation grounded in duty. But the relationship also runs in the other direction, with the desire to secure a purified ideal of morality in a non-empirical concept of obligations also supporting the withdrawal of the rational self from its messy and inconsistent empirical counterpart.[71] The notion of a universal, timeless, transcendental ground for morality walks hand in hand with the Self.

[68]Foot's discussion of these matters in chapters 4-5 of *Natural Goodness* paint a very different picture of the relationships between rational thought and moral goodness. I discuss these issues in more depth in the following two chapters.

[69]Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 15–17, 46; G. E. M. Anscombe, "On Promising and Its Justice, and Whether It Needs Be Respected in Foro Interno," *Crítica: Revista Hispanoamericana de Filosofía* 3, no. 7/8 (January 1, 1969): 61–83, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40103923; G. E. M. Anscombe, "Rules, Rights, and Promises," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (September 1, 1978): 318–23, doi:10.1111/j.1475-4975.1978.tb00364.x.

[70]In coming chapters, I will argue that this is deliberate. This will entail some change to received moral ideals, as Foot seems mainly concerned with prohibitions on certain forms of anti-social conduct. See Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 114. Even so, the weaker notion of "morality" can still support ideals of freedom, dignity, and respect for human individuals as essential and necessary parts of human goodness.

[71]This is an argument also advanced by Bernard Williams in his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, chapter 8 and *Making Sense of Humanity*, passim. Despite the Nietzschean pedigree of this line of thought, there is a surprising overlap with Foot's neo-Aristotelianism.

This quasi-Kantian interpretation of the Footian agent does have some textual support. Foot claims that in explaining "the relation between goodness of choice and practical rationality it is the former that is primary."[72] There is no criterion for practical rationality that is not *derived from* that of goodness of the will. This is clearly resonant with Kant's well-known claim in the *Grundlegung* that the only unconditionally good thing in existence is in the good will.[73]

That said, it must be stressed that Foot strenuously denies, and has pretty much always denied, that there is a necessary conceptual connection between goodness and the will.[74] This matters because the persistent need to locate a conceptual connection between goodness and choice inevitably invites a certain conception of the self into the story. As far as Kant could see, unconditional goodness belonged to the rational will because it could be nowhere else, and this is due to the fact that no merely contingent motives or inclinations could stand as the basis of the universal ends of morality. Kant's argument quickly excludes all the objects of theoretical intellect as candidates, the contingent attributes of bodily feeling, emotion, mere inclination, anything else not belonging to the rational will in itself. Now we are back at the earlier dilemma. To speak of autonomy of the rational will means that we must exclude any 'heteronomous' causes from outside of the will. Choice must be made by the will and the will alone.

But we must contend with the consequence of Foot's argument that this very distinction within the person, between the disengaged powers of rational agency and the concrete determinations of the empirical self, is not part of *human agency*. Where Kant's good will was good in respect of its formal and abstract properties, the neo-Aristotelian good will is good in respect of its concrete and particular characteristics, of which rationality is only one part.[75]

My concern is *not* that McDowell or Hacker-Wright are saying that second nature *itself* is a contingent attribute of human lives, as if there is a way for human lives to go well without acquiring rational thought. My concern is that the specific framework of concepts used to explicate Foot's Aristotelian rational agent are already laden with historically contingent and culturally bound assumptions about disengaged selfhood. It isn't *just* the dualism that should concern us here. It is that the distinction of a rational self from its empirical embodiment is already a construct of recent Western history, and so its characteristics need not be essential

[72] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 11.

[73] "It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a good will." Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Mary J. Gregor and Jens Timmermann, Revised edition, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4:393.

[74] A point which is consistent across her works. See, inter alia, Foot, "Moral Arguments"; Foot, "Moral Beliefs"; Foot, "Goodness and Choice"; Philippa Foot, "Rationality and Goodness," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 54 (January 8, 2010): 1–13, doi:10.1017/S1358246100008420.

[75] I say more about practical rationality in the following chapter. Foot makes her argument for the primacy of human goodness over practical rationality in chapter 4 of Natural Goodness.

attributes for any concept of human agency. These considerations make it difficult to square this position with an *Aristotelian* view of the rational animal.

Yet isn't it true that it is not a human being who is responsive to reasons, but some acquired, contingent part of her which stands at a remove from the bare animal nature (though in some way depends on it)? This is right up to a point. Infants are not reason-responsive, nor are certain human beings who, through injury or illness, have lost or had diminished their rational capacities. At the same time, the reasons to which we are responsive seem to be universal, or at least strongly invariant to contingent details of a life.

To return briefly to Taylor's historical analysis of the Self, he argues that the disengaged self is a contingent feature of our lives in a different sense than the contingency of rational thought in the developmental course of an individual's life. The Self is also a product of a particular cultural and linguistic history within which an individual is situated. An acquired second nature, if we understand it as disengaged (to whatever extent) from its biological aspects, would be a culturally dependent feature *in its specifics* rather than a natural attribute in the way as eyes and hands. It is true that the natural component of "second nature" is not in the fact that we have it but that we are suited to receive it, paraphrasing Aristotle. Even with that said, we must be careful not to equivocate on this general and minimal sense of a capacity to acquire reflective thought, on the one hand, and the particular cultural-historical development Taylor identifies with the disengaged self, on the other. An entity so bound to the cultural horizons of a particular community seems an unlikely candidate for a *natural* quality belonging to the whole species. Whatever agency is, if it is a natural characteristic, it must be different than the Self.

The point is this. Whatever is contingent in the human being's powers of rational thought need not be contingent for us in the sense that pure, abstract rational thought implies a special form of withdrawn self-consciousness. I believe it is a mistake to import that kind of a Kantian, or Kantian-inspired, version of the self into a neo-Aristotelian form of naturalism. As far as Foot is arguing, living nature is already normative, and what is meant by normative reason thereby loses its special connection with the practical will. (Which is *not* to say that reasons thereby have *no connection whatever* to the human practical will.) What it means to be a reason-responsive human agent is already an expression of (one kind of) natural normativity.

This strikes me as a more faithful rendition of an Aristotelian practical philosophy, for which it is the whole human being, in all its concreteness and individuality, who is the subject of ethics. Agency and personhood are qualities of this whole being, rather than a being divided up into concrete and abstract elements where only the latter has a special power of rationality. It is in this way, I suggest, that Foot comes much closer to Taylor and his defense of the personal paradigm of action.

To say exactly what this means will require digging further into Foot's account of reasons for acting and what it is to respond to reasons.

3.6 Conclusion

All of which brings me back to the matter of what this will imply for morality and for the rationality of action. What does human agency, naturalized as Foot wants to naturalize it, imply for ethics? I suggested that the readings of Foot discussed above seem to me to mistake not only what she has to say about human agency and rationality, but also to carry over into a misunderstanding of her account of the virtues and human goodness.

I can leave only a promissory note on these matters for the moment. Whatever morality may be, it does not require something over and above our ways of living, given in natural-historical judgments. Foot's claim is not that we can ground a "higher" ideal of morality in a natural organism. It is that our natural lives are such that many of those ideals *called moral* are part of our natural flourishing. This will include even those ideals of intrinsic respect and dignity that attach to the human person, though achieved without either locating grounds in impartial motives of duty or turning to an explanation in the sentiments. Rather, the Aristotelian take that Foot offers us involves, by degree, some of each.[76]

One important question raised here concerns the moral worth of persons and the dignity owed to them. The value of the individual is now central to our moral beliefs and intuitions, in a way that it wasn't for the ancient Greeks. And this is true in respect of both our status as morally responsible beings who can comprehend and act for reasons, as well as our intrinsic worth as beings which has strong connections with our conceptions of ourselves as autonomous, norm-responsive persons.

Once we get autonomous reason on the table as a source of universal dignity and respect for human persons, everything else seems to drop away as far as *moral* considerations are concerned. The other virtues, if they are virtues, are only part of our goodness so far as autonomous practical reason can place its stamp of approval on them through acts of choice

[76]In a recent article, Hursthouse suggests that Foot "is not denying the significance of the fact that most of us are persons, that is, that we are moral agents, and have a special sort of rationality". She continues: "Acquiring the rationality that makes *us* moral agents or persons fairly early in our development, and, if we are lucky, keeping it until we die, just is normal, healthy *human* development. But it is a stage in *human* development. The rationality and "personhood" in question are human rationality and human personhood; the two concepts apply only to human beings, and thereby only to beings with certain biological and consequent psychological properties, each of whom is, moreover, culturally and historically situated. We are not a whole different order of beings just because we spend most of our human lives being persons, and there is no reason to suppose, in advance of our encountering some promising candidates, that the concepts could also be applied, by family resemblance, to aliens or divine beings." Rosalind Hursthouse, "The Grammar of Goodness in Foot's Ethical Naturalism", in Hacker-Wright, *Philippa Foot on Goodness and Virtue*, 37–38.

in the rational person. Autonomy becomes a master moral ideal as well as a source of moral justification.

As we will see, Foot doesn't quite go for this. In fact, she seems uncomfortable with this schematic picture of morality and its importance to human beings, arguing against exactly this position in chapters 4 and 5 of *Natural Goodness*. Human dignity does stand as a reason for me, as a human being, to refrain from certain kinds of actions toward others. Yet that same dignity also takes on a self-referential, even prudential quality (Foot will argue). Moral reasons are reasons alongside the same kinds of reasons I have for taking care of myself, my family, and my friends, with no special compulsive force for having the label "moral" attached to it.

A second issue is how autonomy relates to other goods, moral and non-moral. Once autonomous persons, and the associated moral ideals of rights, intrinsic dignity, and obligations, enter the picture, what part is nature playing as source or justification of our moral beliefs and judgments?

If I am right, autonomy *of a sort* remains important and essential to morality in Foot's view. But as I have argued here that her view of the human agent involves a different sort of being, who in turn entails a different sort of species-relative necessity, these have vital implications for the value of autonomy in respect of morality and moral reasons for human beings. For Foot, human freedom is (a) one good among many, often conflicting, human goods and (b) not the rational foundation of goodness as the self-validating source of authority over human actions.

As controversial as this may sound, there is no timeless and universal foundation for the virtues in Foot's story. This isn't what the virtues are, nor is it a correct description of how the virtues give reasons to the human agent. She does not offer us an account of moral foundationalism, with some basic reason or type of reason standing as the ultimate justifications of a moral judgment. Her account of human practical rationality stands on a different basis, and bears a different connection to human goodness, though it nevertheless includes the goodness of choice and action.

All of this will have to await further argument. For now it will have to suffice to say that Foot is not defending a notion of human agency as autonomous reflection capable of criticizing without limitation. There are constraints on autonomy which place some limitations on what a rational human being can rationally want or do. These are not external impositions on the practical will but constitutive of human agency itself. A human *agent* need have no connections to the *disengaged self*, conceived in its absolute freedom from the material or empirical world.

As such, the sorts of necessities at work in her account also lack associations with universality and timeless being, being the kinds of necessary truths that Anscombe referred as

Aristotelian necessities. The Aristotelian necessities concerning our freedom, responsibility, and the intrinsic worth attaching to persons in respect of them, indicate a more restricted, though still crucial, importance in ethics. The virtues of justice and charity belong here, and still make demands on us, though in a more mitigated sense than we might expect.

Reason itself is answerable to a notion of goodness which in one way outruns it, and another way contains and shapes it. The constitution of my agency, my power to recognize and reflect on a consideration, is already shaped by distinctly human considerations, needs, and interests. But responsiveness to reasons itself involves a different capacity than rational reflection isolated from the remainder of the empirical individual. One quite literally comes to *see* reasons as reasons much as one cannot help but attend to the shape and color of an object, rather than consisting in conscious acts of deliberative reflection.[77]

A rational Martian could not be expected to comprehend human goodness. Its own being could be conceivably so far removed from the human life-form and our characteristic feelings of pleasure and pain, our emotional responses, our appetites and desires, and even our dialogical, language-mediated form of social life, that what we take as good for us would hold no meaning for it. For human beings, there are constraints on our constitution *as human beings*, and not just as rational agents, which are essential to understanding many of our goods. It is here that the worth of persons and their freedom must be established.

If we understand the Footian human agent in this way, we have an account of agency consistent with Taylor's self-interpreting animal. For Taylor, a human agent is a subject of evaluative distinctions of worth. As agents we are also beholden to standards beyond our bare feelings and desires. So it is with Foot, as I will argue further in the coming chapters.

[77]There is an affinity here with Iris Murdoch's argument that morality concerns *attention* rather than choice, and it isn't entirely accidental, although I did not have space to draw out these connections. What it is to be a reason-responsive agent, as an expressivist like Taylor might tell that story, departs from the Kantian and post-Kantian emphasis on the agent's choices and comes to resemble instead a receptivity to standards beyond one's desires and choices. See Iris Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality"; *The Sovereignty of Good*.

Chapter 4

The rationality of acting well

This chapter concerns the topic of practical reasoning and the rationality of moral action. In what follows I will compare Taylor's hermeneutic theory of practical reason and later Foot's naturalistic theory of practical rationality.

For Taylor, the human agent is a being with a body, whose bodily actions and expressive powers of language constitute the human agent's identity as a person. As such a human agent's powers of reasoning about its own ends and actions cannot take place in total abstraction from the actual person or people undertaking it. We lose something important when our paradigm cases of practical thinking follow the paths broken by mathematics and reasoning in natural science.

Foot's account of practical rationality as developed in *Natural Goodness* aims to show how it can be rational for a human being to act morally, how the virtues can give reasons for acting to a human agent. For Foot, rationality belongs to human goodness. The rationality of choice and action are determined by evaluative facts about the human species, much as the life-cycle of a bobcat or a sunflower involves normative constraints on the proper course of development and behavior for individuals of those species.

This seems to create a tension between her view and Taylor's in several respects. The main issue is that she needs to say how a human being can recognize and respond to reasons for acting which are not explicable as merely psychological motives, e.g., desires or self-interest. The problem is this: if moral reasons are not already among an agent's motives, then Foot's kind of account seems to recapitulate the modern kind of practical thinking that Taylor finds implausible. Footian rationality requires external reasons to impose upon the agent's rational will from outside, in the kind of heteronomous determination of will and choice that so worried Kant.

My claim is that Foot's account of practical rationality as a human virtue can handle these challenges. I will proceed by first surveying some key differences between ancient and modern theories of practical thinking. I then consider Talbot Brewer's dialectical account of

practical thinking, which provides a useful way of conceiving this difference, before turning to Taylor's socially-grounded and interpretive account of practical reason. Several worries for a naturalistic theory of practical reason appear here. I argue that these worries, should one press them against Foot, rest on a misunderstanding of her account. Foot in fact moves away from the narrowing theories of practical thought in question, and her approach in this respect is comparable to Taylor's account of practical reasoning. Practical thinking plays a crucial part in human life, but it is a *part of a human life*.

4.1 Practical thinking, ancient and modern

Aristotle argued that practical reasoning goes well when it establishes *what is right* in respect of the human will, and when the reasoning agent experiences the *right desires* as determined by practical thinking.[1] Rational action springs from the intellect's operations in the will, whereby knowledge and desire cooperate in aiming at the good. Aristotle's account of practical thinking is notable for two features which are largely absent in modern accounts. Practical thinking has its own subject matter, that of human will and action, which distinguishes exercises of practical thought from exercises of theoretical reasoning. Second, practical thinking *aims at* what is good, fine, noble, or admirable (*kalon*).

Modern views of reasoning break with this notion. There are no ends at which right reason or right desire could aim. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the new mechanistic sciences provided their own models for reasoning processes. The new materialism led to the psychologies of Hobbes and Descartes, for whom all thinking could be explained as a calculative process of ratiocination. Thought was not *directed toward* any ends. Rather, thinking was conducted according to *correct procedures* which determined the right starting points and the right series of steps required to reach a valid conclusion. Practical thinking is merely the application of the proper methods of reasoning to the production of desires and actions, instead of the beliefs produced by theoretical reason.

Hume's explorations of reasoning put an end, for many, to the plausibility of whatever distinction might have remained between practical and theoretical uses of the intellect. Reason could be nothing but the "slave of the passions", disclosing to the agent matters of fact and relations between ideas, but having no power to determine or even criticize one's ends.[2] Ends are determined by desire and desire alone. There can be no such thing as a specifically practical use of reason, because practical reasoning has no subject matter of its own; there are no specifically practical reasons to explain human actions.

[1] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. VI.2.

[2] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Ernest C. Mossner, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1985), bk. II section III; David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Eric Steinberg (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), Appendix I, section V.

Kant famously recoiled from Hume's conclusions and tried to make something of the catastrophe. Kant's solution was to direct thinking itself to an inquiry of its own conditions of possibility. Through his critiques of pure forms of reason, Kant believed he had found a way to delineate a specifically practical use of the intellect. But this came at a price. Practical cognition could not properly belong to nor have its objects in the world grasped by theoretical cognition. Exercises of practical cognition, and the subject matter of practical thought, could concern only the human will.[3] The price of Kant's defense of the autonomy of practical thought from theoretical reasoning forced morality outside of the natural order of cause and effect. Ethics could only be properly a subject in connection with the study of the human will.

The calculative (instrumental), Humean, and Kantian accounts of practical thought are three peculiarly modern conceptions of practical thinking. We can identify at least three features in common between them. They are *procedural*, concerned with processes of thought that produce a distinct output. Theoretical reasoning is productive of beliefs, where practical reasoning concludes in production of desires, or practical judgments, or intentional actions. They are *externalist*, meaning that the methods of rational thinking and the reasons entering into chains of reasoning must be transparently available to any and all rational agents. Inferential conclusions reached by argument must be independently verifiable, in method and conclusion, by any party without consideration for the contribution of that party's perspective. Rationality requires that one assent to the conclusion of an argument if one reasons correctly and agrees with the premises.

Finally, they are *subjectivist* theories of reasoning. Reasoning is fundamentally related to the subject and with the motives and ends of the subject rather than any ends or reasons external to subjectivity.[4] When applied to answering practical questions, reasoning is reasoning essentially concerned with the motivational states or operations of a subject. Practical norms are practical (if they are) in respect of a connection between reflective awareness and the subject's acts of choice or her motivating states.

4.2 Human agency and practical thinking

Although instrumentalism, Humeanism, and critical rationality differ in important respects, the differences between them are less interesting for present purposes than their shared con-

[3] Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

[4] This point can be given both a "Humean" and a "Kantian" gloss, according to how one conceives of reason's connection to, and corresponding distance from, any particular empirical subject. Hume famously places reason in the service of the motivating passions and so distances reason from the true wellsprings of action. Kant's system gives reason a very different, critical, role. Yet the transcendental subject of the *Critiques* remains at a remove from the experiences and motives of concrete individuals, albeit in a very different way than in Hume's account. Nevertheless, reason is set at a certain distance from the particular empirical motives and feelings of the person with which it is concerned.

ception of the agent as a bodiless locus of feeling and choice surveying its world from afar. These theories of practical thinking all exhibit what Talbot Brewer calls the 'world-making prejudice' of modern philosophy.[5] The human agent is in some way in, though not fully of, the world it surveys. Reasoning about the world involves two-way connections between agent and world. Belief or knowledge entails a 'mind to world' direction of fit, wherein the agent perceives some aspect of the world and correctly represents it in thought. Desiring entails a 'world to mind' fit, such that the agent correctly perceives a discrepancy between presently existing states of affairs and the desired state of affairs. Intentions are formed and actions undertaken with the express aim of minimizing or closing the gap between existing and desired states of affairs. What Brewer calls the modern conception of practical thought occurs

> in a moment of stasis prior to action, taking as its input some representation of the circumstances at hand, and yielding some distinctively practical output – for instance, an action or intention that is deemed apt in prevailing circumstances, or a judgment concerning which intentions or actions would be apt in those circumstances.[6]

The ubiquitous thought experiments in contemporary moral philosophy provide many examples of this kind of reasoning. These cases begin, says Brewer, with an agent who is fully aware of his generically-describable circumstances, and raise the question of which generically-describable action the agent ought to choose in light of the facts about the circumstances. Using toy cases of moral dilemma to illustrate and evaluate moral theories using this general formula leads moral theorists, he argues, to assume (tacitly) that the logical structure of all ethically-relevant practical thinking is a movement of thought from an achieved understanding of the circumstances, to the initiation of an action, or perhaps to a judgment about what action it would make sense to perform. This allows moral theorists to conceive of practical reasoning "as a discrete and occasional process that occurs in the interval between two relatively well-defined temporal boundaries."[7]

Brewer's analysis of practical thinking highlights an alternative to the modern conception, which he calls the *dialectical conception of practical thinking*.[8] Practical deliberations, he argues, may conclude with the agent's involvement in a temporally extended activity, which the agent regards as intrinsically valuable. Activities of this kind have a dialectical character, such that engaging in them yields a greater depth or extent of understanding of their internal goods. This isn't solely an epistemological matter of access. Participation in dialectical

[5]Talbot Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2009), chap. 2.

[6]Talbot Brewer, "Two Pictures of Practical Thinking," in *Perfecting Virtue* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 118, http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511973789.006.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Brewer, "Two Pictures of Practical Thinking."

activities partly constitutes the standards of what counts as a proper mode of engagement in them. Understanding-by-doing in turn prepares the way for even more adequate engagement, as the agent comes to a deeper understanding of what is involved. Dialectical activities involve a continual striving to attain a clearer view of the intrinsic value of the activity.

Participation in the activity is not optional if one is to understand the point of it. To reason well about dialectical activities requires *that one do them*. This introduces a distinct break with modern conceptions of reasoning in one key respect. Understanding the intrinsic purpose of an activity is not the same as attaining a detached grasp of the reason-giving force of one's circumstances. One cannot begin with a clear description of one's circumstances because there is no such description to offer before involving oneself in the activity. Dialectical understanding directs the agent's practical attention to *what is being done* or *what one is doing*.[9]

The dialectical activity of moral argument

Dialectical thinking cannot be an ethically-neutral point of view. Involvement in dialectical activity is a necessary condition for understanding the purpose in it. This implies that it *matters* how things are with the agent, not only that she participate in the activity but that doing it well, or badly, requires the right motivations. We could well imagine a reluctant player drawn into a game of tennis, who sees no point in the game and comes to resent it. A good tennis player finds enjoyment in the game for its own sake, continually striving to deepen and improve – this being part of what it is to be a good tennis player.

This doesn't entail that there is such a thing as "the goodness of tennis" or any universal judgment that "tennis is good". It only means that with respect to the activity itself, as performed by those who see the point in the activity, there is good to be found in it. And within that good, distinctions can be drawn between better and worse – better/worse performances, better/worse enforcement of the rules, better/worse games.

Tennis, or any game, has limits when drawing comparisons to ethical and moral issues. No one is forced to play tennis. Maybe I prefer chess, or reading a book. Nothing of real importance rests on a love (or hatred) of a game. By contrast, a great deal rests on what we are prepared to say about lying, stealing, or killing.

That acknowledged, the general points about the value and significance of certain forms of activity hold. There are ways of speaking of better and worse in respect of the desires and actions of human beings *qua* human beings (rather than as tennis players, or what have you). On a modern conception of practical thinking, a moral realism like this can look flimsy. Just look at the different points of view on right and wrong just within a single culture. That's

[9] Ibid., 123.

before we even begin to consider the different historical stands on morality, or the differences between presently-existing cultures. Even the case made via dialectical practical thinking doesn't seem to cut it. So what if our activities of morality are purposeful for us? Some of them clearly weren't for our own ancestors, and aren't for other peoples right now. That we see the point of morality doesn't mean that we have stumbled on the goodness of moral actions.

The dialectical conception of practical thinking recommends that we try to gain some purchase on the meanings that activities have for their participants. If that is our method, then our understanding of what is at stake in moral disputes could proceed attempting to learn the point that the practices of alien cultures have for them. From that standpoint of achieved understanding, we could then entertain comparative judgments about what is better and worse in in various ways of living. This need not be a vicious form of relativism. There are many goods in a human life, and no single life, or culture, can realize all of them. That we can find other ways of life comprehensible, even comprehensible as *moral* ways of life and even when they disagree with some of our moral judgments, attests to this.

Don't we need some criteria by which to decide between competing views on, or realizations of, the good? We should ask just what kind of criteria we could expect. The question seems to be, how could we produce an argument which can put an end to rational dispute and command assent from all comers? It is hard to see this as even a plausible account of how moral disagreements come about, let alone how we might resolve them.[10] It is too narrow, assuming that moral disagreements only occur within certain emotive or affective bounds against a background of neutral facts. It is also too general, assuming that this model holds wherever moral disputes occur. Moral arguments given for one's moral point of view can require feelings or desires on the part of the person making or entertaining the argument for it to be a good argument.[11]

The distinction between the modern conception's technical or instrumental model of thinking and the dialectical conception's qualitative or evaluative model mirrors Aristotle's distinction between *making* and *doing*.[12] Making is an activity which is meaningful only derivatively, in relation to the product or outcome of the activity. Making includes the skilled activities of the craftsman and the technician as well as the work of the artist. Doing is a purpose-guided activity which is done for the sake of no further or extrinsic purpose. Aristotle held that doing was the only true form of human action; all else was subsidiary to it. Virtuous activity is a paradigmatic example. To act justly, or to act courageously, or temperately, is to act well, as the good human beings acts. But there is no further point to virtue; virtue

[10] Foot, "Moral Arguments."
[11] Foot, "Moral Beliefs."
[12] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. VI.2.

is, as Iris Murdoch once put it, *pointless*.[13] Virtuous activity just is what human excellence consists in, and it stands in need of no further justification, no further point beyond itself.

The dialectical conception of practical thinking provides us with a useful interpretive tool moving forward. In the next section, I will survey Taylor's account of practical reason, before turning to Foot's naturalistic theory.

4.3 Strong value and practical reason

Taylor's account of human agency is a natural fit for the dialectical conception of practical thinking. Feelings and motives open us up to objective distinctions of worth, such that the feelings and motives themselves are subject to comparative placement and ranking according to the standards those distinctions provide. In matters of practical thinking, the purpose that one sees in one's desires or feelings or actions serves as the *constitutive end* of that desire, feeling, or action.

The agent's moral feelings, experiences, intuitions, beliefs, and desires are reflective articulations in the medium of a shared symbolic language.[14] There is no sharp line dividing mental acts from outward happenings, or indeed between the mental acts of one individual and those which belong jointly to partners in dialogical activities. The capacity to ask for and give reasons is part of what it is to be a person, a capacity which is itself realized in dialogical acts of expression. You ask me what I'm up to, and I respond: I'm making lunch. Talk of reasons, giving grounds and explaining why, belongs to the public space of social interactions.

Naturalistic theories of practical reasoning which exclude qualitative distinctions don't get us to this. They assume atomism, or methodological individualism, which treats the individual as the locus of practical thinking.[15] Joint and communal forms of activity are explained in terms of the individual atomic selves which constitute the whole. The methodological assumption originates from the belief that only from an impartial standpoint can we speak properly of what is rational.

One difficulty here is that the question of whether a course of action is better or worse than another, whether there are better and worse ways for human beings to live, cuts across the divide (whatever it might be) between reflections on personal meaning and conduct, and thinking which is properly social or political, concerning the best way for everyone to live.

[13]The arts, she wrote, "show us the absolute pointlessness of virtue while exhibiting its supreme importance; the enjoyment of art is a training in the love of virtue. The pointlessness of art is not the pointlessness of a game; it is the pointlessness of human life itself, and form in art is properly the simulation of the self-contained aimlessness of the universe." "On 'God' and 'Good'", Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 84.

[14]See Chapter 3

[15]Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, chap. 3.

Some cultural forms of expression will realize human flourishing better than others, or in certain respects. Naturalistic theories inevitably either leave out matters of importance altogether, or attempt to collapse a vibrant range of intra-cultural goods into a single dimension of ethical significance.[16] We see this in Utilitarianism's attempts to quantify all moral value into the concept of utility. It is also evident in the projects of political liberalism which aim for a universal set of standards by which individual (personal and cultural) forms of moral expression can be realized alongside one another with minimal conflict.

Neglecting qualitative distinctions of worth, such theories cannot adequately understand the ways in which activities, practices and institutions of a culture become meaningful to its participants. This is not to say that we cannot make cross-cultural judgments of better or worse ways of living. It is to say that our prospects for doing so must involve an appreciation of the central part that qualitative distinctions – the strong evaluations we discussed in the previous chapter – play in these appraisals. This point requires further explication.

Strong evaluations as hypergood perspectives

In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor introduces the concept of *hypergood perspectives*.[17] Some of our moral experiences and desires carry ontological commitments, which we have good grounds to take seriously. Among these experiences, *hypergoods* are a class of higher-order qualitative distinction or goods "which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about."[18] Hypergoods "define higher goods, on the basis of which we discriminate among other goods, attribute differential worth or importance to them, or determine when and if to follow them."[19] Examples of hypergoods include the idea of the Good as it figured into Plato's moral philosophy, or the part played by God in Christian theology. For many moderns, the search for justice, or authenticity, or universal love may play the part of the highest good. Hypergoods do not preclude acknowledging other goods. Rather, they provide a standpoint from which other goods are known or judged as goods.

Our hypergood perspectives cannot be justified on independent grounds, from arguments or reasons given from outside the outlook that hypergoods make possible. Hypergoods can seem like implausible metaphysical extravagances given the suppositions of contemporary naturalism; critics of such metaphysical pretensions are correct that there is no way to step outside of the human condition to perceive such matters clearly, without any influence of a distinctly human point of view. The point is not that hypergoods are a way of "reaching up" to

[16] Ibid., 78–80.
[17] Ibid., 63.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

absolute certainty. It is rather that we remain in the thick of human lives and ask ourselves the question posed by the Best Account principle, what better position could we have?[20]

Reasoning is not yet operative in such judgments. Yet to say this seems to give up on something of importance. If hypergood perspectives are a matter of feelings and desires, and necessarily precede reason-giving considerations and rational reflections, then how can reason be important? How could one convince another, who shares little or none of one's own moral outlook, that his view is mistaken and he ought to adopt another? It follows that if one cannot give a reason to another, one may find it no easier to justify one's own moral views. If practical matters are all ultimately matters of non-rational feeling and desire, then what work could reason do here?[21]

The difficulty here, Taylor contends, is another symptom of the pernicious influence of modern epistemology and its myopic focus on the classical model of natural science. Conceived in these terms, even practical thinking requires us to first neutralize our own anthropocentric feelings and responses. Practical arguments ought not rely on such things; we should be able to convince even people who share none of our basic moral intuitions; if we can't do this, then practical reason is powerless.[22] What we have called the machine paradigm of human actions predominates.[23] Reason is powerless because reason plays no explanatory role in human motives and behaviors.

As Taylor argues against this reductive view, our best account of human life is formulated within the qualitative and anthropocentric terms of the personalist paradigm, terms which relate to the intrinsic significance or meaning things have for us. The naturalistic demand that we abscond from all such meanings and abandon our moral intuitions and motivations, asks us to change the subject.

Practical reasoning as a transition between hypergoods

The first step to rehabilitating practical reason is to understand it as a mode of convincing ourselves and others by reasoning in transitions between hypergood perspectives.[24] Practical reasoning does not aim to establish that some moral position or course of action is absolutely correct, only that some position is superior in comparison with another. Practical reasoning is concerned with comparative propositions, which are justified in showing that a move from one view to another constitutes an epistemic gain. Such transitions represent not a positive gain in knowledge but a reduction of error.[25] By analogy, we can imagine entering a room and

[20]The Best Account principle was discussed in chapters 1 & 3
[21]Ibid., 71.
[22]Ibid., 71–72.
[23]See chapter 3 above
[24]Ibid., 72.
[25]Ibid.

feeling that something is amiss. The initial judgment turns out faulty once we move around, take a few different positions and reassess. What we originally saw was just an illusion, or a result of bad lighting, or a poor positioning relative to the oddly-shaped thing we thought we saw. Error-reducing practical thinking aims not to get a grip on a static world of objects or states, but to enable us to move around, to find a good perspective that allows us a clear grasp of what we are seeing.

The "bad" model of practical reasoning based in epistemological and naturalistic perspectives leads us to mistrust comparative arguments. They are too close to the disreputable concept of goods. The naturalistic temperament pushes us to look for *criteria*, which could be established outside the contested perspectives and which could still be decisive. There can be no such thing; *my* moral perspective is defined by my moral intuitions and moral motivations. Set these aside for a rationalist abstraction and I cannot understand moral arguments at all. In addition to this, the differences of perspective which new languages make available to us can help us to make better sense of contradictions or anomalies within our own standpoint, or they make better sense of conflicts between two points of view, or they provide an error-reducing move in the transition from the old perspective to the new.[26] Concepts like human rights or a universal concern with suffering had analogs prior to the modern era, but before we had the languages to express them they could not be meaningful as they are to us today. Once these became meaningful to us, they opened up new moral worlds to us, and made older visions unthinkable to us.

Another basis for naturalistic skepticism about reasoning in transitions between hypergood perspectives originates in a worry about the order of argument.[27] Platonism provides a paradigmatic case. Platonism begins with a description of the order in the world, that is, an order that exists in light of the Good, and then deduces that certain kinds of moral reactions or intuitions are correct on that basis. Accepting Plato's Good or the Christian God has no necessary connection with this form of argument. Our Best Account of the moral world may well include such beings as essential to it; the point is that there is no question of abandoning our moral intuitions in this area. Our acceptance of any hypergood is "connected in a complex way with our being *moved* by it", where the complexity is entailed by the fact that "we never think of these things entirely on our own and monologically, however certain moral views may exhort us to do so."[28]

The essential connection between seeing and feeling in moral matters and our esteem for hypergoods could seem to give easy comfort to reductionists and subjectivists. After all, this is just what they claim: that it is just our feelings and perceptual experiences and emotions that

[26] Charles Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason," in *The Scientific Enterprise*, ed. E. Ullmann-Margalit (Springer, 1992), http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-011-2688-5_12.

[27] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 73.

[28] Ibid.

morality consists in. But that cannot be. What we sense in the experience of being moved by a good is what is valuable in it that moves us, not that it is valuable because it brings about a reaction in us. “We are moved,” says Taylor, “by seeing its point as something infinitely valuable because of our reaction.”[29] We could, of course, be mistaken. But the BA principle allows that we could also be right. The only way to decide is by facing down this or that particular critique. Is there an error-reducing move which can bring us out of our present belief? Can we show that hidden fears, or feelings of guilt and resentment, motivate my beliefs? Whatever resists these challenges is the provisionally best account; there is nothing better for anyone to go on – including the naturalistic critics.[30]

If we are to speak of reasons, we must conceive of them in different terms. Qualitative distinctions do provide reasons, though we cannot understand them as reasons in the way the required by the external model of practical reason. A hypergood

> offers a reason not in [the sense of the modern conception] but as an articulation of what is crucial to the shape of the moral world in one’s best account. It offers a reason rather as I do when I lay out my most basic concerns in order to make sense of my life to you. And we can see right off from this why the perception of a hypergood, while offering a reason, at the same time helps define my identity.[31]

The modern conception of practical thinking offers standards of rationality in terms of what Taylor calls *basic reasons*: giving a reason for a moral principle shows that the act prescribed or commanded by the principle has its prescriptive or imperative force in respect of special property.[32]

It is typical of modern moral theories that they turn to some form of basic reason to organize their account and to justify moral claims derived from it. Utilitarians assert foundational propositions joining basic reasons with a principle of utility. Rawls famously rejected moral intuitionism, which recognizes a plurality of basic moral concerns, in favor of a systematic reduction of moral ends to a list of basic reasons. What is common is the search for a base around which all moral views could be organized in principle.

Such attitudes do not compare favorably to Aristotle’s moral theory, which conceived of human goods as irreducibly diverse and derived from a range of different spheres of activity. Human beings pursue a number of goods and exhibit a variety of virtues. Aristotle does envision a single complete good, that coherent life in which various goods are ordered in the correct proportions, which serves as man’s ultimate end. Yet this notion of the good life does not provide a basic reason, as if it were a proposition expressing a realizable state of affairs

[29]Ibid., 74.
[30]Ibid.
[31]Ibid., 76.
[32]Ibid.

at which we could aim, or reasons which guide our actions along a proper course of conduct. Aristotle could not have been a Utilitarian or a deontic moral theorist, for the good life does not stand in this kind of reason-giving relationship with the practical intellect.[33]

Strong evaluations do not offer basic reasons. Qualitative distinctions can be reasons in the sense "that articulating them is articulating what underlies our ethical choices, leanings, and intuitions. It is setting out just what I have a dim grasp of when I see that A is right, or X is wrong, or Y is valuable and worth preserving, and the like. It is to articulate the moral point of our actions."[34] In moving from external descriptions of actions and basic reasons to the language of qualitative distinctions we are moving into a different language of *thick descriptions*, "a language which is a lot richer and more culturally bound, because it articulates the significance and point that the actions or feelings have within a certain culture."[35] The distinctions picked out by thick concepts do not exhibit the special connection with an agent's will that modern moral philosophy takes as requisite.

This brief sketch of Taylor's thinking on practical reason indicates a some points to keep in mind moving forward. He anticipates Brewer's criticisms of the modern conception of practical thinking, affirming the dialectical conception as an alternative. Let us turn now to Foot's account of rationality to see how it holds up in comparison.

4.4 Naturalizing practical rationality

In chapter 4 of *Natural Goodness*, Foot turns to a problem that afflicts her theory of natural norms. If she is right and natural normativity does indicate a formal pattern of evaluation which applies to human desires, choices, and actions as sure as to the development and behavior of plants and nonhuman animals; if she is right that a human being who does not act to do what is needed for human good is defective; then she faces a skeptical question. It will always be possible to ask "But what if I do not care about being a good human being?"[36]

We must take the skeptic's objection seriously, as it is part of the great "sea change" in human beings, that which sets us apart from plants and animals, that we can critically evaluate our own behavior and rules of conduct.[37] It is worth pausing here to draw attention to the expression *sea change*. We might speak casually of a sea change as a holiday, or perhaps a more profound displacement of employment or location; the meaning suggests a change of scene or venue with some import to it. The expression itself comes from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*,

[33]Ibid., 76–77.
[34]Ibid., 77.
[35]Ibid., 80.
[36]Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 52.
[37]Ibid.

where Ferdinand learns the fate of his father from the spirit Ariel.[38] The Shakespearean resonance of the term indicates a radical transformation, an irrevocable qualitative change from the previous state to the later.[39] I stress this point as a prologue to the point that Foot is making about rationality in human life. Human rational agency includes, but for us is not *just*, some organic functions or properties specifiable in objective, causal or instrumental categories.

Foot further stresses that the nature of the skeptical question is not whether we have reason to be good human beings , but whether the rational human being has *reason to do what the good human being must do*.[40] This may seem a trivial detail, but as we will see, it makes a considerable difference as to whether the topic is how one must *be* in respect of one's character, or whether the concern is with one must *conduct oneself* in respect of one's actions. This suggests that the issue at stake is not in the rationality of having some character traits and lacking others; it is the rationality of *what is done and what is not done* that is at stake in the skeptic's question.

Recall from our previous discussion that Foot follows Aristotle and Aquinas in conceiving of the human being as a rational animal, capable of making choice according to the *logos* or rational principle.[41] Human beings can see *grounds* for acting in some ways and not others, and we can ask *why* we should act in some ways and not others.[42] Both the ability to question and the need for rationalizing grounds belong to our social natures. It is within language, acquired as children and exercised as participants within a cultural form of life, that the topic of acting for reasons comes onto the human agenda. This is how Foot maintains the qualitative break between human persons and those entities, both inanimate objects and nonhuman organisms, which lack this expressive and socially-mediated capacity.

Rationality in practical thinking depends on the exercises of this capacity in recognition of the reasons we are given for the actions done by others, and reasons we recognize as bearing on our own courses of action. The signal problem here is that just this power to criticize and question is what makes the comparison between moral evaluations and natural evaluations seem so inapt.[43] Bobcats and sunflowers do not ask "why should I?". Questioning their reasons and actions is not a part of their lives. The problem is all the more perplexing when moral evaluations require that one do something distasteful or even harmful to his person for the advantage of others. As Foot puts it, moral philosophers cannot shirk this question, and so must "either deny that natural goodness in a human being is like that same goodness in a

[38]Act I, scene 2, lines 397-403

[39]Hursthouse has stressed the significance of this point for Foot's naturalism. See "The Grammar of Goodness in Foot's Ethical Naturalism", in Hacker-Wright, *Philippa Foot on Goodness and Virtue*, 38, 40.

[40]Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 53.

[41]Ibid., 53–57.

[42]Ibid., 56.

[43]Ibid.

bee or a wolf in the way I have suggested, or else dismiss the fact as of no practical importance, asking to be given a reason to do what a good human does."[44]

The logical shape of moral arguments and 'should' statements

I have already mentioned Foot's "Moral Beliefs" and "Moral Arguments" and the challenges they raise to noncognitivist theories of moral argument. Moral arguments need not always "break down", and not in any single well-understood way. There is no element within the agent or subject which determines the meaning of a moral concept or judgment.

What do action-guiding 'should' propositions mean, then? The logic of these statements is given by the structure of rationality itself. But, as another word of caution, this does not mean Foot is calling us to follow Kant into a critique of reason abstracted from all particular content. To the contrary, just because rational agency belongs to a human life it is constrained by the form that such a life characteristically takes. Practical reasons must be both relative to considerations and defeasible in light of the circumstances to which they are relative:

> Every 'should'-statement that gives even *a* reason for ϕ-ing must itself be based on a certain consideration (or considerations) that can be quoted in answer to the question 'Why do you think that that is a reason for ϕ-ing?' … My immediate point is that these considerations (call them reason-giving considerations) may themselves only defeasibly give any reason for acting.[45]

Moral reasons have been typically understood as occupying a special place, being neither relative to other considerations nor defeasible given extenuating circumstances. Kant's categorical imperative may be the most well known and obvious example of this, though the belief that moral rules are universal, exceptionless, and overriding of other considerations is hardly unique to him. No less than Hume and Mill believed that a defense of morality meant a defense of such claims.

As Foot has it, the space of reasons is rather more textured than this. Reasons for human beings are always in some sense relative to other considerations. Some reasons are 'prima facie', initially appearing as reasons only to turn out that they were not reasons at all. Other reasons are relative 'should' statements, emerging as considerations for us given this or that detail of the situation.

Each of these differs from the verdictive or 'all things considered' statement. An all things considered 'should' has a conceptual connection with *practical rationality*, being the kind of thought one entertains on realizing that she has a flu and a temperature of 103 degrees and

[44]Ibid., 57.
[45]Ibid., 58.

concludes that the rational thing to do is stay home in bed. The rational force of the verdictive judgment is neither a property of specially moral 'ought' propositions nor of the agent's will or choices.[46] We should not confuse verdictive judgments with categorical imperatives or any other kind of foundational propositions about what ought to be done.

Foot's point in drawing out these distinctions is that one is not irrational who acts against self-interest for the sake of justice. One who fails to see a moral consideration rightly can be both in rational error and blameworthy for the lapse. The actions of someone who does not ϕ when ϕ-ing is called for by rationality are defective. There is a coincidence of acting according to practical rationality and acting well as a human being (and vice-versa).[47] The question is not whether an agent has reasons, or whether this or that thing is a reason, but in showing how morality can be among an agent's verdictive reasons.

Good action for defeasible reasons

Let us underscore Foot's point that human practical rationality is *neither* rational in respect of a prior theory of reasons *nor* singularly responsive to a special kind of overriding reason with the force of a universal imperative. Morality gives reasons to a human practical will which is appropriately sensitive to them. What sets the standard of appropriate "fit" between reasons and the practical will? That is determined by the orientation of the practical will to the human good.

The defeasibility of reasons for acting follows from the complexity of human life and the incommensurability which follows from the wide range of goods in a human life. Real-life moral dilemmas are rarely as straightforward as philosophical thought-experiments would have them be. We rarely have the clairvoyant grasp of the circumstances envisioned by deontological and consequentialist theorists, able to foresee consequences or lucidly apply the correct moral principle to the case at hand. The blind application of principles of practical reasoning alone, on the belief that we've got the relevant features and possibilities of any and every case sorted in advance, can seem more like arrogance than a perceptive grasp of the moral realities we all face.

Defeasible moral reasons could lead us too easily to the unsavory conclusion that moral standards themselves are malleable, up for negotiation, or even determined by an individual's reasoning. From there it is a short leap to the thought that morality could license bad ends should they prove instrumental to securing a greater good, or taken to its conclusion, something we can set aside when it suits us. The problem is that moral reasons are fungible here *if* one should see them as of a lesser importance, to secure a greater good. Foot is keenly aware of this worry in one of its aspects. I would not be in the right by choosing to act on

[46] Ibid., 59.
[47] Ibid.

selfish desires or my preferences to the neglect of moral reasons. One could not be a vulgar hedonist or egoist and find oneself blessed by the recommendations of practical rationality.

The possibilities for moral argument and moral disagreement turn out to be not like those envisioned by the modern view of practical thinking. They are in fact much broader and more wide-ranging than that view could envision, encompassing much more than just a difference of feeling or motive. They are quite seriously akin to differences of *vision*. Yet it is just this wide-ranging possibility for disagreement that raises another set of worries. The first is a conflict between goods, say when I am torn between an obligation from charity and keeping a promise to my daughter. The second is in the recognition that some goods can only be achieved by doing bad things. Given that a plurality of incompatible goods is part of the human condition and something we must always deal with, and given that the hopes of practical thinking to provide us with secure answers by the route of argument are unlikely, this remains an open difficulty to contend with.

What can we say about this problem? It is entirely conceivable that someone who is "moral" to a fault, exceptionally sensitive to considerations of justice or charity, but insensitive to the considerations of other goods – say he neglects his children, or even has a pathological neglect of his own health – would not *act well*. Given what kind of beings we are, and with special attention to the all too common failings of human character and reasoning ability, it should not surprise us that a human agent can reason badly and reach a mistaken conclusion about her final 'should'; or she might reason well about what ought to be done but fail to respond or act on that reason. There is also a difference between a blameworthy defect of reasoning and a failure that one could not have reasonably prevented. If I fail to do the right thing in assisting a drowning victim because I don't want to miss out on my lunch, I have not acted well. But I could not be held to blame for my failure to save him in the process of saving someone else who was nearer to me, or if I couldn't see the unfortunate soul because his body was concealed behind a large rock while it was otherwise in my power to save his life.

The complexity of moral reality means that we cannot always say that one acts well when acting morally. A "moral" action can be bad action on some particular occasion. Nor can we say that acting well entails acting morally, for it is conceivable that the best thing to do in some circumstance is to neglect morality. No one could be defective or blameworthy who refused to bring his family to ruin for the benefit of an equal number of strangers. This is not to say that a good human being could, or would, habitually act against justice or charity. For one thing we could not readily imagine a virtuous person seeking out cases where acting contrary to morality is the right thing to do. It is also unlikely that a virtuous person would tend to *find herself in* these cases to the extent that they are avoidable. It does not take much imagination to see how a life of vice, including poor choices and unchecked selfish desires could regularly land a person in situations where injustice or cruelty are the best of a bad lot

of options. One who lands in the same kind of case through no fault of her own, and who does an unjust act having no better options, need not act badly in doing so. She has not acted well, but she did not do the unjust act as the unjust person does unjust acts. For the same reason there is nothing inconsistent in two virtuous persons agreeing on the good and disagreeing about what should be done on an occasion for action. Moral disagreement is more complex than an expression of a difference of motive or feeling.

With the distinction in hand between reasons given by final 'shoulds' and the reasons which are relative to considerations on which nothing of important rests, what can be said about the force of moral reasons on the rational human being? How do considerations of the 'moral' virtues, justice and charity, come to stand as reasons for us?

When we evaluate a person's actions or character, we use a range of psychological and evaluative concepts, words like 'kind' and 'cruel', 'selfish' and 'generous', 'courageous' and 'cowardly', and so on. Most of these words come in pairs indicating qualitative distinctions between better and worse, good and bad, noble and base alternatives. The use of these 'thick' or secondary moral words is inseparable from the evaluation of persons and actions. In Foot's terms, the normative patterns which apply to the practical will and human actions belong formally to the patterns exhibited by all living things, and thick moral words belong to our ways of describing these patterns.

In practical thinking, recognizing a reason for acting is recognizing the kinds of qualitative distinctions that our evaluative words refer to. There is a "getting it right" and "getting it wrong" in respect of the goodness of one's choices, desires, and actions. Having a reason is not just having a true proposition. It is that, or at any rate it can be that, but there is a more significant point in this: to have true propositions about good actions or good persons requires, as a necessary condition, the kind of quasi-perceptual or aesthetic mode of awareness which constitutes the human evaluative perspective. If having a concept is analogous to the exercise of a skill, then correctness of an evaluation depends on the reflective awareness of a human agent with the right constitution. One must be the type of being – and the type of person – who understands human goodness in order to properly see it.

The point extends to the structure of practical rationality itself. As Foot has it the practical thinking of the reasoning agent is only a partial determinant of what is rational. We would expect certain contributions from good-functioning perceptual and cognitive powers, so that one can accurately grasp and assess the morally-salient features of a situation. We must also have the right emotional orientations, such that we feel rightly about our choices and actions and can accurately perceive reason-giving considerations. Someone profoundly mistaken, or constitutively insensitive to certain considerations, could be defective in respect of rationality because of that sort of deficit.[48] One can even be blameworthy should one fail

[48]We could plausibly understand a psychopath as bearing this sort of defect. A psychopath is insensitive to

to have knowledge that a good human being ought to have in the circumstances. But the agent's functioning and contributions of his reasoning are only one aspect of rationality. Because there is a way of getting it right which tracks agent-independent distinctions, good functioning is *aimed at* the evaluative reality beyond the agent's own epistemic and practical capacities.

A second feature of this story is that there is no basic distinction between specially moral kinds of 'ought' and a remainder of non-moral 'ought' statements. This invites us to recall G. E. M. Anscombe's argument that modern ethics would do well to set aside the specially moral use of 'ought' and its companion concepts, using instead a richer and finer-grained vocabulary of value words.[49] In the present context, such an argument could well apply to practical thinking and its excellence. There are many things which give a human being reasons for acting. Specially moral considerations, the demands of justice or charity being typical examples, are only one kind of reason-giving considerations.

Foot herself denies that there is a distinction to make between the specially moral, indicating a distinctive set of obligations and duties, and the class of non-moral 'oughts' which provide reasons in other contexts. She argues that "moral" considerations – which really means other-regarding considerations, like those given by justice and charity – have no special force within a human person's practical deliberations. A moral reason is a reason for a human being who is properly responsive to reasons as the human being is responsive to reasons.

Because there is no bright line separating a moral reason from a non-moral reason, it follows that the proper topic of practical thinking (and of ethical thinking, if there is a difference here) is not *right action* or *moral action* conceived as acting out of duty or on a universally binding imperative. It is the distinction between *acting well* and *acting badly* as the human being acts.

4.5 Agency and practical rationality for human beings

I want to pick up a thread left dangling from the discussion of human agency in the previous chapter. It is worth drawing attention to the ramifications of Foot's move here, for it highlights some important connections between practical rationality and human agency as well as for our ideals of morality itself. In the previous chapter, I argued that the autonomy of the human agent, as well as its moral worth, undertake a different configuration in her ethical program. The shift in practical rationality's content and its relationship to morality

the emotional life of others, and so lacks the capacity to appreciate and respond appropriately to others.

[49] G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (January 1, 1958): 1–19, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3749051.

is one further implication of a transition in ethical concern from a disengaged self to human being qua rational animal. The kind of being we are as reason-responsive agents carries downstream implications for our understanding of what it is to be (practically) rational as a human being.

The consequence of this is a substantial departure from the usual, broadly Humean or Kantian characterization of rational norms and rational action as well as the relation between the two. Against Humean orthodoxy, rationality cannot be thought of as cold calculation in the service of hot passions with no specially ethical or moral content of its own. Against Kantian moral theories, rationality cannot stand as the universal stamp of approval over a person's desires and actions with no concrete connections to one's actual motives and interests.

It is striking how far Foot deviates from these ideals. As she writes, there is "a mistake of *strategy* involved in trying to fit the rationality of moral action into [hedonistic or egoistic theories of rationality]: such an enterprise implying that we can first come to a theory of rational action, and then try as best we can to slot in the rationality of acts of justice and charity."[50] Practical rationality for human beings must be answerable to human goodness, not the other way around. Although she does not put it quite this way, one way to frame this transformation of rationality to an intrinsically ethical ideal is to ask the question of why rationality is *significant* for us, in the qualitative sense that rationality is *worthwhile* or *important* for us as human beings.

Rationality can matter to us because we are kinds of beings for whom things *can matter* in connection with our own choices and actions. This fact precedes and is a condition on rationality. Foot's concept of significance or meaning is wider than just this. That natural norms exist, objectively, suggests that it is not just for linguistic convenience that we can say that it *matters* to an individual organism that it not be defective in respect of its life-cycle and life-activities; this is not the sort of "mattering" or significance that requires a conscious agent to apprehend it and make it explicit in thought.[51] The point is rather that the specifically human, reflective, agential sort of "mattering" that we speak of in connection with choice and action is a special case of the more general type. But Foot is arguing that practical rationality must include qualitative distinctions of worth among its ends, taking into account the goodness of the human life-form. In being practically rational an individual human being likewise demonstrates a form of characteristic excellence. Human practical thinking is shot through with evaluative distinctions of worth. The goodness of human beings outruns the concept of rationality.

A significant barrier to understanding the salience of this point emerges in the problems

[50]Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 10.
[51]Ibid., 33.

Foot herself grappled with in her earlier writings. In her widely-known "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives", she famously argued that the rationality of moral action is not settled merely by showing that the truth of moral judgment is not dependent on an agent's desires or interests.[52] That much is true of a great many action-guiding and reason-giving propositions, like belonging to a sports club or playing a game of chess. The impartial truth of such propositions does not also mean that there is a reason for the agent to act as the rules prescribe.[53]

This point brings us around to the problem discussed previously, which is the tension between impartial moral judgments and the concrete motives given by an agent's desires and interests. Given that the latter, but not the former, seem to have efficacy in causing action, only these considerations can make moral action practically rational. This is supported by the thoughts that, firstly, desire and interest often are reason-giving considerations, and secondly, many philosophers think that these have a special power to explain human action.[54] That second thought she finds dubious:

> For after all an action can be explained by all sorts of causes, as for instance (a) habit, (b) a tendency to mimic the actions of others, (c) something significant about the occasion on which one first did what one is now going to do, (d) the fact that it is substitutionally representing some other action, or (e) even something as far out as post-hypnotic suggestion. What tells us that conscience cannot explain action?[55]

To explain one's action by a consideration of right and wrong can be a true explanation, and we have no compelling reason to suppose that acting on conscience requires explanation in terms of belief plus desire (or some other motivating attitude) in order to be an explanation of what someone does.[56] The problem is not showing how moral beliefs can explain action but in how a moral belief can give an agent a reason to do or not do it.[57]

The meat of the issue then is to say how someone who acts (morally) wrongly also acts contrary to reason. Can we show, in other words, that considerations of right and wrong belong to the list of rationalizing considerations? If rationality is not the "stamp of approval" over all judgments or actions under the label of "moral", then it seems that we can. This is because rationality is already a virtue, part of human goodness, which is to say, it already matters to us that we are responsive to certain kinds of considerations beyond our own desires and interests.

[52]Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives"; Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 60.
[53]Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 60.
[54]Ibid., 61.
[55]Ibid.
[56]Ibid.
[57]Ibid., 62.

More importantly, Foot is not arguing that practical reasoning and standards of practical rationality are *derived from* 'dead' evaluative facts, whether those of survival or those of morality, which must become 'live' in the practical thinking of a human being. Her claim is that this very distinction, between normative characteristics and the causal-objective properties of living things, is faulty.[58] However influential, the schematic of neutrally-characterized normative properties 'reaching out' to regulate the moral goodness of the agent's acts of willing, or in her character traits, or her feelings, is no part of the neo-Aristotelian story. These psychological characteristics already partake in rationality though – and this is the crucial point – rationality itself, those ideals and standards connoting that to which we are answerable, is already "in the things", not apart from them.[59]

This makes a difference to the model of rationality that can be applied to cases of practical and ethical thinking. It is not as if Foot is asking us to begin with an account of the virtues and then proceed to explain the whole range of moral motives and actions, perhaps by reference to the duties or obligations that virtues demand of our actions, terms of a theoretical account of the virtue concepts (and nothing but those).[60] Practical thinking as we are presently considering it is not that sort of account.[61] Among other things, to be rational requires more than having the right beliefs or the right thoughts. It requires having the right feelings and right desires, minimally, and perhaps involves more than this (for example, as Taylor discusses in respect of bodily posture and comportment to our shared social world). Proper recognition and responsiveness to reasons is a feature which belongs to the human *kind*, to our characteristics ways of speaking and interacting with one another, feeling and experiencing, and even desiring. Accordingly, the virtues, as characteristic excellences of these attributes, play a very different part, within a very different model of rationality, than the parts played by duty or utility in traditional moral theories.

What of the objection that the norms of practical reasoning can be identified narrowly with the norms regulating survival and reproduction in living things? Foot does seem to say this relative to non-human animals. Yet she is conscious that a shift of this argument to human beings requires additional considerations. This transition to human concerns can be approached from several directions.

First, the norms regulating patterns of development and activity in *human beings*, even

[58] See the discussion of this in the previous chapter.

[59] Again, this can be true on either a Humean 'desire-first' or a Kantian 'rationality-first' reading.

[60] Criticisms of this sort are advanced in Robert B. Louden, "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (1984): 227–36, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20014051; Kurt Baier, "Radical Virtue Ethics," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (September 1, 1988): 126–35, doi:10.1111/j.1475-4975.1988.tb00117.x; J. B. Schneewind, "The Misfortunes of Virtue," *Ethics* 101, no. 1 (October 1, 1990): 42–63, doi:10.1086/293259; Copp and Sobel, "Morality and Virtue."

[61] Annette Baier, "Doing Without Moral Theory?" in *Postures of the Mind*, NED - New edition, Essays on Mind and Morals (University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 228–45, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttt6mv.17; Hursthouse, "Applying virtue ethics" in Hursthouse, Lawrence, and Quinn, *Virtues and Reasons*.

in connection with survival and reproduction, are qualitatively transformed by our socially-mediated powers of language. Language and sociality are as much a part of the natural history of the human species as are any anatomical or physiological facts about us, and in recognizing that fact we must revise our understanding of everything else that follows for our motives and inclinations, even those which appear in other members of the animal kingdom. This connection between rational thought and human nature is quite intimate. As a result it can be hard to draw a line between the two, a fact which can yield apparently paradoxical results. What is natural for us qua individual human beings is that we can reach beyond our nature. This is a difficult thought, and I suspect that it

As discussed previously, even John McDowell's otherwise sympathetic reading of Aristotelian naturalism does not seem to entirely drop the requirement of disinterested rationality.[62] McDowell rightly stresses the transformative powers of practical thinking with the memorable example of a rational wolf who has acquired language and become aware of his "wolf-nature" as a source of inclinations which he can call into question. He is surely right to emphasize, as I have here, the radical distance that the practical *logos* introduces between beings who possess it and those who live by inclination alone.

Yet the story itself raises an important question: can we conceive of a rational wolf? Is it possible to imagine that just any kind of being, or any kind of living organism whatever, could acquire practical *logos*?[63] My concern here is that the story itself supposes we require a disengaged self to make sense of rationality, that sort of abstract rational being which is agnostic to *who, exactly* realizes it in a particular material body. We might imagine the free-floating disinterested rational agent haunting a wolf's body like a ghost, as it could a human being, a Martian, or some future robot.

It is far from clear, however, that a practical intellect can be abstracted away from the concrete form and function of the individual human beings who possess it. To say that it *can* is to assume that rationality *per se* can be disentangled from its active realization by the activities of flesh-and-blood human beings. Yet if Foot is right about human agency, then this seems a dubious holdover from moral philosophy's history. What she actually says about the rationality of human beings does not indicate that rationality can be conceived as such an abstract, disengaged being.

Given McDowell's account of the practical *logos* in human beings, I wonder then what we can say about his evocative metaphor of the *logical space of reasons* as something distinct from the natural world occupied by living animals. My question is whether rational norms can be conceived as truly autonomous from biological "first nature" in the way that the distinction

[62] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."

[63] Compare to Wittgenstein's remark: "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him." Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part II, section xi, 223. Human speech and reasoning supposes a great deal of shared intelligibility between human beings, only some of which is expressly available to our reflective powers.

seems to demand. To distinguish sharply between the "first nature" of human organisms and our contingently-acquired, language-mediated, socially-constituted "second nature" seems to demand that we superimpose a distinct domain of normative facts on the normatively-inert realm of nature.[64]

The point of all this is to ask, if we are taking Foot's case seriously, is there any basis in her argument to support this as a reading? If the social, linguistic and cultural facts about us are facts about the way human beings live, as Foot interprets those facts, then the distinction between the space of causes and the normative space of reasons must be rethought. At the very least the distinction between causes and norms must take into account both (1) that the normative is already continuous with the natural on Foot's view (as well as Michael Thompson's) and (2) that natural norms depend on prior evaluations, implying that moral norms are grounded in human goodness. That is to say, to belong to the space of reasons is not to thereby be a function of something abstract, non-natural, or autonomous from nature *or* natural goods.

An organism possessing practical reason is not an organism to which reasoning is added, as if it somehow stumbled its way into a supernatural domain of normativity. Human powers of reasoning do not merely depend on but consist in our social natures and the uses of language which mediate and constitute them. We are organisms who have, and who are characterized by, our powers of reasoning. We can take stock of our motives and inclinations and raise questions about them.

But there is an important upshot to all of this, which is that normative rationality is not thereby cut off from all considerations beyond itself. Rationality, being a concrete ability possessed by a particular kind of life-form, is answerable to the goodness of the human life-form. Both our motives and our rational thoughts can be appraised as excellent or defective in respect of human goodness. It is not rationality alienated from concrete embodiment or motive that places a stamp of approval over our desires and actions. Rationality itself is beholden to standards beyond itself.

What I have tried to make clear here is that disengaged practical will, indeed the moral philosopher's long-standing and wide-spread interest in practical thinking in the abstract, is not part of Foot's story. She is distancing herself from such views. For her the goodness at-

[64] McDowell may have changed his mind on this interpretation in more recent writings. In a recent exchange with Hubert Dreyfus, McDowell claims that Dreyfus has misunderstood his (McDowell's) notion of 'mindedness', of conceptual thought, as being equivalent to the expressly propositional thought, which Dreyfus does, but McDowell does not, distinguish from non-conceptual forms of skill-usage. For McDowell, Dreyfus's non-conceptual skills are already expressions of conceptual powers. See Hubert L. Dreyfus, "The Return of the Myth of the Mental," *Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (August 1, 2007): 352–65, doi:10.1080/00201740701489245; John McDowell, "What Myth?" *Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (2007): 338–51, doi:10.1080/00201740701489211. I confess that I am not entirely clear on whether there is more than a terminological difference between Dreyfus's non-conceptual 'coping' and McDowell's more-expansive notion of conceptual activities as to include activities which are not classically mental or propositional.

tributed to the human practical will is due to its concrete exercises in the individual human *as a member of the human species*. The intrinsically evaluative structure of human agency means that choices, desires, feelings, and actions are good first as human characteristics and only then as reflectively-apprehended qualities. Foot, like Taylor, is developing a dialectical conception of practical thinking which expressly involves social, language-mediated dimensions of human behavior.

4.6 The sovereignty of goodness over the human practical intellect

If this line of thinking is right, then it heads off one problem that Taylor's account of practical reflection could pose to the Footian theory. Foot stresses that the human grasp of reasons requires that we acquire and learn to use concepts of persons, actions, giving reasons, asking for reasons, and questioning the grounds of a choice or action while situated within a cultural form of life. The shared horizons of human meanings open up this dimension to us. Taylor's concern about the alienated, disengaged, monological thinker who is the star of the received picture of practical thinking is not applicable at least in this.

It could still be possible to object that the Footian practical thinker, though not a hedonistic or egoistic reasoner, would still have trouble distinguishing between a self-interested motive and an objective reason for acting. Even though practical thinking aims at the good, how could the distinction be made between what is desired and the desirable? This is already built into the account; the desirable belongs to human goodness. Of course, Foot's account is not alone in facing this objection. Any good Humean or Nietzschean skeptic could press the worry that any normative theory speculating about 'oughts' rather than attending to the facts of motivation is a flight of fancy. At least a neo-Aristotelian account is equipped to acknowledge the relevance of agent motivations for practical reasoning.

In fact these two features of Footian practical thinking, the distinction between the desire and the desirable and the intrinsically evaluative orientation of human practical thinking, compare favorably with Taylor's development of these ideas. This can be brought out in comparison with Warren Quinn's papers on the topic, which proved so influential on Foot's thinking in this area.

We can recall first of all Taylor's analysis of human agency, which precludes the possibility of explaining moral emotions like shame and fear as bare responses which entail no ontological commitments beyond the agent's sensibility.[65] Such emotions cannot be characterized without recourse to the objects which evoke them and make them intelligible. These feelings themselves can be appraised as rational or irrational according to whether their ob-

[65] "What is human agency?" and "Self-interpreting animals" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*.

jects merit the response. The object of shame must be shameful, the object of fear must be frightening or dangerous.

Quinn argues that certain objects of desire can cause trouble for neo-Humean theories of rationality because, in their indifference, these theories tolerate or even recommend aiming at them.[66] What are we to say about rationality if it could even license, let alone recommend, nasty activities as good or apt objects of pursuit? Suppose, for example, that someone enjoys and desires being nasty to other people. He spreads lies that put his "friends" at odds with each other, and has good reason to think that he can get away with it without being exposed. What is important about being rational if it recommends manipulative games (say) as a fit object of pursuit?[67]

This raises a second question which we must address before proceeding to an answer. "What *kind* of thing is the excellence of practical rationality, whether we adopt a moralized or amoralized version of it?" Quinn asks.[68] It is first of all a quality of character, as indicated by responses we might give to the question "What was the character of…?", to which we might respond "She was devoted to religion", or "She was a coward", and so on. "Rationality, no less than aestheticism or bravery," he writes, "is a quality whose actualization gives shape to the personal character of our choices and lives."[69] Prudence and recklessness give a person a certain character, and so it is for one who takes his good as the maximal satisfaction of self-regarding desires, indifferent to their nastiness.

Yet it is too hasty to infer that the character of such a person's rationality is itself nasty. Even an egoistic or hedonistic person has other desires which are consistent with morality, desires which his rationality would lead him to maximally satisfy. The problem with his rationality is not that it is nasty but that it is *indifferent to nastiness*.[70] Rationality which is indifferent to nastiness, to the odious, disgusting, offensive, and so on, being itself a quality of character, shares in those same faults.[71] A rationality indifferent to the shameful character of one's ends is itself *shameless*. The shameless part of rationality will not be manifest in someone who lacks shameful desires, but it will be latent in the quality itself. This must count against the neo-Humean ideal of rationality as the excellence, the most perfect expression, of practical reason.[72]

This is strikingly similar to Taylor's analysis. Emotions like shame provide a confounding problem for 'colorless' theories of rationality that first step away from all feeling before proceeding into matters of reflection. If rationality is to be the "light by which" other virtues

[66]"Rationality and the human good" in Quinn, *Morality and Action*.
[67]Ibid., 214–15.
[68]Ibid., 215.
[69]Ibid.
[70]Ibid.
[71]Ibid., 215–16.
[72]Ibid., 216.

of character and action show up to us as excellences, then a rationality which is indifferent to shame, which is *shameless*, cannot play that role.

In another paper Quinn argues that the functionalist attitudes which contemporary noncognitivists place in the role of the concept of desire are inadequate to the part.[73] The conception of a "desire" as a functional state which motivates an agent to action misses out on the crucial part played by the estimation of the value of what is desired. If a desire were simply a functional state which rationalized an action while making no reference to the intrinsic value that the agent sees in the action, it could not accommodate all that we mean when we talk about desiring and wanting. What is in fact desired by someone is not the same thing as what merits desire, what is worth wanting. Besides standing as an inadequate concept of desire itself, such attitudes cannot rationalize actions; they lack the necessary orientation to the goods which can rationalize a choice or action. Practical thinking must have its own subject matter. It cannot be the application of theoretical reasoning to practical questions.

The cognitive element of appraisal that necessarily belongs to emotions and desires need not be immediately motivating in the way that the noncognitivist argues. To recognize that a valuable end requires us to do something is to recognize that we would act badly if we did not do it.[74] Reasons provide the light by which the good shows up to us, by which a normative standard appear for us, disclosed in whatever states of feeling or desire make the evaluation available to us. A cognitive orientation to the good does this rationalizing work. Quinn's account tracks rather neatly with the distinctions Taylor draws within the concept of desire.[75] Taylor's strong evaluations draw evaluative discriminations between what is higher and lower, better and worse, worthy and base, within our motives for acting.

This proves a useful response to the worry that Foot's account of practical rationality as a human virtue is inadequate compared to Taylor's account of culturally-situated reasoning in transitions. It isn't as if Foot is trying to account for reasons for acting without reference to any concept of agency or a capacity for choice and decision. There are no normatively-inert facts which somehow impose on human agents.

While Foot's version of practical rationality finds its grounds in human nature, her account still makes recourse to concepts of shame and shamelessness, of promise-keeping, of the dignity of persons, and even characteristic moral feelings and emotions. She is no less interested in the irreducibly social dimensions of human life, the way in which evaluative concepts arise and become meaningful in human ways of living. Human needs include keeping one's promises even when one is not forced to do so, and even when a greater good might

[73]"Putting rationality in its place" in Quinn, *Morality and Action*.

[74]Ibid., 252.

[75]I am referring to the distinction between first-order and second-order desires, and within the latter, between weak and strong evaluations, in "Self-interpreting animals", in *Human Agency and Language*.

hang on breaking the promise. This is as much a universal, or at least an invariant if talk of universals is out, as experiences of shame. Yet the institution of promising is not separable from the import we ascribe to promise keeping. The rationality of keeping a promise consists in seeing rightly that an act of infidelity merits the ascription of shame.

Perhaps other beings could get on without promising, and it would be no part of their morality. For us, for our needs as we actually are, we need that others keep their promises, and we must keep our own. The normative grounds for this fact just are the facts about our life-form. We could not get on as we get on, living as social beings in communities, without some expectation that we will not be killed or robbed blind while we sleep. We could not imagine a human life without shame, or where shamelessness were not something to be condemned. That latter statement should not be interpreted as a specially philosophical proposition. It is a remark about the ethology of our species.

4.7 Conclusion

One conclusion of my arguments on Foot's behalf is that her account of practical rationality is not reducible to a vulgar form of egoistic practical thinking. There are two reasons that this fact is important.

One of them is to head off objections that might stem from a tendency in contemporary moral psychology, which takes biological self-interest in survival and reproduction, or that of group flourishing, as its basis.[76] Despite the growing influence of this sort of reductively-naturalistic explanation of morality, it would be a mistake to read Foot's account as attempting any such thing. The rationality of action, in her view, includes ideals and standards that reductive naturalist explanations cannot take seriously. Human beings may be motivated by considerations of survival and reproduction (it would be hard to argue that we aren't); the point is that even these motives, in us, take on a different significance than in our animal counterparts, and we are moved by more besides these.

There is something intrinsic to the *person*, not her genes, not natural selection pressures, but the person and her comprehension of what matters to her, which escapes such theories. The reasons that a human agent discerns and can act upon are not mere motivational states, attitudes, or dispositions within an individual. *There are reasons*, which depend on the form

[76]The kind of evolutionary or biological moral theories discussed, for example, in J. L. Mackie, "The Law of the Jungle: Moral Alternatives and Principles of Evolution," *Philosophy*, October 1978, doi:10.1017/S0031819100026322; F. B. M. de Waal et al., *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*, The University Center for Human Values Series (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2006); Christopher Boehm, *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame* (New York: Basic Books, 2012); William FitzPatrick, "Morality and Evolutionary Biology," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2016, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/morality-biology/.

and nature of human beings, which are recognized and acted upon by members of the human species.

A second and more interesting reason concerns Bernard Williams' influential objection that Aristotelian ethics, that, in being concerned with the question "how should I live?", the ancient way of doing ethics is "incurably egoistic."[77] Since Plato and Aristotle took it as their aim to give to each person a justification for why she ought to take ethical considerations as her own, Williams labels them as a kind of *formal egoism*.[78]

Given what we've seen of them, Foot and Taylor do each offer formally egoistic theories of practical rationality. They do set out to show to each person why there are certain considerations *for* him or her that are not based on considerations of their own desires or self-interest. However, there is an important shift of key in their respective moral psychologies which must be brought out here.

For Taylor, and I have argued that Foot shares in this, not all desires are merely personal, subjective attitudes. At least some of our desires are responsive to standards which are not exhausted by the motivating inclination itself. Yet these standards are not exactly external to one's motives in the sense Williams indicates as an "outside perspective", a standpoint beyond any and all particular desires and interests. Some moral standards do transcend the bare attitude through which we come to know them and have them, but they are not thereby accessible from an absolute "view from nowhere". Such standards require the involvement of an experiencing human subject without being reducible to those involvements. Moreover, these standards are impossible to detach from our historical, social, and cultural situation.

As for Foot, her account of practical rationality differs enough from orthodox Humean, Kantian, and consequentialist theories of practical reason to avoid Taylor's worries about modern theories of reason. Foot is not offering an externalist account of practical reasons *understood in that way*. The question of reasons-externalism aside, she is not thereby committed to an internalist account of rationality which takes the agent's motives as basic. Her account of reasons and practical reasoning is more subtle than this. Again the comparison with Taylor proves helpful. Like Taylor, Foot argues that reason runs *through* the agent's first-person understanding while *reaching out* to self-transcending standards.

While they may each be formally egoistic in this mitigated sense, it isn't clear that Williams' initial concerns about egoism hold water for Foot and Taylor. There is a middle ground between internal motivating reasons which appear only from a particular perspective and external considerations knowable from an outside point of view. These accounts of

[77] See his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 11–14, 49–52.

[78] Williams distinguishes formal egoism from three different sorts of ethical egoism. One asserts that each person ought to pursue his or her own self-interest; a second claims that this state of affairs is *what ought to happen*; a third version holds that *it is for the best* that people pursue their own self-interest. Formal egoism is not exactly ethical egoism, but as we will see, it does raise an important problem in this vein.

reasoning are better understood as what Talbot Brewer called a dialectical account of practical thinking. The agent *sees the point in* what she is doing when she acts. In doing this agents do not passively respond to external stimulus, rational or otherwise; nor do they act on internal dispositions alone. Reason-responsiveness begins with the agent's feelings, emotions, and intentions as modes of intuition, or quasi-perceptual grasp, of the intuited objects. But it only *begins* there. The standards which it recognizes and which move the person reach beyond the bare feelings and inclinations.

The binary contrast between *my* internal motives and the external standpoint beyond particular motivations, which Williams believes to be so central to ethical thinking, is countered by appealing to a different form of objective standards of validity. Williams' contrast, while important, is not quite what Taylor has in mind. If I am right about Foot, much the same goes for her story.

Even with all this said, however, we haven't yet discharged Williams' concerns. The central aim of ancient Greek ethics, as Williams puts it, is not to impose standards upon a person from the outside but rather to understand the self as it truly is. With that understanding in hand, one will see that the virtues (say) are not considerations external to the self but rather goods which are rational to pursue given how one is.[79]

So far so good. This is consistent with what we have discussed in Foot and Taylor. But a problem remains in the vicinity of egoism:

> A center of doubt gathers, however, on the point that when Aristotle seems most removed from modern ethical perceptions, it is often because the admired agent is disquietingly concerned with himself.[80]

At this point, we are stepping away from rationality and entering into questions about *what* considerations come to bear on a rational human agent. Thus, while a plausible account of moral rationality can be determined from a broadly Aristotelian outlook, such that a human agent's rationality can and indeed must include certain ethical considerations – such as those given by justice and charity, among the other-regarding virtues – it seems difficult to square two further details.

First, there is not likely to be a single ethical life which can be specified for each individual human being, simply because we can and do question as well as actively create our lives. Second, within the life of each person there are going to be conflicts between ethical considerations and our other aims. As Williams puts it in distinguishing the modern predicament from that of the ancients,

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[79] Ibid., 33–34.

[80] Ibid., 35.

> We understand – and most important, the agent can come to understand – that the agent's perspective is only one of many that are equally compatible with human nature, all open to various conflicts within themselves and with other cultural aims.[81]

Although the accounts of practical rationality I've discussed here do make some headway in showing how an agent's motivating dispositions can coincide with ethical ideals as viewed from an "outside perspective", that is, independent of particular perspectives and their desires and interests, there remain questions. In the following chapter, I will discuss how the account of the self and the ideals of ethics may intersect, before turning to the question of the ethical life, or lives, in the concluding chapter.

[81] Ibid., 52.

Chapter 5

The self and its goods

Foot and Taylor are in substantial (though not perfect) agreement that a human life is a life of situated, bodily and expressive agency which is inseparable from a shared sense of intrinsic goodness. This alone challenges several central tenets of *modern moral philosophy*: a prevailing theoretical and methodological tendency to address the question, "What should one do?", and the corresponding task of determining rules or principles, or a theory which generates obliging practical conclusions, in answer to the question.[1] The ancient Greeks, to whom we are still indebted for much of our thinking on ethics, asked a different question: *How is it good to live?* I will adopt Bernard Williams' usage and call this Socrates's question.[2] My thesis in this chapter is that the methodological aim shared by Foot and Taylor is to reorient ethics towards Socrates's question.

A closer analysis of Foot's virtue theory and Taylor's concept of strong evaluations reveals similar aims in regard to the basic approach to doing ethics. Both concepts are articulated within an anthropology of human individuals which serves as the starting point for ethical theory. Both posit an intrinsic relationship between the identity of the human agent and one's actions, especially in respect of the tight relation between one's feelings and motives and one's sense of the good. It is this evaluation of the whole person, inclusive of her actions, that constitutes the subject of ethical thinking.[3] In these respects, Foot and Taylor share similar, though not identical, methodological strategies for the doing of ethics and evaluating actions more generally.

The main challenges to this reading turn on some ambiguities in the concept of a virtue and a theory of the virtues. In this chapter I will respond to some objections which seem to set an Aristotelian theory against Taylor's agent-centric account of strong evaluations. I will

[1] Following Anscombe's usage in her "Modern Moral Philosophy."

[2] Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, chap. 1.

[3] Though the word "person" must be used carefully here. As I am using the word, unless further qualified, it does not refer to the logically distinct person, the Self independent of its living body, which is so central to Anglo-American moral philosophy.

argue that Foot's ethical theory is not only defensible against these challenges but, consistent with the arguments from earlier chapters, it is developed with many of these worries in mind.

5.1 Socrates's question: on the theoretical task and methodological aims of moral philosophy

In recent decades, modern moral philosophy has found itself contested by defenders of virtue approaches to moral philosophy. The 'virtue turn' in contemporary ethics has taken seriously attempts to do moral philosophy with the virtues of character as their starting point. Although it is easy to identify Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics as exemplars of virtue approaches to ethics, there is in general some confusion about just what a virtue approach involves. Critics have worried that virtue theories do not provide action guidance as a moral theory should; that virtue approaches to ethics do not properly address the need to specify the rules or principles regulating moral conduct; that virtue approaches are not substantially different from other normative ethical theories because they employ character traits in the role that duty plays for the Kantian ethicist or expected utility for the utilitarian.[4]

Part of the difficulty is that virtue approaches to ethics come in several varieties.[5] In recent years a wide range of canonical moral philosophers have been given a reading as a virtue ethicist. However, when Hume, Kant, and even Nietzsche can all be read as virtue ethicists, there is a risk of trivializing the significance of the virtue turn.[6]

The proliferation of interpretive approaches notwithstanding, the worry that concerns me here is the tendency to read virtue approaches as providing a basic concept or system of concepts which could fill in for the deontological notions of duties or obligations, or a conse-

[4]Louden, "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics"; Schneewind, "The Misfortunes of Virtue"; Hursthouse, "Applying virtue ethics" in Hursthouse, Lawrence, and Quinn, *Virtues and Reasons*; Copp and Sobel, "Morality and Virtue"; Chappell, "Virtue Ethics in the Twentieth Century."

[5]Michael Slote, "Some Advantages of Virtue Ethics," in *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. Owen J. Flanagan and Amélie Rorty (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1990); Justin Oakley, "Varieties of Virtue Ethics," *Ratio* 9, no. 2 (September 1, 1996): 128–52, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9329.1996.tb00101.x; Copp and Sobel, "Morality and Virtue"; Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Clarendon Press, 2005); Julia Driver, "The Virtues and Human Nature," in *How Should One Live?*, ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford University Press, 1998), http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0198752342.001.0001/acprof-9780198752349; Roger Crisp, "A Third Method of Ethics?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 90, no. 2 (2015): 257–73; Karen Stohr, "Contemporary Virtue Ethics," *Philosophy Compass* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 22–27, doi:10.1111/j.1747-9991.2006.00004.x.

[6]Robert B. Louden, "Kant's Virtue Ethics," *Philosophy* 61, no. 238 (October 1986): 473–89, doi:10.1017/S0031819100061246; Thomas H. Brobjer, "Nietzsche's Affirmative Morality: An Ethics of Virtue," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 26, no. 1 (2003): 64–78, doi:10.1353/nie.2003.0020; Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*; Christine Swanton, *The Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche* (Malden, MA: Wiley/Blackwell, 2015). I do not mean to claim that these readings are incorrect or in themselves misleading.

quentialist principle of utility.[7] The virtues provide a source of basic reasons, rationalizing the agent's choices and actions, and thereby providing an account of what ought to be done. This *ought* is used in a specially moral sense, underscoring the foundational connection between the imperative directing one's actions and the rationalizing states or acts of the moral subject.[8]

If this is the 'default' perspective of the moral philosopher, then Socrates's question metamorphoses from the question of the good life, *how is it good or best to live?*, to the question of *how one ought to be*. That subtle change of wording keeps the moral 'ought' at center stage. Instead of choosing rightly in conduct, the moral agent instead chooses rightly in matters of the character traits one ought to possess or acquire. But this makes the virtues superfluous or uninteresting; we could just as well speak of duties or maximizing utility in their stead.[9] If being courageous is part of human goodness, then this could be interpreted as a claim that one has an obligation to do courageous actions, or that the virtues are states which maximize well-being for the agent or for the agent's social group. If virtue ethics isn't to collapse into deontological (duty-based) or teleological (good-directed) theories of right action, something must distinguish virtue approaches from act-centric approaches. A related difficulty is that the concern with character seems to exclude the kind of action-guidance we want from an (act-centric) ethical theory. Talk of virtuous persons, or courageous or temperate or just persons, or the virtues themselves doesn't give us any indication of how we should behave when faced with a real moral choice or dilemma.[10] The topic of action and the evaluation of action seems off the agenda. What is left that deserves the title of an ethical theory?

Virtue theory and virtue ethics

There is a crucial difference between having a virtue *theory*, which is possible to locate or reconstruct in most any major moral theorist, and adopting a *virtue approach to ethics*. It is not enough to call an ethical system a virtue approach just because it plausibly involves a virtue theory or because that theory is put to use in generating lists of duties, obligations, right actions, or some other basic connection between specially moral rules or principles and the agent's acts.

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[7]Baier, "Doing Without Moral Theory?"; I take it that Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, chap. 3 is effectively arguing this same point.

[8]The canonical source of this point is Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy"; much the same point is made in Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality"; "Moral beliefs" and "Moral arguments" in Foot, *Virtues and Vices*; and Foot, "Goodness and Choice."

[9]Louden, "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics"; Baier, "Radical Virtue Ethics"; Schneewind, "The Misfortunes of Virtue"; Gary Watson, "On the Primacy of Character," in *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. Owen J. Flanagan and Amélie Rorty (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1990).

[10]Copp and Sobel, "Morality and Virtue"; Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*; "Applying virtue ethics" in Hursthouse, Lawrence, and Quinn, *Virtues and Reasons*.

Modern ethics has tended to suppose that understanding the right in action gets us the good in a life, or that at any rate that it secures the good to the extent moral philosophers have anything to say about goodness at all.[11] This view is complicated, of course, by its many historical sources. The liberal approach has complex roots in the Reformation, in the liberal tradition inaugurated by Locke and Grotius, and in the Romantic protest where Rousseau is an influential point of departure. Kant's moral theory looms large in the background, and more recently the influence of figures like Rawls, Dworkin, and Habermas have helped to set the agenda in this direction.

Given the rationale for the development of liberal theories and the decline of thinking about virtue or goodness, some critics have worried that is not clear just what it means to say that the concern is with right action rather than the good, or that the good is cordoned off from the proper scope of morality. It is not a coincidence here that Schneewind[12] objects to virtue approaches to ethics on much the same grounds that Will Kymlicka[13] presses his worries about Taylor's revival of goodness as a serious topic in moral philosophy. To defuse some of this confusion, it is helpful to see that there are at least two ways such propositions about goodness and its place in moral philosophy could be interpreted. Both are intimately connected with a picture of human agency.[14]

The first problem in getting to clarity is not just that there are more goods in a human life than moral theories of right action acknowledge, although this is one difficulty. No human life could be said to flourish by acting on duty alone. This is implied, in varying degrees, in the theories of the well-known moralists. Hume tells us that benevolent motives and actions emerge from pleasing feelings of sympathy within the person, but so do the other more mundane virtues which prove useful or pleasing in public life.[15] Kant deliberately circumscribes moral goodness to the class of actions done for the sake of duty alone, without pronouncing *morally* on the actions outside that scope so long as they do not conflict with duty.[16] Mill restricts the sphere of morality to our duties and obligations to others, while allowing that other pleasurable interests beyond morality's reach are still part of one's happiness.[17] These bulwarks of the liberal tradition make the distinction between morality and everything else *precisely in order to* preserve the role of philosophical reflection in morality. The guiding assumption being that it is not the place of philosophical ethics to pronounce on what is good

[11] Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, especially chapter 10; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, chap. 3.

[12] "The Misfortunes of Virtue."

[13] "The Ethics of Inarticulacy," *Inquiry* 34, no. 2 (June 1, 1991): 155–82, doi:10.1080/00201749108602250.

[14] Taylor's concluding remarks in in chapter 25 and the conclusion of Taylor, *Sources of the Self* try to make clear just how variegated and conflicted our modern sense of the self and goodness really is. My brief summary cannot do it full justice.

[15] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

[16] Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

[17] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. Roger Crisp, Oxford Philosophical Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

for an agent. Each can best choose his or her own good.

Yet there is a paradox here. All of the major moralists recognize that morality is not *everything* in a life, despite the well-established disagreements over the nature and full extent of morality's claims on us. Theories of right action exclude other non-moral goods, or exclude these goods from morality. They make us *inarticulate* about the good.[18] By the lights of the liberal outlook we are incapable of recognizing any vision of the good life or any concept of "good" which is not further explicable in terms of right conduct. At the limits this is true even of the distinction between specially moral considerations and everything else that interests or concerns a human being. This is not itself an ethically neutral standpoint. It requires taking a stance on what is good in the living of a life: namely, that one respect certain formal constraints on one's own conduct for the sake of living freely among others, so that others can partake of the same liberty, or so that the net welfare for all is maximized. To include only specific forms of action, or specific kinds of action-regulating principles, which concern our conduct to others, in the public sphere, is to already say – if only minimally – that *it is good to live this way*. What is good is to live by this distinction between what is morally good and what is merely a conventional way of acting or a prudential concern with one's own interest.

The issue here is not just a formal matter about whether moral philosophy *ought to* concern itself with the good or with goodness. The question is whether there is a disinterested, non-moral, perspective from which these questions can be asked. The supposed neutrality of the liberal tradition of ethics is in fact *very interested* in the goodness of values, intuitions, beliefs, practices, institutions and courses of action, although it cannot acknowledge this moral interest.

Radical and routine virtue ethics

For these reasons, a virtue approach to ethics which takes seriously the spirit of Socrates's question entails a discontinuity with this way of theorizing and inquiring into ethical and practical thinking. Put differently, we can distinguish a *radical virtue ethics* from a moderate or routine virtue ethics. The radical approach breaks with the question of right action and the task of action guidance as the primary methodological and theoretical concerns. The question of the good life is the central topic of ethics, its answer the primary methodological task.[19]

A consequence of this break is the abandonment of the moral "ought" as a catch-all term to encompass all uses of moral language. "Ought" is replaced by a range of different con-

[18] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, chap. 3.

[19] Baier, "Radical Virtue Ethics"; David Solomon, "Virtue Ethics: Radical or Routine?" in *Intellectual Virtue*, ed. Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski (Oxford University Press, 2003), http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199252732.001.0001/acprof-9780199252732; Jonathan J Sanford, *Before Virtue: Assessing Contemporary Virtue Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

cepts with finer shades of meaning, words like "callous" and "magnanimous". This shift of emphasis to 'thick' concepts indicates that the virtue concepts themselves are not fundamental elements from which proper conduct is to be derived. We evaluate persons or actions as courageous, charitable, just, temperate, and much more besides. All human languages have rich and fine-grained vocabularies for describing and appraising personal attributes. The virtue and vice words belong to this category, as do the 'thin' concepts of "good" and "right."[20] In evaluating a person or an act, we are not giving some ultimate explanation of right or good in terms of a character trait which rationalizes the judgment. We are evaluating with respect to our many ways of speaking about things in terms of their excellence or defect, standards which do not themselves belong to any empirically-determinable trait or characteristic.[21]

Doing ethics without the narrowly moral use of 'ought' as a unifying master concept means that the method of constructing ethical theories, and the aim of any such theories, involves a much wider range of evaluations than those made available by the appraisal of actions according to moral principles, rules, duties and norms.[22] We can of course still speak of other-regarding actions, and even speak of them as implicating us in certain obligations.[23] The point is that this is not *all* we are doing, nor is it *the most important* part of ethics. I will say more about this below.

As a first approximation, my claim is that Foot and Taylor can both be read as radical virtue ethicists if only in the critical sense sketched above. (That is, both are highly critical of the methods and theoretical approaches to moral philosophy that have made up the mainstream of ethical thought since the early 20$^{\text{th}}$ century.) Yet both figures have ambiguous relationships to virtue ethics of either sort. This may seem a strange thing to say about Foot, who is most often cited as a proponent of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. As we will see in the following section, the label is not entirely adequate, though to the extent it is right it is due to her association with the radical program.[24] Taylor tends not to be thought of as a moral

[20]This is a corollary of Foot's analysis of good as an attributive adjective. "Good" is not a class or category into which all things judged good fall. Rather it is good itself which belongs to the class of thick evaluative words, being 'on all fours' with all the other terms we use to evaluate and draw qualitative distinctions.

[21]"Moral beliefs" and "Moral arguments", in Foot, *Virtues and Vices*; Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality."

[22]For example, Philippa Foot, "Utilitarianism and the Virtues," *Mind* XCIV, no. 374 (1985): 196–209, doi:10.1093/mind/XCIV.374.196 argues that utilitarianism could be made out as a kind of virtue ethics, one which treats a single virtue, universal benevolence, as the foundation and criterion of right actions; Baier, "Doing Without Moral Theory?" raises a similar point against Rawls' contractarianism. The method of reflective equilibrium leaves ordinary moral intuitions untouched, seeking instead to achieve a theory which can accommodate them, leaving justice in the role of the "master" virtue.

[23]Anscombe makes this point effectively in contrasting the moral "ought" with the obligation one incurs at the grocer, who is owed payment for goods and services rendered. In general the concept of a promise requires and involves no special concept of obligation or special meaning of "ought", she argues. See Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy"; Anscombe, "On Promising and Its Justice, and Whether It Needs Be Respected in Foro Interno"; Anscombe, "Rules, Rights, and Promises."

[24]Foot expressly distances herself from the term "virtue ethics" in the first footnote to her "Rationality and

philosopher or ethicist in the usual sense, and so there is no clear association with the label. I will argue that he should be at least a collegial ally of the program of radical virtue ethics if not among its members. Before moving on to these matters, I want to introduce Foot's account of the virtues.

5.2 Goodness of character and human action

I want to begin with Foot's remarks in chapter 5 of *Natural Goodness*, which query the modern moralist's distinction between specially moral and non-moral reasons for action. Although there is a way to make some sense of this difference, both "kinds" of evaluation belong to the more general category of evaluations of the rational human will. Foot's interest in the more general features of goodness and badness in human actions rests on her philosophical anthropology, and on her virtue theory which makes reference to human nature as the basis of evaluations of excellence or defect in the will.

As we move from evaluation of living things in general to the specific topic of moral evaluation, we inevitably encounter new ways of speaking. For example, the expression 'good human being' seems to have no analog among nonhuman organisms. Even when we do speak of 'a good S', where S is some plant or animal, we are speaking of it as a whole being. The phrase "good human being" invariably concerns moral evaluation, evaluating a human being only in the dimension of the will or action.[25]

Morality, at least in the recent tradition of Anglo-American moral philosophy, has explained moral evaluation as a special subject. Moral judgments are thought of as distinct from other kinds of evaluations, as when we make an aesthetic judgment about a work of art or a prudential judgment about a financial investment. As we have noted already, it follows from Foot's analysis of 'good' and the propositions into which it figures that moral evaluations of human beings and their parts belong to this shared conceptual structure.[26]

We saw that Foot's analysis of 'should' statements recognizes no intrinsic distinction between the 'should' of a moral judgment and the 'should' of a prudential or desire-satisfying consideration.[27] All of these sorts of considerations provide reasons for action to a human being. The moral philosopher's preoccupation with the special moral kind of 'should' or 'ought' seems to depend more on the emphasis placed on the evaluations made in certain contexts rather than the logic or grammar of the words involved. We express disapproval about the actions of another, and especially in connection with the violation of the rights of others or

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Goodness." It seems to me that she is rejecting the modern, and not the radical, interpretation of the term.

[25] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66.

[26] Ibid., 67.

[27] As we discussed in chapter 4.

with a public good. Yet we cannot generalize from these uses of words to a special kind of logical grammar involved in only in these evaluations and not in others.[28]

Here we find a hint as to why modern moral philosophy has not gotten on well with the virtues. Modern philosophers came to think of morality as concerned with relations between individuals or between individuals and society as a whole. Morality is a public, if not political, subject concerned with one's obligations and duties to others. Of the four cardinal virtues, only justice remains on the agenda. Courage and temperance are practical, non-moral virtues, wisdom a virtue of the intellect. The result is a contrast between moral and prudential considerations, a distinction not found in Plato or Aristotle.[29]

There is nothing wrong with using the word 'moral' in this way, as it is part of ordinary ways of talking, and nothing of importance rests on how the word is used. What does matter is the distinction itself between the specially moral and the non-moral, the logical or grammatical basis for the distinction, and with that the thought that there is anything to properly distinguish moral evaluations – evaluations we make of actions as 'wrong', but also 'wicked' or 'evil' – from other evaluations of the rational human will.[30] It is true that when we make "moral" kinds of evaluations we are usually involved in socially and emotionally charged circumstances concerning horrifying, despicable actions which are importantly distinct from imprudence, foolishness, or intemperance. Yet the latter as well as the former are all evaluations concerning persons and their actions, and we can identify shared features between all of them.[31]

For one thing, they all have voluntary action and purpose as their subject. When we make moral evaluations, or even prudential evaluations of someone's actions, we are talking of actions which are done with the agent's knowledge, with an intention. The matter is complicated because the goodness and badness in an action can come from three different formal features of a single action.[32] First the nature of the action itself, what is done, can be a source of goodness or badness. No one acts well who murders for personal gain or tortures another. Second is the end for which the action is done. What is intended or desired in the action can be a source of goodness, if one aims at (say) keeping a promise to a friend, or badness, if one aims at an evil or a kind of wrongdoing. Finally, the relation of the action to the agent's own judgment of whether he is acting well or badly – one's conscience – is also a source of excellence or defect in action. What about when the evaluations of an action conflict and pull us in different directions?[33] It is enough that an action has a single defect that it be called

[28]Ibid., 68.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Ibid., 69.
[31]Ibid.
[32]Ibid., 72–73.
[33]Ibid., 75–76.

bad. An action which is not bad in itself nor aimed at a bad end, but done against one's conscience, is enough to be judged a bad action. The asymmetry of badness and goodness leads to a surprising principle: For an individual action done by an individual person, *if it is in no way bad then it is good*. The goodness of action is appraised by its *absence of defect*.

The faults in the actions treated by 'morality', in respect of goodness and badness, have their parallels in the 'self-regarding' actions. Self-destructiveness replaces cruelty, indifference to one's own good stands in for indifference to the good of others.[34] We have no good reason to uphold the distinction between specially moral evaluations and other evaluations of the rational human will. There is no *logical difference* between 'moral' and 'non-moral' evaluations.[35] Moral reasons have no special overriding power; nor do they have a singular power to make an action good, if present, or bad, if absent or ignored.

What of prohibitions against certain actions? Hasn't Foot said that acts of cruelty, torture, and murder are bad kinds of actions? She agrees that there is a case to make "for a limited moral absolutism by which certain such actions are held to be such as to rule out circumstances in which it could ever be right to perform them."[36] But this limited sort of absolutism does not support, or depend on, a general theory of moral reasons as overriding reasons for action. That this or that kind of action is prohibited does not mean that the prohibition rests on an overriding reason. Even in speaking of verdictive descriptions of actions which entail a final 'should', descriptions which include 'unjust' and 'cruel', it isn't necessarily the case that a verdictive judgment must weigh in favor of specially moral considerations.[37] The rights or needs of others, or the public good, have no special grip here. Words like 'imprudent' and 'foolish' have the same kind of verdictive force to them as 'unjust', indicating that the action so described ought not be done.[38]

It is not hard to find other cases where the other-regarding 'moral' consideration does not win the judgment in a conflict of reasons for an action. There are situations where one obligation outweighs another, though this point alone does not support the general principle that moral obligations always and everywhere have this force. "In fact it is often reasonable for agents to give themselves (never mind their families) preference over others," she writes.[39] The always-overriding quality of "moral" judgments is not a truth of moral philosophy, no matter how pervasive the doctrine.[40]

Moral concern does not begin or end with one's conduct to others. As individual agents,

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[34] Ibid., 74.

[35] Ibid., 77.

[36] Ibid., 79.

[37] We discussed verdictive descriptions and verdictive 'should' statements in chapter 4.

[38] Compare the force of 'imprudent' with 'dangerous' and 'self-regarding', words with evaluative force but which do not suggest that the action under that description ought not be done.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

each of us are beings with a life, with our own needs, concerns, relations, and interests. Our life and its contents are of moral interest if anything is. Foot's focus on the person should not be confused with hedonism or egoism. That one is ready to accept good things for oneself is part of virtue, as is hope for the future. Indeed Foot makes a crucial point in remarking that with "the appalling number of young suicides in our present society…hope should be among the first of a fairy godmother's gifts at the cradle of a child."[41]

If nothing else, her remarks here raise a question of what is lost when morality leaves behind the whole individual for the abstractions of 'right actions' and canons of moral principles. Morality's obsession with a disembodied agent which is only a matter of moral interest to the extent that it chooses and acts on its choices has real consequences, whatever gains in freedom it has brought. Relegating experiences, emotions, and desires to the fields of personal choice or individual liberty outside of morality has knock-on consequences, about which modern moral theory has perhaps said too little.

5.3 Virtue and vice as the basis of goodness and badness in action

Once specially moral duties and obligations are no longer sufficient to evaluate an action as right or wrong, it might be tempting to substitute talk of virtues and vices as "good making" or "bad making" counterparts.

It is important to explore the connection between virtues and the goodness of action given what we have discussed so far.[42] In previous chapters I discussed what I find to be novel on the subjects of human agency and the rationality of action in Foot's work. Given this background, it is worth unpacking what these issues, as well as Foot's dissolution of the distinction between moral and nonmoral reasons, imply for the evaluation of actions.

One thing to notice is that talk of virtues and vices provides us with languages to evaluate actions with a finer grain than action-binding 'ought' imperatives. Of the four cardinal virtues, only justice can be framed in these terms without violence. In excluding courage, temperance, and wisdom, to say nothing of the other virtues like friendship, hope, or faith, an Aristotelian can argue that morality itself has become impoverished. Something is lost when we leave concrete persons – *ourselves*, in the multiple resonances of that word – out of the sphere of moral concern. Morality is abandoned to the public or political sphere, as if we are concerned with nothing but common duties to others, and these derived by impartial reflection on a special sort of obligation.

[41] Ibid., 74, footnote 15.

[42] This will fill out the remarks I made at the conclusion to chapter 3 concerning my objections to reading Foot as a moral foundationalist.

One implication of a virtue-centric approach to action evaluation is that there are a variety of ways in which an action can be appraised. To see why, let us briefly detour Foot's account of the virtues, which is most developed in her paper "Virtues and Vices."[43] The virtues are characteristics "in some way" beneficial to their possessor, characteristics that a human being needs for his own sake and for that of others.[44] Of course this goes for many characteristics which have nothing to do with virtue. Where physical health is an excellence of the body, and powers of memory an excellence of the mind, the virtues are an excellence of the will.[45] Virtue concern what one intends. Intention can be interpreted narrowly, as when someone forms an intention to perform a specific act. It also applies more widely, to a person's innermost desires, for many virtues depend as much on one's attitude as one's intentions. "The will" indicates a very general sense of what one wishes as well as what one seeks.[46]

This account is further complicated by the part played by the virtue of practical wisdom. While classically thought of as an intellectual virtue, as it concerns knowledge rather than intention or desire, wisdom nevertheless bears on the will in two aspects. First, the wise person does not merely know how to do good things. Because wisdom supposes good ends, it must include the *desire* to do those good things.[47] Second, knowledge of what values are good bears on the will insofar as it also concerns our attachments to things.[48] Someone lacking wisdom is liable to have 'false values', holding bad things in an esteem they do not truly merit. There is an element of false judgment in this, since we are speaking here of the things one apprehends or even judges as good, albeit mistakenly. But we are also speaking of one's attachments, and so the will is involved in this apprehension.

The virtues act on desire and feeling in their role as *correctives* of the will, in tending to curb certain temptations to excess, or remedying deficiencies of motivation where one ought to act.[49] Virtues like courage and temperance are only virtues because humans can be so easily tempted by fear or the desire for pleasure. There are things we are tempted to flee when we should stand our ground, and pleasures we should deny. Justice and charity each concern a certain deficiency in one's motives which must be made good.[50]

Kant argued that the positive moral worth of an action is determined only in its connec-

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[43] Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, chap. 1.

[44] Ibid., 2.

[45] Of course even making this distinction suggests an obstacle to understanding Aristotle and St. Thomas, given that our English word 'virtue' does not neatly track their analogous concepts. Aristotle's concept of *arete* concerns even excellences in the arts and intellectual pursuits, whereas for moderns 'virtue' tends to indicate specially moral virtues. Likewise, Aristotle's class of 'moral' virtues, the *arete ethikai*, do not neatly map to our four cardinal moral virtues. Practical wisdom was an intellectual, not moral, virtue for Aristotle.

[46] Ibid., 5.

[47] Ibid., 6.

[48] Ibid., 6–7.

[49] Ibid., 8.

[50] Ibid., 9.

tion with duty, so that a philanthropist who takes pleasure in his charity would undermine the worth of his actions.[51] In contrast, Foot's virtue approach has it that there are different ways in which an action can be appraised as worthy. Some actions can be accord with virtue without requiring virtue, while other actions both accord with virtue and require the possession of the virtue. Kant's happy philanthropist does not act out of duty, but he does act out of charity, and charity is a virtue of attachment as well as judgment. In general we can say that a virtuous, or positively good, action is one which is contrary to no virtue, and for which a virtue is required. (Recalling our earlier discussion of the asymmetry of badness and goodness in an action.)

In addition to the various considerations of goodness which come out in our talk of courage, temperance, and wisdom, of charity and justice, there are also different motives, and different emotions and feelings, which enter into our appraisals. Through these desires and experiences the virtues also involve our powers of judgment with respect to the worthwhile and the desirable. Thus it is not only the case that we evaluate acts by a diverse range of criteria. It is not enough that one has a disposition to act or feel in certain ways, if the disposition is understood as a functional or causal source of emotion or bodily movement. One must feel and want rightly, in respect of what merits the feeling or is worth wanting. Being virtuous requires that one be answerable to standards beyond the mere having of a desire or emotion. If the worth of an action is determined by a range of characteristics, then the motives and experiences which guide us to the excellent, noble, or desirable (etc.) can have a similar range of sources.

The fine grain of evaluative languages indicates that there is unlikely to be any single concept, or short list of basic concepts, that can adequately cover the full range of distinctions of worth. Feelings of sympathy or the motive of duty may well be part of our moral motives but they could not exhaust them (if the virtue approach is correct). Evaluation of the human will and actions involves us in a multi-dimensional space of possibilities, and this poses a *conceptual* obstacle to accounting for all of it in a parsimonious theory of obligations. Virtue and vice terms are a subset of evaluative languages which capture our ordinary grasp of goodness and badness in actions, but also in a person's character, desires, emotions, interests, and choices. They capture what is esteemed, what is worthy, what is admirable, noble, and fine, in a human being's personality, not just in his outward behaviors or some class of his behaviors but also the way in which his *perception* of himself and others is colored and textured by distinctions of value. What one truly wants and what one truly feels matter to the evaluation of actions as much as what is done; and these characteristics do not neatly fall under the heading of any simple, one-dimensional theory of motivations or reasons.

Importantly, this all suggests that to call an action a good action or a bad action is to

[51] Ibid., 12–14.

involve us in more than establishing a connection between the action and a particular motive or a special type of reason.

Virtue as a privative conception of goodness

The evaluation of actions is likely to be more complicated than any single concept or characteristic can adequately explain. Is this a matter of simply lacking an adequate theory, or does it reveal something deeper about the nature of goodness in action?

It seems that it is the latter. The multi-dimensionality of moral experience and moral judgment raises a question. If morality is internally variegated as the virtue approach suggests, how is it possible to speak of goodness in action at all? Whatever the weaknesses of speaking of duties and obligations, at least there is a way to weigh them on an occasion and reach a conclusion about how to act. The virtues do not so much lack as rule out this possibility. If we cannot judge an act as good if it is contrary to some virtue, then most any action could be held as contrary to *some other* virtue. What are we to say when the demands of courage conflict with the demands of charity? Or when hope contravenes truth, or when care for one's family conflicts with the obligation to give aid to another?

How can the distinction be made between a good action and a bad action given the realities of such conflicts? Are we committed to say that the virtues can be part of *bad actions*? Does a murderer who shows courage in his act of killing thereby act virtuously? We would not generally feel justified in calling this a courageous murder, nor to speak of the murderer as courageous in his action.[52] Yet there is something in the thought that the murderer was not cowardly. He did not have an additional defect that another murderer might have had. Now we seem caught between two thoughts: that the act of murder expressed the virtue of courage, yet it was not a courageous act. How can we speak of courage as being in an action, yet not praise the act as if it were a good action?

If the murderer is a characteristically courageous person, then in general he will pursue good ends motivated by courage. We cannot simply say that courage is not a virtue in him on the basis of a single bad action. What does distinguish the individual bad action from the courageous act turns on the characteristic power identified by the word courage (and by the virtue-terms in general), this being the power to produce good actions and good desires. Just as arsenic is ordinarily a poison, there is nothing contradictory in it being a poison and acting *here* without producing the characteristic effects of poison. In the same way, the presence of the virtue of courage in a particular case need not act as a virtue, even though it characteristically produces good actions and desires. That one has a virtue does not imply that one thereby has something which is a virtue in her.[53]

[52] Ibid., 15.
[53] Ibid., 16–17.

There is a poor fit between the moral ideals implied in our talk of the virtues and our actual moral judgments. While there are people who seem to possess all the virtues and are loved and admired for it, we do not always find that it is the most virtuous or least vicious person who commands our respect and admiration. In fact we often find people with conflicted, chaotic lives, even those lives short of wisdom or temperance, more interesting and even, in a way, more admirable than the moral saints.[54]

This might seem an unlikely thing to say. The point becomes more plausible when put negatively. There are people in whom temperance does not act as a virtue, but expresses itself in a certain timidity that results in a failure to accept good things. We would not have to look too far to find those for whom justice amounts to a superficial mask over a deeper need, perhaps to assuage feelings of guilt – this being one source of Nietzsche's infamous skepticism about morality. But even without pressing the point to immoralism, it is not hard to imagine real cases in which the virtues do not act in that person as a virtue.

This raises a question. If the virtues are the basis of moral evaluations and judgments, then how can we make judgments at all if someone can have a virtue, and act as that virtue requires, and still not do a virtuous action or act virtuously? We can answer the point in two ways.

First, the virtues are not basic concepts from which "good" is derived. The virtues conceived broadly are what human goodness consists in, but they are not the only concepts available to the virtue theory. We can speak of goods as desirable or choiceworthy, and of judgments which depend on appraisals of virtue in a person, but do not neatly reduce to virtue-attributions.

Second, in connection with Foot's later naturalistic theory, we can speak of goods in connection with human needs. In *Natural Goodness* she writes that "for all the diversities of human life, it is possible to give some quite general account of human necessities, that is, of what is quite generally needed for human good, if only by starting from the negative idea of deprivation."[55] Human good, specified as a range of necessities, is defined in *privative* terms. It is easier to show where things go wrong than to say positively how they go well. It is no coincidence that the appraisal of action shares this privative quality. Recall that Aquinas affirmed an asymmetry in badness and goodness, so "that a single defect is enough for badness, while goodness must be goodness in all respects."[56]

What is good in an action is that *if it is in no way bad, then it is good*.[57] Nor should

[54] Ibid., 17.

[55] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 43.

[56] Ibid., 75; citing St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1947, http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/index.htm, First Part of the Second Part, Question 18, article 4.

[57] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 76.

this surprise us, for the principle 'good if not bad' is how we evaluate the development and operations of living things. The principle itself has its roots, of course, in Aristotle. In Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, speaking of the difficulty in hitting the mean between excess and deficiency, he remarks that while it is possible to fail in many ways, it is possible to succeed in only on way "for evil belongs to the class of the unlimited…and good to that of the limited."[58] It is always easier to miss the mark than to hit it. Aristotle is expressing the same point about the asymmetry of badness. It is worth highlighting the importance of the shift in emphasis from *seeking the good* to aiming for the *absence of defect*. It is easier to say how things go wrong in a human life, and make the effort to avoid them, than it is to specify a positive account of how they go well.

If this is the case, then matters are more complicated than saying that virtues "are good", or that they "aim at the good", or that actions are appraised in respect of a well-defined quality or attribute of goodness. The complexity of ethical life for human beings does allow for a guiding ideal of goodness – though that ideal is not likely to be specified in any positive, explicit accounting or theory of goodness.

At this point the Aristotelian's view on the evaluation of actions as good or bad, and the modern moral theorist's evaluation of an action as right or wrong in accord with a moral obligation, diverge. It isn't the case that we must begin with an ideal of what is right to do, what one must do, what one is obliged to do, and then set out appraising this or that act as right or wrong. Rather, an action is evaluated as good or bad based on different criteria, applied in a different way.

This does raise an important question about the nature or source of the goodness at which the virtues aim and how it can relate to the practical evaluation of action. I will have more to say about this later, and in the concluding chapter. For now, I want to say more about the prospects of reading Foot's virtue theory as a theory of basic or foundational reasons which serve to rationalize or "make good" an action or course of conduct.

Virtues as moral foundations or basic reasons

The virtues do serve as normative standards, though not in providing reasons for a human being in respect of a special connection with desire or choice.[59] The rational relationship between the virtues and human desires and actions is more complicated than answering the question of *how one ought to be* rather than *what one ought to do*.

Given the discussion already, we can see some problems with this way of putting the point. The framing of the point suggests that character becomes the central concept, dislodging some other, rival deontic notion of duties or consequentialist account of good states of affairs.

[58]Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II.2, 1106b29-35.

[59]A point discussed in more detail in chapters 3 & 4.

Foot is in no way concerned to eliminate duty or ends as part of morality. For her these are considerations emerging from justice or charity, lacking any special hold over the will when weight against the other virtues or other evaluative concepts, but hardly unimportant.

This misunderstanding can be given a more sophisticated gloss. Consider Gary Watson's remark:

> While it might have implications for how one lives, an ethics of virtue is not, like an ethics of love or liberation, a moral outlook or ideal but a claim that the concept of virtue is in some way theoretically dominant . On an ethics of virtue, how it is best or right or proper to conduct oneself is explained in terms of how it is best for a human being to be. I will call this the *claim of explanatory primacy*.[60]

Explanatory primacy need not be the simple claim that virtue explains what is right in an action. Explanatory primacy can involve other evaluative terms besides "right", more generally all of the concepts which fall under "morally good conduct". "An ethics of virtue," he writes, "is not a particular claim about the priority of virtue over right conduct but the more general claim that action appraisal is derivative from the appraisal of character."[61] Basic moral facts are about character. Facts about action are derivative.

Watson's general point is agreeable. It marks an improvement over critics who argue that virtue ethics involves a conceptual reduction of secondary concepts, such as desires or actions, to a primary concept such as moral character, or a morally good person.[62] A radical ethic of virtue takes *both* some version of the claim of explanatory primacy *and* a theory of the virtues as its two components.[63] If we take Watson's claim in the minimal sense that an ethics of virtue is "a set of abstract theses about how certain concepts are best fitted together for the purposes of understanding morality", then this is certainly the direction Foot is heading.[64] Improperly characterized, a virtue theory will not adequately distinguish itself from the utilitarian or duty-based alternatives. But what is it that makes this distinction? More needs to be said about what these concepts are and how the understanding of moral concepts relates to the idea of virtuous activity that Foot has in mind.

The question "how ought one be?", while superficially similar to Socrates's question, can create the impression that the 'ought' has a special moral meaning or practical force in respect of concepts alone. This raises two difficulties that we've already considered. It isn't as if moral concepts can be understood by an agent on purely neutral grounds, *as concepts* which are accessible on neutral grounds, with nothing further said about the perspective or constitution

[60] Watson, "On the Primacy of Character," 451.
[61] Ibid., 452.
[62] For example Louden, "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics," 228.
[63] Watson, "On the Primacy of Character," 455.
[64] Ibid., 451.

of the being comprehending them. Nor can we say that *character traits*, rather than moral principles, stand as the object of an agent's choices or motivating attitudes.

Furthermore I have argued, following both Foot and Taylor, that virtue and vice terms are not psychological predicates at all. Much less are they psychological concepts of a sort which could stand in the kind of rational connection to actions that deontological and consequentialist theories of rational action require. Whatever the relation of explanatory primacy of virtue over the appraisal of individual actions, it does not obviously lie in a conceptual connection between neutrally-characterized moral concepts and the agent's psychological states. The "how ought I be?" question is better interpreted as a "how is it good to live?" question – a re-phrasing which brings actions back to the table as the proper target of moral evaluations. For a life consists in the actions that one habitually, characteristically undertakes.

A naturalistic theory like Foot's can demonstrate a systematic connection between the virtues and other kinds of good without undermining the autonomy of virtue.[65] This is possible by holding the virtues themselves as part of a good life, what it is to flourish. The virtues also provide the virtuous human with ways of seeing human goods as reasons for acting. What the virtuous person sees as worth caring about is in fact worth caring about, for its own sake. But a Footian naturalist is not committed to the further thought that the virtues as personal characteristics are what *makes* those goods into the proper objects of virtuous desire or interest. A just person cares about just things for their own sake, because just things are intrinsically worthwhile. The virtue of justice is part of human excellence in this respect, in that it reveals what is good and motivates the bearer of the virtue to act for good things.

Living the good human life, as delimited by virtuous character and activity, does not play the role of an explanatory foundation for subsequent action evaluations. The actions judged virtuous constitute the life, the habitual and characteristics activities, of the virtuous person. A courageous person is courageous because she does courageous things; she habitually acts courageously because she is courageous. Speaking in general, whatever is desirable in a good human life will be desirable for its own sake, as part of human excellence. The appraisal of good action is made from the standpoint of virtue, aimed toward the good, not from an ideal of goodness which is found in or behind the concept of virtue. It is what the agent sees as good in light of virtue that indicates intrinsic worth in the acts of virtue.

If offering an explanation of good acts which is derivative of good character just means that good acts are appraised as such in respect of virtue, we can agree in a minimal sense. In one way this is just what is happening: a just act is called a good action because it accords with the virtue of justice, which is part of human goodness. But this is not yet an informative statement. The explanation of the just act as a good human action does not refer solely to a trait of character. It refers to justice, and to just character and just acts as a part of human

[65]Ibid., 460.

goodness. The dispositive character trait of justice is involved in a whole web of concepts and actions, ranging well beyond a simple psychological evaluation of a person.

However, even in the sense the minimal sense in which the point is right, it risks misleading us on a key point. The appraisal of action does not *derive from* appraisal of character so much as it *constitutes* it.

To see why, consider first that in answering the question *how is it good to live?* we are not interested exclusively with *either* character *or* actions. Partly this is because the virtues themselves cut across these categories. One could not be just "in the soul" without regularly and habitually doing just acts. Nor could one habitually and characteristically do just acts without being a just person, for that is what it means to be just. In the same way, it would be odd to make a claim for explanatory primacy of one or the other – action *or* character – as a fundamental ground of evaluation. Actions do matter for moral evaluations, but so does a person's character. We miss something vital if we leave out one or the other, or look for theories which will provide us with ultimate grounds in one or the other. As I have tried to stress, moral evaluations are more complicated than this. The relation between character and actions exhibits a dialectical reciprocity, manifesting in the wholeness of the concrete person and not in her constituent parts. Character manifests in action, and actions reveal character. The concept of *living well* unites the virtues and the good in the living of a life, where neither is (or need be) a fundamental characteristic. Human goodness consists in virtuous action, and virtuous action is carried out in a good life. To call this an explanatory *derivation* of action appraisal from character appraisal seems to miss the point.

I have previously argued that the distinction between acting well and acting badly is essential to moral evaluation on the virtue approach.[66] Doesn't that mean the concern is, in fact, to appraise action, and to do so in respect of one's character? The answer to both is affirmative. My worry about Watson's way of characterizing the explanatory primacy of character is that it can too easily be interpreted as giving comfort to a too-simple analytic distinction between traits of character and the acts that realize and constitute them.[67] This is the sort of distinction which might be at home in empiricist and Kantian psychologies, but is no part of the broadly Aristotelian psychological accounts in Foot or in Taylor.

In appraising actions and in making evaluations of the rational will, we are concerned with actions *as the actions of the person who does them and who is constituted by his or her actions*. The acting person is not the same thing as the disengaged self. What it means to evaluate the acts of the acting person is not the same as the test of whether a disembodied will has acted properly according to an obliging rule. The virtues do not *explain* what is good or right in a good action, not if the action is logically distinguished from the agent who performs

[66]See chapter 4

[67]Watson himself is not committed to this, nor does it follow that he would argue for the point.

it, or her psychological traits. The virtues are what the human agent's goodness *consists in*, having human goodness as their (virtuous) ends, and being richer than mere psychological traits.[68]

Discovery and creation in Aristotle's *Ethics*

There is admittedly something paradoxical in this account of the virtues and virtuous activity. One must see the point of virtuous actions in order to do them, yet one must do virtuous actions in order to see the point in them. This characteristic leads all the way back to Aristotle's remarks on the virtues in the *Ethics*.[69] With virtue, he argued, "we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."[70] Yet, confusing many modern readers, he also argues the contrary. If people do "just and temperate acts, they are already just and temperate, exactly as, if they do what is grammatical or musical, they are grammarians and musicians."[71] The apparent contradiction arises because, although human beings are well-suited to acquire the virtues, they do not spontaneously arise in us, for

> …it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature… Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.[72]

Human nature does not lead us to virtuous action as the nature of a sunflower leads it to face the sun. We must be educated in virtue in order to acquire it. Those things that come to us by nature, like sight or hearing, first come in the potentiality and only later in the action. Virtues come first in their exercise.[73]

Aristotle recognizes at least something of this difficulty. He attempts to explain it by distinguishing between arts, like grammar and music, and the virtues. Arts have their excellence in their products. One who excels in making music does so just because she produces good music or shows skill in creating music. The virtues are not like this. It does not follow that an act in accordance with the virtues of justice or temperance is thereby done justly or temperately.[74] In the case of virtuous action, the agent must be in the right condition when he does the action. He must have knowledge of what he is doing, he must choose the act,

[68]This position is comparable with Aquinas's remarks on the definition of virtue in *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, Question 55, article 4.

[69]Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II.

[70]Ibid., 1103b1–2.

[71]Ibid., 1105a20–22.

[72]Ibid., 1103a19–26.

[73]Ibid., 1103a27–32.

[74]Ibid., 1105a27–30.

and choose it for its own sake, and the action must proceed from "a firm and unchangeable character."[75]

Unlike the arts, knowledge "has little or no weight" as a condition of the possession of the virtues.[76] Indeed Aristotle disparages the idea of learning virtue by contemplation alone:

> But most people do not do [virtuous actions], but take refuge in theory and think they are being philosophers and will become good in this way, behaving somewhat like patients who listen attentively to their doctors, but do none of the things they are ordered to do. As the latter will not be made well in body by such a course of treatment, the former will not be made well in soul by such a course of philosophy.[77]

Neither good motive nor good intention, nor knowledge alone, is enough to make one virtuous. One must *act virtuously*, not only to have "skin in the game" with respect to one's moral caliber, but because one cannot truly be *made well in soul* – become virtuous – by passive study in the absence of action. The virtuous person must see the point in what she is doing, and perspective cannot be attained by contemplation without action. Moreover, an outside observer who does not also occupy the standpoint of the virtuous person, who does not participate in virtuous actions, will have no frame of reference by which to describe the virtuous person's motives or actions. If knowledge is not sufficient to learn to be virtuous, it is not sufficient to describe a person's dispositions or motives without recourse to the purpose or import that the virtue reveals to the virtuous agent.[78]

Virtue is not merely knowing what to do or how. What makes an action a virtuous action is that it is done *as* the virtuous person would do, so that an act is a just act when done as the just person would do the act, or a temperate act when done as the temperate person would do it. It is

> by doing just acts that the just man is produced, and by doing temperate acts that the temperate man; without doing these no one would have even a prospect of becoming good.[79]

This helps make some sense of the apparent contradiction. There is a difference in an act under the description of a just act, which could be done by an indifferent or even a vicious person by accident or luck, and the same action as done by the just person who acts knowingly,

[75] Ibid., 1105a30–34.
[76] Ibid., 1105b1–4.
[77] Ibid., 1105b13–18.
[78] Recall our discussion of Talbot Brewer's dialectical conception of practical thinking from chapter 4.
[79] Ibid., 1105b8–11.

by choice and desire, and out of his character. One who lacks a virtue can only learn it by behaving virtuously, as under instruction. Should that person then later acquire a virtuous disposition from this conduct (which Aristotle believes is by no means guaranteed), that person's acts will no longer be accidentally virtuous. Learning to be virtuous by doing virtuous things is the only way to inculcate the kind of character which chooses virtuous actions for their own sake in full knowledge of what is being done.

As we will see in the following section, Charles Taylor's own account of the relationship between personal identity and the actions of a human agent share in some interesting parallels with Foot's neo-Aristotelian virtue theory.

5.4 Virtuous agents and personal identity

Taylor's account of personal identity builds on a concept of **strong evaluations**.[80] A strong evaluation is a qualitative distinction drawn within the concept of a desire or a feeling, between appraisals of higher and lower worth. Evaluations which concern the agent's own wants and emotions, *subject-referring import ascriptions* to use Taylor's term, open us up to the domain of distinctly human concern. The capacity to make strong evaluations of one's own feelings and motives is not only a necessary condition on being a human agent. To be oriented to a sense of what is good and worthwhile, to take a stand on what is of higher importance, is inseparable from our sense of self and agency.

The essential connection between who someone is, or who she takes herself to be, and what one holds most as intrinsically worthwhile or not also appears in Foot's virtue theory. The just person takes justice as *important* to her conduct. She does just actions on the basis of that appraisal. Because *she acts justly as the just person acts* we can describe her as of just character. There is an intrinsic connection between who one is, qua virtuous, and what one sees as of higher importance, qua the virtues. It is through this evaluative understanding, which belongs to the person, that motives and actions are appraised.

There are some challenges standing in the way of this easy agreement. The essentially evaluative nature of human agency means that the domain of human affairs transcends determinations of facts about biological, psychological, or sociological realities of human existence in one important sense. We cannot turn to these non-ethical explanations and the theories which include them in order to make sense of ourselves as human agents or persons. There is no stepping out of the medium of language, or the import-ascribing feelings we articulate in it, to get at a putatively neutral or 'objective' account of our human responses or else the intrinsically evaluative distinctions which are their objects (and which are thereby incorporated into

[80] "What is human agency?" and "Self-interpreting animals" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, chap. 2.

the meanings of these articulated feelings). If we read Foot's virtue theory as beginning with a theory of natural norms, which are themselves value-neutral and objectively described (being attributes of biological organisms), and then proceeding to an account of specially human desires, feelings, and actions which are also described from the same non-anthropocentric and objective standpoint, then the problem reappears at a different level. There is no real notion of good, goodness in the strong sense, in this account. There are only the colorless abstractions of objective facts and neutral descriptions.

As I have argued above, a virtue ethics does not require that we step out of the space of meanings. Quite the opposite. The virtues could not be ethically neutral concepts, nor could they belong to a theory or a methodology free from evaluative presuppositions. At least by Foot's account, there will be no objective description of the virtues, if objective means specification without any reference to intrinsic purposes or meanings or distinctions of worth which feelings and desires open up to the human subjects for whom they are meaningful. If my reading of her is right, Foot has in mind a uniquely human perspective on the good which is the kind of perspective that indicated by Taylor's concept of strong evaluation. There is a uniquely human perspective which is indispensable in formulating, or having any purchase on, the concept of a good. And there is a *virtuous standpoint* from which human agents, qua virtuous agents, can see the good aright. Both the perspective and the perceived object are essential parts of a robust psychology of human agency.

But the question remains: how are we to reconcile the purportedly 'natural' quality of the norms of human life in Foot's account of virtue with the agent-centered perspective of Taylor's strong evaluations? Let us turn to that question.

5.5 Rule-following and virtue

The practical, social and cultural aspects of the virtuous life open up a new dimension that I have not yet remarked on. Taylor argues in multiple places that opening up the linguistic or 'semantic dimension' of meaning does not merely give expression to an existing human nature. Language irrevocably transforms even those natural needs and inclinations of the human animal, even as it opens up new kinds of goods and relations between goods.[81] Human beings do not simply speak what is true of themselves, in respect of either biological inclinations or inner psychological states. We use expressive metaphors and engage in conversational dialogue with others in an attempt to make sense of our feelings and desires. With these new languages it becomes possible for human beings to create new pictures of the good and to act for those goods. It would be inconceivable otherwise to speak of living, let alone dying, for intangible goods. Humans can find worth in standards that could only exist within the

[81] See, for example, the discussion of Taylor's *metabiological meanings* in chapter 3.

shared life of a culture. Indeed, some of our goods are goods *of* a culture, belonging to the community and not to any individual members or sub-set of the whole.[82]

To situate the Footian account of natural virtues in a social and cultural context, two issues must be addressed. First, more must be said about the connection between the virtues and the social practices in which they are realized. It is consistent with Foot's virtue theory that a social dimension to the virtues is not only indispensable to acquiring virtue but also displaying it in action. So far I have said little about how the virtues as personal characteristics relate to outward or public forms of action that constitute shared practices. Second, more must be said about the kinds of goods that the virtues disclose, or otherwise make possible, in a human life. One objection to the Aristotelian approach to virtue is that it is ultimately a kind of egoistic theory because of its intrinsic connection to the goods of an individual life.[83] A related worry concerns the identification of goodness with the flourishing of human beings, when the linguistic dimensions of goodness often implicate goods which transcend any particular kind of life.[84] I will take up the second question in the concluding chapter. The remainder of this chapter will address the first question.

To draw out a connection between the virtues and social practice, I will consider Taylor's remarks on what it is to follow a rule.[85] The question of what distinguishes the correct application of a rule from a misunderstanding became a topic of philosophical interest thanks to Wittgenstein's remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations*.[86] Understanding a rule seems to involve knowledge on the part of the agent. A visiting stranger who doesn't speak our language or know our customs misunderstands our road signs because she lacks knowledge that we possess. This easily lends itself to a representationalist explanation: what we have is something "in the mind". When we explain to the stranger where she has gone wrong, we are giving her an explanation that we already have. If we didn't have any such thought, a skeptical doubt can appear. How do we know that we are acting rightly if not for a rule?

Wittgenstein's rule-following argument advances a *reductio* against the very idea of identifying the rules of action with the interpretations made by an agent. Any series of actions can be interpreted so as to fit a rule. Since any sequence of actions can be made to accord with a rule, the same sequence can be given contradictory interpretations. We can ultimately say nothing about a course of action *if* we treat the rule of action as an interpretation. The intelligibility of a series of actions cannot be determined by a rule advanced to explain it.

Understanding a rule aims to provide a way of distinguishing correct from incorrect ac-

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[82]"Irreducibly social goods" and "The politics of recognition" in Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*.

[83]Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, chap. 3.

[84]Charles Taylor, "Ethics and Ontology," *The Journal of Philosophy* 100, no. 6 (June 1, 2003): 305–20, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3655731.

[85]"To follow a rule" in Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*.

[86]The "rule following paradox" is typically attributed to the remarks at sections 200-201 in *Philosophical Investigations*.

tions. Though misunderstandings are potentially infinite; there are an indefinite number of points where understanding can go wrong. If following a rule requires that an agent understand all of these errors, rule-following behavior would require an infinite number of thoughts somewhere within the mind. There is always a need for further interpretations; now we are implicated in an infinite regress of interpretations. It would be no good, presumably, to have an interpretation of a rule if it could not give us a final explanation of the behavior.[87]

The rule-following paradox means to show that the foundationalist's quest for secure foundations is hopeless. We don't need a self-evident explanation if we are to overcome doubt (which is another way of saying, to explain misunderstanding). How is it possible to misunderstand a rule, if there is not a single true answer which determines correct understanding? Wittgenstein's answer, as Taylor reads him, is that understanding always occurs against an implicit background that is taken for granted.[88]

Rule-following behavior can be understood as a kind of social practice.[89] The intelligibility of following a rule is not determined by a rule 'in the mind'. Nor is it explained by a set of brute connections outside of the agent of which no further demands can be made. Instead, the background involves agent-understanding, but as an inarticulate (perhaps inarticulable) grasp on things from which we can still give interpretations if asked. This implicit grasp already makes sense to us – if not in the form of an express rule – and it is this that our articulations of a rule try to express. Following the arrow's point and not its feathered end is not an arbitrary choice about which nothing else can be said, even though it is an 'obvious' way to interpret the pointing arrow.

The social and practical basis of understanding intimately involves the body and bodily activity. Understanding itself is embodied, which is to say "our bodily know-how, and the way we act and move, can encode components of our understanding of self and world."[90] We can often find it difficult to draw a map or give verbal directions around a place we know very well. This sense of purchase on the world is not limited to the physical environment. The sense of oneself, insofar as this also consists in the footing or stance that one takes to others, is also largely embodied.

This is what Wittgenstein means in saying that rule-following behaviors are not determined as such by accord with a rule that anyone *has*. Many of our practices cannot be understood as the behavior of an isolated agent. Joint activities like playing a game (itself a notable example in Wittgenstein's later writings) are dialogical activities which involve two

[87]Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 166–67; Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 87.

[88]Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 167; compare with Wittgenstein's remarks "there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation." "And hence also 'obeying a rule' is a practice." Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, secs. 201–2.

[89]Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 167–68.

[90]Ibid., 170.

or more agents in conversation.[91] What we call 'obeying a rule' must be elaborated within the "spaces of common action, on a number of levels, intimate and private" which language opens up to us.[92]

The socially and bodily form of understanding involved in following a rule is also the basis of the neo-Aristotelian concept of virtue, or so I want to argue. This is brought out more clearly in Taylor's discussion of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*.[93]

The social sciences need a concept of a rule in their explanations of human social behavior. The human actions studied in the social sciences exhibit regularities, both because actions consist in repeated patterns and because action is responsive to norms. Consider certain forms of address, or deference in respect of social status, or obedience to a ritual. These kinds of behaviors are rule-governed in both senses. To understand the behavior of a society, a social theorist must discover and formulate the rules regulating its actions. This is fine as it goes. Troubles appear when the rule represented by the anthropologist who studies the foreign society is taken as causally operative. He must assume that the agents hold thoughts of the rules in their minds, or, if this is implausible, that the rule defines a hidden causal structure at work. But how do *our* formulated rules work in *their* lives?

The representation or "map" of the rules cannot be mistaken for the territory it represents. Rule-following action exists in its exercise, unfolding in space and time, akin to an inarticulate familiarity with a place we know well. Maps abstract from lived time and space, laying out all the points and relations simultaneously. The symmetry of the map, compared with the asymmetry of inarticulate understanding, is why we can be dumbfounded in trying to give directions to a visitor. The search for abstraction, perhaps motivated by the search for natural laws governing human behavior, distorts our sense of action. What the map presents as a set of actions under conditions of full certainty misleads us into thinking that the lived reality will resemble this equilibrium state. Action is asymmetric, taking place under uncertainty and being directed into the future without full, transparent knowledge.

How is it possible to have a rule which exists only in practices it directs, and may not have any express formulation? It is possible through embodied understanding. This is the *habitus*, a "system of durable and transposable dispositions" to bodily comportment, to act in a certain way.[94] It is a bodily disposition that encodes a cultural understanding, expressing the meanings that things and people have for us. It is in giving expression that the meanings exist.

[91] By "conversation" I do not mean to imply that face-to-face chat is the only relevant case. The category of dialogical actions includes this but also encompasses the full range of joint social behaviors, and at the fringes it even includes the behaviors of a political or religious movement which may involve little or no actual face-to-face interaction.

[92] Ibid., 173.

[93] Ibid., 174–80.

[94] Ibid., 175.

The joint bodily and cultural dimensions of Bourdieu's *habitus* concept have an obvious Aristotelian pedigree. The discussion of Foot's concepts of action, rationality, and the virtues so far indicate nothing inconsistent with this. But I believe that there is a good basis for a stronger claim. As I've discussed, Foot's virtues share in the same linguistic, social, and practical, expressive qualities that the *habitus* demonstrates. The explanation of rule-following behavior is intrinsically connected with bodily and linguistically mediated understanding within a cultural form of life.

The *habitus* concept has a second parallel with Foot's virtue theory in the essential connection between uncertainty and action. The uncodifiability of virtue ethics is a long-standing objection in the literature, though advocates of virtue ethics have pointed out that it is not a serious problem.[95] This seems right. Any explicitly formulated rule held as an explanation of an ethical act or course of conduct would face the rule-following paradox. The *habitus* concept demonstrates how limited rule-based explanations of action can be, a thought further supported by the indeterminate variety and complexity of moral situations in human life. Explicit rules are not enough because no finite list of rules could cover every case, as if we have full clarity in advance of the real circumstances of a moral quandary and the agent's involvement in it. For this very reason Aristotle and St. Thomas wrote of the vital role of the practical intellect and the virtue of wisdom in moral action. It is always easier to go wrong than to proceed rightly. The uncertainty imposed on human actions by the asymmetry of time is a practical limit on establishing certainty. As a corollary, any normative standard that depends on establishing full transparency about the future is suspect. Ethics is uncodifiable in part because of the gap between the idealizations of express rules and the rule's enactment in realized action. This is as much an ontological condition as it is an epistemological limit.

This situation challenges the thought that moral or ethical action could find its explanation in an explicit set of moral principles or principles explaining the regularity of moral actions, whether known to a subject or not. Codified schemes of moral principles, or theories of hedonistic or egoistic motivation, or principles of expected utility all become suspect explanations. Goodness or badness in action will not be specified by principles in connection with the moral subject; or, it seems, any principles at all.

Modern moral philosophies in general stand in an uncomfortable relationship with uncertainty and the suspense living in real time. The preoccupation with moral duties and utilitarian ends already testifies to this. A duty holds no matter the circumstance. Expected utility supposes an unobscured vision of the future as well as a connection between what is foreseen and what one's actions bring about. Uncertainty, suspense and irreversible change

[95] Louden, "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics"; Schneewind, "The Misfortunes of Virtue"; Hursthouse, "Applying virtue ethics" in Hursthouse, Lawrence, and Quinn, *Virtues and Reasons*; Copp and Sobel, "Morality and Virtue."

haunt all significant action in a human life, and moral theories which are ill at ease with this find themselves alienated from human reality in an important respect.

A radical virtue approach to ethics resolves this difficulty by setting rules and outcomes, and the choices of the agent, into a secondary role. This is not to say that a virtue approach is better able to overcome uncertainty. The point is rather that the virtue approach takes a more realistic stance towards the reality of uncertainty and the asymmetry of time, acknowledging the real limitations – and tragic possibilities – of human life.

The virtue of hope merits further consideration in this respect. Elizabeth Anscombe argued so vehemently against consequentialist and 'ought'-based moral theories because of their commitment to the thought that there could always be circumstances which could make out even a great evil as the right course of action.[96] The worrying part of this is not in the thought that bad things might sometimes need to be done. For none of us know what the future holds, and there is nothing inconceivable in a run of bad luck leading us into a situation wherein the only courses of action available to us all involve us in some bad action. The problem with the consequentialist view is that it is too ready to pronounce on this possibility in advance of any details of the case. Whether the case might be avoided, or whether the possibilities for action available to a creative or determined mind might not provide another way forward, are not considered. And this runs against the virtue of hope. Hope demands that we keep the possibility of good things in view, not to decide what ought to be done in advance on the basis of a theory alone. The uncertain future always leaves open possibilities.

5.6 Conclusion

I have argued that Foot's virtue approach to ethics shares certain important features with Taylor's strong evaluations, relating essential constituents of human identity to strong evaluative commitments. I argued that the Aristotelian concept of virtue has an intrinsically social and embodied aspect, which is highlighted in Taylor's discussion of rule-following behavior and *habitus*. Finally I argued that the uncertainty entailed by the future-orientation of action, along with the reciprocity of rule and action, means that the reality human agents inhabit exists beyond their ability to fully grasp it in reflective thought. An ethical vision must contend with these issues. Foot's virtue approach is an attempt to contend with such problems – as is Taylor's. Although he is not easily brought into the fold of mainstream work on virtue ethics, if my reading is right, neither is Foot. If we can plausibly call hers a radical virtue ethics (which I believe we can), then Taylor's account of strong evaluations can be plau-

[96] Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy"; Sabina Lovibond, "Absolute Prohibitions Without Divine Promises," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 54 (March 2004): 141–58, doi:10.1017/S1358246100008481.

sibly situated as a like account. In each case, it is a conceptual connection between personal identity and evaluation that forms the core of ethics.

Even with all of this said, there remains a further question. How can the distinctions of worth tracked by the virtues also track the kinds of distinctions of worth tracked by the self-interpreting animal? For Taylor, history is the fundamental problem of self and morality. New metaphors, new ways of understanding ourselves, bring along new commitments to higher goods. Our identity, speaking loosely of an English-speaking Westerner in the early 21st century, embodies certain moral standards received from the Western traditions of Christianity, the Enlightenment, and the Romantic and modernist revolts. This has surely brought about an irrevocable and qualitative break with the sense of self and worth in the past. If that is right, can we reconcile the thought that there are invariant spheres of excellence which are nevertheless given differential and variegated forms of development in various human cultures? This is the question I will turn to in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 6

The goods of a life

In this concluding chapter I will take up an issue that appeared as a point of conflict, in the previous chapter, between Foot's virtuous human being and Taylor's strongly-valuing "self in moral space". Two obstacles stand in the way of the conciliatory reading offered in the previous chapter.

The first is the problem of modern self-consciousness and time.[1] The concept of virtue fell into disrepute in moral philosophy in no small part due to the dramatic historical and social transformations brought about by modern forms of self-understanding. One source lay in the new possibilities for human freedom that came about during the modern era, due to the influences of the Reformation and the scientific revolutions on early modern and Enlightenment thinkers. Another is the unique time-consciousness of modernity. Modernity understands itself as an ahistorical achievement, defined in relation to both the past which it has overcome and its openness to an unbounded future which it can help create. The possibility of choosing one's own life, in full awareness that the modern predicament differs profoundly from the situation in the ancient and medieval worlds, signals a profound shift not only in how we think of ourselves as human beings but how we envision and relate to our goods. This poses a difficulty that any ethical theory must contend with. Taylor's hermeneutic method finds itself at home here, already being expressed in historically-aware terms. It might seem that Foot's ethics, being both naturalistic and a theory of human virtues, is less resilient in this regard.

The other challenge comes from the account of goodness itself. Taylor's analysis of the modern identity paints a portrait of a fragmented being adrift in a moral reality that transcends full expression. To be oriented to the good is to be open to possibilities for exploration and creation beyond the fulfillment of, or in, any particular human life.

The eudaimonist element of Foot's ethics might come off as conservative or even provincial

[1] I am drawing here on Taylor's discussion of secularization in, inter alia, his *A Secular Age* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

by contrast. The goodness of a human life circumscribes the ends of human beings, restricting the notions of what is worthwhile, noble, fine, excellent, or otherwise good in a life to the goods *of* a life. Taylor argues that this vision of goodness is inadequate, itself one symptom of the instrumentalist and naturalistic suppression of higher goods.

If this is right, then an important point of difference between Foot and Taylor lies in the bounds of the good and what goodness consists in. Despite certain conspicuous aspects of affiliation with Aristotelian and Platonist interpretations of goodness, my interpretation of their works suggests that the difference even here is less radical than it appears.

6.1 Happiness as the highest human good

In the concluding chapters of *Natural Goodness*, Foot inquires into a difficulty that has appeared for her account. Practical rationality is a human virtue, belonging to human goodness rather than the colorless abstractions of procedural thought.[2] But this raises a worry. What is the good at which rationality aims? The Aristotelian tradition identifies happiness as the highest human good, this being what it is to live well as a human being. What does happiness mean? And how does it relate to virtue?

The difficulty here revolves around the diversity of goods and choices in human life, a fact which opposes the very idea of one ultimate end:

> For how then could it be that virtue sometimes requires the sacrifice of happiness? And how is it that that happiness can, it seems, be obtained by wickedness? Can these things be denied?[3]

Her first step is to seek some clarity in the concept of happiness itself. Happiness could not be mere enjoyment or superficial feelings of pleasure. Such hedonic theories of happiness exclude the sense of achievement that accompanies happiness. This kind of happiness can exist without immediate feelings of contentment or enjoyment or even accompanied by painful or uncomfortable feelings. The sense of accomplishing something, and the sense that what is achieved is worthwhile, is part of happiness as sure as any immediate experiences. These ways of talking about happiness suggest that both the awareness of achievement as well as a sense that one is achieving something *desirable* are part of the logical grammar of "happiness". That talk of happiness involves talk of accomplishment and desirable ends indicates that we are not merely speaking of a feeling or preference, but of goodness itself.

Foot is explicit here that, despite the cognitive attitudes involved, happiness need not consist in express thoughts. For happiness "is a sense of how things are, and therefore not

[2] As argued in the previous chapter.

[3] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 82.

essentially episodic."[4] This sense has "the distinctive relation to the time sequence that belongs to a belief", which "even if long-standing may never have been formulated by the one who has them, can be attributed to him or her in the present tense, irrespective of whether, at the time of attribution, they occupy the mind."[5]

The concept of happiness, what she wants to call *deep happiness*, is more complex than a simple attribution of a feeling. Deep happiness is neither a state of mind, to be confused with excitement or elation, nor should it be confused with a concept having 'psychological depth', as if somehow detachable from a person's experiences or beliefs. To speak of inarticulate, though cognitive, aspects of happiness is of course adding depth to our understanding of the concept, though not in the sense suggested by metaphors of a murky deep lying beneath the surface of a pond. "One can say that bona fide attributions of deep happiness take place in a characteristic syndrome of spontaneous utterance, action, gesture, and response," she writes.[6] Deep happiness is situated in particular contexts, and so the concept itself cannot be separated from its objects.

Because of this, nothing in the concept requires any special facts about the human condition beyond a general, minimal sense of human responses:

> Why shouldn't the communality of meaning not depend here on a shared reaction among human beings to certain things that are very general in human life? Are not these reactions shared even by people of very different cultures; not, of course, exactly, but nevertheless with sufficient similarity for people of one age or culture to understand depth of happiness over a birth and depth of grief about the death of parent, child, or friend?[7]

There are some aspects of human life which will exist wherever there are human beings. We would not know what it would mean to speak of human beings without these activities or the sense of significance attaching to them. "Thus possible objects of deep happiness seem to be things that are basic in human life, such as home, and family, and work, and friendship," she writes.[8] Such things are mundane, and this is not intended as a disparaging term. These things form the raw materials of our sense of goodness, and having them provides us with a grip on the intelligibility of the idea of 'human good'. Though certainly happiness is not restricted to these things, for we also find that "in a person such as Wittgenstein, the chief joy of his life was in the quest for truth, and in other exceptional men and women it is in artistic creation or the exploration of strange lands."[9]

[4] Ibid., 84.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 86–87.
[7] Ibid., 88.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

Happiness is not enjoyment, cheerful mood, or even happy activity. Deep happiness is not like 'having a headache' in being separable from our thoughts or our actions. Yet it is not enough to say that contentment and pleasure are no part of happiness, and consequently that a life full of these things could not be a good life. Happiness must consist in achievement of worthy ends, though it is not separable from a person's appraisal of what is good and worthy. And this means we cannot yet rule out a good life, even of deep happiness, which is also a life of wickedness. Because happiness involves our sense of achievement as well as basic human goods, happiness must concern the underlying thoughts that a person has about himself and his life. This means it is conceivable that a wicked man going about his evil deeds without shame in the pleasure he takes, genuinely believing himself in the right and acting for right ends, would also be a happy man. He would be, in Foot's schema, also a flourishing man.

She wants to resist this conclusion, obviously. Her suggestion is that there is a way of understanding human good and happiness which does not allow wickedness to count as a happy, flourishing human life. Much as goodness in respect of physical health and intellectual capacities can help classify living things as well as counting towards their good – there are certain things that we need *qua* human beings, which aren't needed by sea stars, and vice versa – there is a relation between the good things we judge good and being an instance of the human life-form. As we've discussed, this is a matter of the relation between virtue and a good life. To this we can now add that the happiness of the person who lives a good life is partly, necessarily (though not sufficiently) constituted by a life of virtue.

Part of the difficulty in addressing the subject, if we are to avoid coming around to religious speculations, turns on a conceptual difference between the *goodness* of those with the virtues and the human *good* they might, or might not, achieve in acting well. Goodness in respect of the virtues does not entail that a good life, qua happiness, is the reward.

The difficulties in nailing down an adequate concept of happiness as the highest good reflect a difficulty in reconciling human freedom, the capacity to deliberate and choose and act according to one's desires and interests, with moral goodness. I won't pretend that there will be any clear resolution to this problem. Despite her generally optimistic discussion in the book, in an interview published a few years after *Natural Goodness*, Foot herself admitted that she found herself stumped by the problem.[10] Before turning to Foot's response to this problem, let us first take stock of why this has become such a problem, and what Taylor's analysis of the modern identity can add.

[10]Rick Lewis, "Interview with Philippa Foot," accessed October 6, 2017, https://philosophynow.org/issues/41/Philippa_Foot.

6.2 Three zones of moral conflict

The kernel of this problem lies in a paradox of freedom. Freedom is, or at least has become, a good in human life. But freedom allows agents to choose their own ends, as part of their own goods. With this it becomes conceivable that *my own good* is logically distinct from *goodness*. Maybe this or that is good for human beings; but if I don't take it as to my benefit, then what of it? I use the phrase "has become" a good because modern time-consciousness introduces the possibility of reflecting on past forms of life and their goods. We know that we are different from any culture in the ancient world, that we don't live as they lived, and mostly would not want to. Freedom and time consciousness introduce new goods, new possibilities for good, which the ancients did not imagine. The possibility of freedom can appear as a double-edged sword. Conservative writers lament the loss of a stable moral order.[11] Liberal minded thinkers praise the end of unjust, oppressive, stifling traditions.

Who is right? Perhaps a better question is in order. Could something be right in both positions? Might it not be that both the 'boosters' and 'knockers' of modernity are on to something?[12] Consider that the rich complexity of modern ideals of good is in one way an improvement over pre-modern ethical life. We recognize more and different sources of meaning, more possibilities for excellence and fulfillment. A wider range of moral concerns demand our attention. We find good in the mundane, in our powers of reason, and in our feelings and powers of creative imagination. But there is tension between these goods, and above all those who find themselves nostalgic for traditional forms of life are expressing a real sense of loss, especially as the naturalist and instrumentalist vision comes to dominate and exclude the others. Theistic sources as well as romantic visions of the whole person are suppressed or even ridiculed as live options, even though these are historical sources of even our modern moral insights and beliefs, even as theistic belief remains a strong – possibly ineradicable – source of meaning for a great many people.

In the concluding chapter of *Sources of the Self*, Taylor identifies three 'zones of conflict' which he takes to arise from this predicament of the modern identity.[13] First is the widespread agreement about moral standards joined with an ever wider disagreement over the moral sources of our considered judgments and intuitions. Second, there is the on-going dispute between the Enlightenment's disengaged instrumentalism and the Romantic protest against technical rationality in the name of higher fulfillment. Third, there is the dispute between that sense of higher fulfillment and our moral standards themselves, whether fulfillment is at all compatible with our moral ideals.

[11]MacIntyre expresses this worry in his *After Virtue*; Williams is sympathetic to this view, though more cautious about full-blown conservatism, in his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*.

[12]Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[13]Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 498–99.

The first zone highlights the way in which considered moral judgments and moral beliefs and intuitions about the good and the right seem to not only converge across and between different cultural outlooks, but that there is also a sense in which something invariant to human beings is being brought out and amplified in the process. It is not simply modernity's mythical story of progress at work here. We can still make something of the story of linear progress, but it cannot be the Enlightenment's tale of overcoming superstition with the light of reason and science. If our modern predicament is a genuine improvement, it is not through wholesale rejection of the past. This is a familiar Hegelian theme, that the past is never set aside but always in some way carried forward, transfigured, in a higher synthesis with what replaces it. We can call the modern situation an improvement not due to the triumph of blind reason and historical progress alone – though these have doubtless contributed their share – but also because something of the pre-modern outlook survives into modernity.

The second zone, between instrumentalism and higher fulfillment, sets itself against that backdrop. The two kinds of freedom underwriting modern ethics and politics – the ideals of self-determination and self-realization – rest respectively on the disengaged self-as-controller and the expressive self-as-explorer. These each stake out different spheres of moral concern and express different commitments in psychology and ontology. Both notions of the self and its freedom invoke a break with the classical tradition of the ancient world. Philosophically, in that there are no clear analogs between either disengaged rationalism or explorations of the creative imagination as ideals of freedom in ancient writers. Historically, because both images of the self are peculiarly modern innovations that are defined in part by their contrast with prior forms of self-understanding. The contest here is a historical novelty, although our previous point holds: something invariant in the human condition, call it a need for recognition as a person, persists, but it is irrevocably transformed in its distinct realizations. Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic expressivism are each articulations of this essentially human way of feeling which tugs at the human soul.

The third zone of dispute develops out of this, in asking the question of whether higher fulfillment is compatible with our moral standards. The possibility of freedom already implies the question; already we find its roots in Schopenhauer and Baudelaire, though it took Nietzsche to bring the challenge to its conclusion. In the 20th century, writers drawing on his works, influenced further by Marx and Freud, raised difficult questions for any moralist. If a fulfilling human life, or the highest expressions of human excellence, runs against our moral standards of personal autonomy, universal compassion, impartial equality and democratic rule, then which ought to win? Or are we faced with a hopeless situation wherein morality must be imposed if it is to be a part of human life? And if that is the case, why would anyone go for it?

All three of these conflict-areas shed some light on the source of Foot's problem. How can

something so simple as *happiness* be called *the* human good given what looks like an intrinsic pluralism of goods? Even if we could agree that the term happiness is roughly correct, could any content given to the term resist the freedom to question and to choose one's own ends? For that matter, given the problem of time and change, what could prevent happiness from occupying very different, and morally-incommensurable, polarities from one time to another? Secular time-consciousness allows us to look at the past not as a source of insights but also as a source of errors, blinkered thoughts, unjust social relations, oppression, domination, and other morally unsound beliefs to be cast off with progress. Nothing is dictated to us by the past, and we are the authors of the future.

There are two areas which are worth exploring by way of a reply. The first thing is the problem of value pluralism, this being the consequence of modern freedom and time. Taylor's turn away from Hegel to the expressivists, notably to the figure of Herder, led him to explore what we can call, conveniently if inaccurately, a 'communitarian' position on ethics and politics.[14] Herder's social theory anticipates some features of the collective will expounded by the German Idealists, though he has the resources to prevent the head-first descent into subjectivism and the loss of the individual in history's race to absolute identity. Taylor's Herder evokes some of the Aristotelian themes we have explored in Foot's work, and there may be resources there to help resolve the issue of the highest good.

The second thing is the issue of goodness itself. I have remarked that a defining difference between the Foot and Taylor might lie in the dispute between Plato, who looked 'up' to the suprasensible world of the Ideas, and Aristotle, who looked out into the world of nature. This works itself out in what appears to be the 'humanistic' concern of Foot's ethics, not in the modern sense of the term but in its aspect of fundamental concern with human living and excellence. Taylor, by contrast, adopts a conspicuously non-anthropocentric position. I will argue that at least one of Taylor's criticisms of neo-Aristotelianism in this respect misses the mark. Moreover, the supposed division between Platonist and Aristotelian views on the good may itself be overstated in this context. I will now address each of these in turn.

6.3 Value pluralism and moral relativism

If freedom and time are the primary obstacles to a retrieval of a virtue approach to ethics, it is because of the intrinsic plurality of goods that they open up for us. As a limiting case this includes the good of freedom itself, and with it the space of complementary goods such as the intrinsic dignity of persons, duties of respect, and obligations stemming from the recognition of the other.

[14] "The importance of Herder" in Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*.

In Taylor's analysis, the multi-faceted modern identity is enriched and opened to new spaces of moral possibility precisely because of its complicated and conflicting moral commitments. Human goods are pluralistic in a strong sense, as there is no fixed set of moral properties nor any determinate language which captures all of our qualitative distinctions of worth. Human freedom exists in a dialectical movement with goodness, as it is always possible to innovate and create new languages to articulate and deepen the sense of intrinsic worth we apprehend in our experiences and motives. The freedom to create and express is not itself a function of subjective choice or feeling. What is articulated is, in a deeper sense, already there to be brought out in articulation.

This is drawn out, not in the direction of the Hegelian dialectical movement toward the identity of the non-identical, but through the expressivist theory of meaning that Taylor draws out of J. G. Herder.[15] It is in Herder we find the resources first to situate meaning in language within the form of life of a people, the culture or the nation with a shared language and history. Recall from our earlier discussion that the constitutive theory of expression and holism of meaning open up a 'semantic dimension' in which the intelligible aspects of human life, those involving persons and actions, and also goods, are grasped.[16] Goodness is situated within the field of meanings realized by and in social practice, enacted by human beings in dialogical actions.

This brings out an important point. If goods consist in 'meaning-events' constituted in and by the practices of particular cultures, then the thought that all goods are 'decomposable' into the goods of individual humans, for example, becomes much harder to defend.[17] The decomposability thesis itself rests on two further pillars, (1) *atomism*, the thesis in the human sciences that all collectives are composed of distinct individuals, and (2) *subjectivism*, which locates the good, or the objects of value in case of noncognitivist psychologies, in some attribute of the individual's mind. Taylor's target here is a specific utilitarian conception of the individual and its notion of happiness, in the thought that there are no collective goods. Any notion of good specific to a human culture must ultimately rest on some fact about states of affairs. A paradigmatic example is the concept of utility, whereby some state of affairs is evaluated according to the happiness it brings to agents. We have already discussed how this notion of the good excludes qualitative distinctions. What is desirable just is what people desire. There is no space here for a sense of higher worth.

Taylor's worry then is that the goods which intrinsically belong to a form of life, which are literally inexpressible without its words, cannot merely be decomposed into states of affairs. There is no frame of reference, no conditions of validity, for certain forms of good absent the

[15] "Theories of meaning" and "Language and human nature" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*; "The importance of Herder" in Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*.

[16] See chapter 2

[17] "Irreducibly social goods" in Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*.

background provided by semantic understanding. In fact goods can be irreducibly social in two ways. The first is that a culture itself can be the site of goods that it embodies or realizes. The value of certain forms of fulfillment, say, or the meaning of a work of art finds its place specifically within the system of practices, institutions, and understandings.[18] The culture itself, or at least some of its goods, are defensible in their own right, not as instrumental to other goods which belong to the individual. (Indeed, we can see how far this runs in recognizing that atomism itself has *moral* weight for many moderns precisely because the Western liberal tradition has made the individual freedom that it entails into an intelligible good.)

The second way involves shared forms of understanding which are *common* in a strong sense. They belong to the "us" of a culture as such, rather than being merely *convergent* matters which happen to have the same meaning for many individuals.[19] No one could play a game of chess alone, since no one can participate in a social practice without also participating in a mutually intelligible form of life; nor could the rules be written off as mere agreement of the players. The players *do agree*, but it is not the agreement in which the rules consist. It is essential to goods of this second kind that their goodness be the object of a common understanding.[20]

There is a strong sense in which the goods of our strong evaluations are not just "ours", in the narrow sense of the individual agent, but (also) belong to us in the more robust sense of belonging to our form of life. And this belies the possibility of giving any single concept of higher or highest goods. How could it be that happiness alone is the highest good if there are many goods, and not all of them belong to any individual? The difficulty is not the rampant subjectivism of the 'anything goes' emotivist or existentialist, but the fact that there are many different cultural outlooks, past and present, which disagree profoundly on matters of the good, and which are inseparable from any plausible concept of human goods. To speak of the virtues as human goods or happiness as the highest good may go for some culture – perhaps it did for ancient Athens – but need not go for ours. For we are at once mindful of the value of our own sense of freedom, and at the same time cognizant of the need to recognize and respect outlooks alternate to our own, for these too will realize their own internal goods.

Are we to be satisfied with a cultural or nationalist relativism? If so, how do we face down a contradiction within relativism, namely that the historically peculiar sense of universal morality that developed out of the European tradition and grounds our recognition of other ways of life is *our cultural good*? By contrast, the affirmation of social or cultural goods runs against the grain of 'difference blind' individualism so characteristic of atomistic ethical and political thought.[21] Yet the recognition of difference between cultures also mandates that we

[18]Ibid., 136.
[19]Ibid., 138–39.
[20]Ibid., 139.
[21]"The politics of recognition" in Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*.

acknowledge the common goods which also constitute their sense of identity.

Taylor's response turns on the juxtaposition of historical and cultural change of understanding with the recognition that what we articulate is an implicit sense of *human* experiences or understanding. What looks like a contradiction is in fact the consequence of the constitutive theory of meaning: articulation in language at once makes explicit and constitutes the essence of the thing made explicit. It is possible for Taylor to say that both (1) the common and collective goods of different human peoples or cultures can be presumed to have something important to say to all human beings, and (2) this is a provisional hypothesis, a starting point, the validity of which must be demonstrated concretely in the course of the study of the culture.[22] There are, plausibly, legitimately higher or more worthy goods, though this worth cannot be either presupposed on the basis of principle alone, or else denied flatly as writers like Foucault or Derrida might have it.[23] Partly this is because it would be ethnocentric and chauvinistic to make such a call, pro or con, on principle alone. And partly it is because without a genuine understanding of the other, an interpretation of the worth that they see in their common goods, we aren't in any position to make the judgment.

Behind all this rests a thought that there is something common in human life which can be understood, which opens the way for a mutual intelligibility even between distantly intelligible speakers. And this seems right. For all the distance between the present day and Plato or Aristotle – for that matter Homer and Hesiod – the experiences of the ancient Greeks are all too familiar to us. The same goes for the ancient writers of different traditions. Confucius, Lao Tzu, Nagarjuna and the Buddha are all comprehensible to the modern-day English speaker. This is not to say nothing leaves us to scratch our heads in wonder, or that there are no difficulties in coming to understand certain meanings or certain social contexts now missing. But the possibility of these misunderstandings is due to the fact that so much else is easily relatable.

Taylor's neo-Herderian vision of cultural difference amounts to an account of the multifarious and conflicting potentials of a single human nature oriented at self-realization. Herder himself believed that the rich difference of cultural outlooks expressed different purposes and different configurations of goods. No single culture can express all of the ways in which human beings can achieve self-determination and actualization. It requires a patchwork of many different peoples in order to fully express human potential. Where Herder took this diversity to be an expression of divine providence, Taylor is more ambivalent about the prospects of a theistic explanation. Without making any a priori commitments one way or another, the possibility that forms of life which have provided 'horizons of meaning' for large numbers of human beings over a long period of time have something deserving our admira-

[22] Ibid., 252.
[23] Ibid., 254–55.

tion and respect makes for a good heuristic in encounters with others.[24] We are in any case quite far off from any condition of being able to pronounce on the absolute worth of any or all cultures.

If this is right, then the diversity of incommensurable human goods and ways of realizing them occurs within a singular, though implicit and unspeakable, horizon of human nature.[25] Different cultural expressions are diverse manifestations of the ways in which that life can go well. What underlies the differences is the minimalist notion of the human being as the agent which values and strives after its estimations of worth.

The modern identity, "the Self" which so preoccupies the contemporary Westerner, is a contingent achievement of human agents who have incorporated its various ideals and concepts into their self-understanding. So "our" modern identity, as heirs to the Western meta-tradition, expresses certain historically contingent achievements. These particular developments could be thought of as realizations of more primordial, though thin, human needs. For example, we could locate a basic need for mutual recognition as part of the meaning of human agency, since it is through recognizing and interacting with others that I can then arrive at self-knowledge through my articulations in the shared language. The refinement of this need into human rights and institutions for recognizing them is one way in which the need is satisfied.

The rationalist tendencies of the Enlightenment thinkers were not motivated by a love abstraction for its own sake. They sought to defend human freedom, autonomy, and responsibility against the subversive forces of modernization which they believed would erode or undermine them. Formal equality, human rights, and democratic political institutions were intended to provide a space in which the intrinsic worth of the person could be grounded and defended. The Romantics and the counter-Enlightenment thinkers who opposed this tendency did not do so because they opposed the dignity of persons, but because they found self-sufficient reason inadequate for the task. Human worth had to be defended in the complete wholeness of the concrete individual, and the individual could only be so understood as a member of a community with a common language, history, and way of life. The basic need for recognition finds expression in two different trajectories, one concerned with control and detachment, the other with the full realization enabled by expression and exploration. These represent two different schemes for grounding and providing norms of recognition which articulate that basic need. That the rationalists too easily abandoned the parts of life which made it worth living, or that the Romantics found it too easy to abandon the person for the

[24] Ibid., 256.

[25] This position can be profitably understood as the social-theoretical elaboration of Taylor's theory of meaning and agency. There is a dialectical reciprocity of meanings, constituted in expression, made intelligible in contrast to an inarticulate background. Actions of collective agents are continuous with the actions of individual persons on Taylor's account of agency.

collective will or the greedy synthesis of the Absolute, is not something we can totally ignore. The present point, though, is that concrete realization of these ideals is at once a genuinely novel historical achievement, and a differential mode of realizing a basic, even universal need in the human condition.

Herder's anthropological conception of human beings understands the person as an essentially expressive, cultural being without entirely subordinating the individual to the will of a collective agent. The concept of an individual person presupposes a community and a language, but she is not defined by them alone. Taylor's portrait of the modern identity leaves us with a pluralistic, somewhat inconsistent (by design) account of the modern sense of the Self. The nature of the human being is such that there can be no single, dominating vision of goodness which is free of interpretation; we are defined by our interpretations. This condition radically transforms even our 'natural', biologically-grounded needs and inclinations into what Taylor calls 'metabiological' meanings.[26] Even something as basic as the need for food or water, or social companionship, becomes a good in the light of the interpreted meaning it has for us. Differential moral outlooks and cultural perspectives on the good represent different interpretations against a shared human background. This condition is, as we will see in the next section, is quite compatible with what Foot has to say about an Aristotelian concept of human goodness.

6.4 Taylor's Herder and Foot's Aristotle

Taylor's account of value pluralism raises several questions for Foot's account of happiness in connection with virtue. The first thing we will ask mainly to set it aside: is Foot's happiness an atomistic or subjectivist concept in the sense Taylor attacks above? It seems fairly clear that it is not. Happiness is not a state of affairs or a transient feeling. It is more like a process or unfolding activity of achievement. Though we have seen that there is the possibility for excellence even in evil, happiness does not belong to the person as a feeling or state of mind. Happiness is caught up in a person's activities and beliefs and feelings which capture the fact that one is indeed doing well. Joined with the thought that human good is *sui generis*,[27] we have here the provocative notion that the ethological or anthropological conception of human good can involve irreducibly social goods. Like Taylor, Foot is feeling her way toward an account of how things are with us – human beings – in a minimal sense, which admits of many and various concrete realizations in different cultural settings.

Not just anything can go for happiness, even if we cannot yet fully rule out the life of "happy wickedness". But how could this be? If happiness is the highest good, and happiness

[26]Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 91–92, 180–95.
[27]Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 51.

could be achieved through evil, then how can it also be a part of virtue? Or vice-versa, if happiness isn't aligned with virtue, why would it be the highest good?

In two papers Foot wrote shortly before her naturalistic turn, she spoke of definitional criteria for moral words.[28] As she had argued in "Moral beliefs", moral words could not just mean anything whatever. There are rules governing their use, and the rules are not arbitrary because they are partly determined by an internal relation to human benefit and harm. But she also argues, in "Morality and art" and "Moral relativism", that the meanings of moral words do not settle all questions about the interpretation of moral judgments. There is considerable ambiguity within our moral concepts, and between them as they relate within a larger schema of moral belief and intuition and judgment. The definitional criteria of moral concepts serve as 'fixed points' within the space of moral meanings, around which an indeterminate number of particular expressions can crystallize. This amounts then to a form of relativism, in that any given moral outlook will be relative to some human perspective or other, though this is what T. M. Scanlon labels Foot's 'benign relativism.'[29] Not just anything goes. There are restrictions both in the narrow sense, on what a moral word could mean, and in the more general sense of what could be admitted as a moral system or outlook. But there is an indeterminate variety in the realization of moral meanings allowed within the scope of fixed conditions on the meanings themselves.

I suggest that Foot's position on this has not seriously changed in her turn to the normative facts of human life and its basic needs as the meanings of moral concepts. Rather, as I read her, it is those very needs and goods which provide us with definitional criteria, in the concepts of benefit and harm which ground the meanings of moral concepts. This is made more plausible in connection with the minimalist and privative account that Foot gives of human needs.[30] All humans need to eat and breathe, we all have social needs for safety and companionship, and psychological needs to acquire language, to be recognized as an individual, and so forth. The virtues are characteristics which tend to help satisfy these needs by acting as correctives to 'natural' inclinations – *natural* here meaning our purely biological inclinations. As I've argued, there is no unproblematic distinction to draw between such 'natural' motivations and experiences and the realized 'cultural' expression of them. The virtuous refinement of basic primate responses in the context of a shared social life is *already* part of the natural form and functioning of the excellent, flourishing human being.

The virtue terms themselves have a minimal characterization at this level of generality. To speak of justice or charity or courage as a human need is to say very little, and mostly

[28] See her "Morality and art" and "Moral relativism", in *Moral Dilemmas*. It is relevant that this doctrine itself gave way to the stronger theory of natural norms, although I think that the structure at the core of the position in these papers is intact, and therefore useful in making sense of this particular ambiguity.

[29] Scanlon, "Fear of relativism", in Hursthouse, Lawrence, and Quinn, *Virtues and Reasons*.

[30] As I discussed in chapter 5.

what they could *not* be. As human needs are defined by an *absence of lack*, so the virtues are specified as *absence of defect*. This places some bounds on what substantial content could be attributed to a virtue concept, though negatively. Speaking of the courage of a person who turns and runs from any predicament where he ought to stand his ground would be more than unusual. It would be a mistake. At the same time, the 'fixed definitional points' of the virtue and vice terms allow for considerable latitude for differences in concrete expression. Perhaps fleeing at the first sign of danger is not courage for anyone, but with minimal conditions satisfied a great many other actions, even those not obviously courageous from one cultural perspective, could qualify as courageous in the circumstance in which they occur.

If this reading is right, Foot's natural goodness comes to resemble Herder's ideal of pluralistic communities with their own internal goods. Both argue for a shared and basic orientation that we can call human goodness, with a contrast between basic human goods and comparative cultural realizations of them. But because human goodness is a complex notion, consisting in many different, sometimes opposing, sometimes incommensurable distinctions of worth and ranking of such goods, there is no single way that an individual life, or even an individual culture, could realize all of its dimensions. There are an indeterminate number of ways that a life or a culture could realize the complexity of human goods.

This plays off an ambiguity in the meaning of the expression 'one right way to live well'. "One right way" can mean: there is one determinate right answer, as there is a single right answer to a mathematical formula. It can also mean: there is a single right way to characterize the unfolding of a process, or a series of activities, such that we provide constraints without precisely determining, in positive terms, how it must go. It is enough to avoid error.

Human potential is richly variegated across its many spheres of concern and activity, and so there are many ways in which a human life can be realized as a good human life.[31] Even restricting the discussion to the virtues, rather than human excellence more generally, no single life, no social or cultural form of life, can realize the virtues in all of their aspects. There are too many, for one thing, and moreover many of the goods conflict, with some choices placing others outside of our reach. Human goodness is such that the goods constituting it cannot be separated from the diversity of ends chosen by human beings, a fact which depends on the human freedom to choose our ends for ourselves. The corollary of this thought is that any concrete realization of goods in a life entails we have excluded some others. But this does not defeat the thought that a good life is available to us. Nor, as Foot has argued, that this good life is attainable without wickedness.

Value pluralism is pluralism of interpretations. It requires no essential difference in who is doing the interpreting, nor the range of basic concerns given in interpretation. Human

[31] Martha Nussbaum advances a position like this in her "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (September 1, 1988): 32–53, doi:10.1111/j.1475-4975.1988.tb00111.x.

nature, our moral predicament as human beings, are things we can only dimly glimpse; in part because of our limitations and in part because of the intrinsic multi-dimensional complexity of the thing. Full articulacy is not possible. Yet the tacit background of unspeakable agreement does not allow just any meanings to stand. Unspeakable is not the same thing as arbitrary. The "rules" we follow in morality belong, in part, to the semantic dimension of social practices, and at the same time they belong to us, qua human beings. It is in human nature that human nature is partly determined by our own designs.

6.5 The Good beyond human life?

So much for value pluralism. The final question I want to address is: what do the highest human goods themselves consist in? We can see now a plausible reading of Foot as endorsing a more sophisticated account of flourishing than a simple ideal of a "good life" for an individual human being. There is a social and cultural dimension to her account of flourishing which I have tried to bring out. Even so, is it the case that goodness just is the flourishing, the doing-well, of human beings? Or are there goods which rise above the flourishing of human lives to touch on higher, unconditional, even sacred ideals?

Taylor has made few remarks about neo-Aristotelian ethics in general. Philippa Foot is mentioned by name in only one article, and there only in passing.[32] While optimistic about their mutual departure from the narrow concern with moral obligations, he seems otherwise skeptical of the neo-Aristotelian's attempt to ground goodness in the flourishing, by way of the properties and life-activities of, human beings. Though Aristotelian ethics mark an advance over stifling theories of obligatory actions, he believes, they still impose limiting and ultimately unsatisfying constraints on the very idea of "good."[33]

My attempt to read Foot's Aristotelian naturalism as congenial seems, from Taylor's standpoint, unlikely on this basis. Envisioned from the Aristotelian standpoint, Taylor's own solution might seem to leave him either alienating goodness from human life in its entirety, or if not that, then retreating into a form of theism or supernaturalism which many modern non-theist and atheist readers would find untenable, both on ontological grounds and as a practically workable account of morality.

I don't think the situation is as bad as all this, and I'll try to say why in the remainder of this chapter. As a first approximation, one might say that Taylor affirms and Foot denies that goodness has to do with something other than doing well in human life and existence. I want to argue that this is a mistake. To see why, I will return to Foot's remarks on happiness in

[32]Taylor, "Ethics and Ontology." This article mainly concerns the Aristotelianism of John McDowell and David Wiggins. Foot earns a brief mention, about which more below.

[33]Charles Taylor, "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy," in *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays*, 2014, 3–23.

connection with virtue and a good life. Two points are salient here: (1) Foot's remarks on the topic show that Taylor's characterization of neo-Aristotelianism as restricted in its concern to the goods of a well-lived human life, *if this excludes a sense of the higher, the noble, the intrinsically worthy* (etc.), is mistaken. Moreover (2) to the extent the problem of reconciling an alienated higher good with the practical conduct of a human life can be overcome, as Taylor wants from his own account, the solution is available to the neo-Aristotelian as well.

I want to handle the second point first, as it leads into an issue I have already raised about Taylor's human agent. The human agent is a being with a body and an embodied set of capacities which include language and social behavior. Given this, it is not clear what could be meant by speaking of 'life-transcending' goods, as might be implicated by the Platonic Good or Neoplatonist and Augustinian forms of Christianity. Clearly there are some ambiguities at work here, and I want to at least clarify the issues even if no conclusive answers are in the cards. In the next section, I will say more about this before returning to the first point.

Before getting to that, I want to forestall one objection. Isn't this a trivial issue now? Not that there isn't an interesting philosophical question about goodness, but if we are considering practical or ethical questions, does anything important rest on our answers? After all, in the matter of which things are good, our moral standards, there is doubtless much agreement; and in the matter of which things are fine and noble and excellent in human life, so long as we agree on what is important in conduct – not to kill or be cruel or steal or lie, say – we can get by without a philosophical account of goodness. Leave it up to a culture, or inquire through psychological and social science, and otherwise get on with the living.

We shouldn't be too hasty in dismissing this view, as there is something right in it, but it does not strike me as quite right. For one thing, the superficial moral agreement is not as unanimous as it appears. There are still many wide-open spaces for disagreement, and these disagreements turn very much on substantive understandings of the good. Moreover, we cannot take agreement itself for granted.[34] Perhaps the spirit of the "end of history" in the air back in the 1990s, when Taylor developed many of these ideas, made moral agreement seem ubiquitous, even inevitable.[35] Recent events at the time of this writing, from the 9/11 attacks in 2001 to the general climate of unease and populist revolt in the air in the United States and Europe in recent years, could make a skeptic out of even an ardently faithful believer in the inevitability of moral progress. Indeed, much of what I have discussed, in respect of the essentially social and cultural kind of lives humans live, can easily support the opposite interpretation. There may be no universal agreement in moral standards, and nothing leading us to a final convergence or consensus on the subject.

[34] Quentin Skinner raises this objection against Taylor's unflinchingly optimistic outlook. See "Who Are 'We'? Ambiguities of the Modern Self," *Inquiry* 34, no. 2 (June 1, 1991): 133–53, doi:10.1080/00201749108602249.

[35] The expression was made famous Francis Fukuyama in his now recanted *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

This thought is further supported by the fascinating work in empirical moral psychology in recent years by Jonathan Haidt and Joshua Greene, which suggests a strong biological basis for moral emotions and experiences as well as an explanation of the differences between moral outlooks.[36] We don't need to accept any particular metaethical interpretation of these findings in order to absorb the insight that superficial agreement may rest on thinner grounds that it appears. It might be that the best case ethical or political scenario for our species could not be the liberal vision of many tolerant democratic states living together. That liberal vision itself could turn up as a culturally-bound moral outlook that we cannot assume as given for all people everywhere. If we cannot rule out the worth of other cultures in advance, nor can we rule out the possibility that there can be no end to conflict between them. This is admittedly a rather ugly thought, but there is nothing inconsistent with it arising from the ethical positions we have investigated so far.

A great deal rests then on what the good is and how we interpret it. Our answers to what is good in a life, but also what goods transcend the doing-well of human lives is crucial to the extent that it matters if we live well in living morally, or whether a human being may plausibly act well in living as Callicles or Nietzsche thought best. And if it is the case that human goods just are the goods of a well-lived life, then we have not ruled out this possibility. It might be that happiness does not rule out wickedness, and that moral virtue only weakly correlates with a good human life.

The answer hinges on what we can say about Foot's proposed solution to this difficulty. Does the conceptual connection between benefit and human goodness work out as she would like? Can it do the work she asks of it without either collapsing happiness into the goods of an animal life and allowing a life of happy evil as good, or else retreating into theistic faith? From Taylor's standpoint, this implicates Foot in a variety of subjectivism. This does not mean that she endorses a subjectivist metaethics *per se*. It is not the subject or the ego but the bounds of human existence itself which mark the boundaries of goodness.

In drawing attention to this Aristotelian preoccupation with human well-being, restricted to the field of "life goods" in their many guises, Taylor may be understood as posing a challenge to the *anthropocentric orientation of modern ethics*. The excellences of a human life, while no doubt part of our goods and our motives for acting for the good, are not themselves sufficient to explain *which things are good* nor why we value them.[37]

[36] For a summary of this work, see Jonathan Haidt, Craig Joseph, and others, "The Moral Mind: How Five Sets of Innate Intuitions Guide the Development of Many Culture-Specific Virtues, and Perhaps Even Modules," *The Innate Mind* 3 (2007): 367–91; Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012); Jonathan Haidt, "Moral Psychology for the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Moral Education* 42, no. 3 (September 1, 2013): 281–97, doi:10.1080/03057240.2013.817327.

[37] While we are not revisiting Moore's 'naturalistic fallacy', there is an important respect in which the Footian is on the back heel in trying to say how the desirable relates to what is in fact desired.

What sense can we make of someone's valuing justice above even his own survival if we do not take seriously a higher sense of good than the flourishing of one's life? That depends on what it means to talk about goods of a life and goods which transcend a life. In the next section I consider Taylor's position on this matter.

Taylor's human-transcendent good

Taylor puts the point succinctly in the introduction to his collected papers: "if one of the fundamental uses of language is to articulate or make manifest the background of distinctions of worth we define ourselves by, how should we understand *what* is being manifested here?"[38] In expressing a commitment to a higher good, one isn't simply articulating a felt response to the environment in the way a thermostat responds to temperature. We are "striving rather to be faithful to something beyond us, not explicable simply in terms of human response."[39]

This opens a new angle on the issue of subjectivism. It could be that even an anti-subjectivist or anti-noncognitivist stance in moral philosophy could still end up affirming a form of subjectivism, insofar as it remains oriented towards provided it still orients itself around a basic concern for the flourishing of a human life. To overcome subjectivism in this stronger sense requires overcoming *humanism*, in the sense Heidegger used that word to imply a singular focus on human existence and its qualities.[40]

Whatever Heidegger's thoughts on the matter, Taylor himself takes up as a central part of his later writings on secularization in the modern world.[41] In his paper "The immanent Counter-Enlightenment", Taylor introduces a three-way distinction between exclusive humanism, that secular, liberal, moral standpoint that is uniquely concerned with rights and dignity, and two other contrasting viewpoints.[42] One of them is the viewpoint of the believer, in the sense of a theist's belief in the divine or supernatural as a source of goodness.

The other is the immanent Counter-Enlightenment of the paper's title, this being an attempt to move beyond both belief and the exclusive humanism which refutes it. The Counter-Enlightenment expresses a certain discontent with secular liberal humanism along two pri-

[38] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 11.

[39] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*.

[40] As in the "Letter on Humanism", in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008).

[41] His thinking on this is implicit in the later chapters of *Sources of the Self*, in the discussion of the "framing epiphany" characteristic of modernist art in chapters 24-25. The topic emerges more explicitly in more recent writings, especially in *A Secular Age*. It is part of human existence that we share a tenuous, mostly ambiguous relation to the world beyond the sphere of human concerns with objects, time, and other taken-for-granted elements of our existence.

[42] Charles Taylor, "The Immanent Counter-Enlightenment: Christianity and Morality," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (January 1, 2005): 224–39, doi:10.4314/sajpem.v24i3.31430. This paper helpfully anticipates and encapsulates several key features and concepts in Taylor's later thinking on the topic of secularization.

mary dimensions. First is a growing dissatisfaction with the modern moral order, which has life, happiness, and prosperity as its moral aim. Figures such as Mallarmé, who endorse a form of humanism, come to to reject this privileging of life as a new form of restriction. "What becomes apparent," says Taylor, "resembles something more like a counter-privileging of death."[43]

Second is a rejection of everyday contentment, which comes to be seen as contemptible. This invites a refusal to recognize the primacy of ordinary life, rejecting it in favor of the ideals of heroic greatness. The modern moral order imposes a second form of limitation in which the goal is taken to be "an attempt to reduce the goals of human life to the core of a strict and abstract morality."[44]

Nietzsche is a key figure in this turn against the moral order, rejecting both the preservation of life as the highest ideal as well as the egalitarianism and reduction of suffering that come with it. Life itself implies cruelty, domination, and a ruthless absence of pity for the weak and suffering. The life of reflection, which points us away from this condition, is thus an affirmation of death and destruction. In the end the moral order of modernity is the negation of life. Reason itself is lead into irrationality, becoming its opposite and negation. Any society organized around a life of reflection must also affirm death and destruction.

Once joined to political reaction against the modern order during the wars of the early 20th century, the Counter-Enlightenment found expression in fascism. Yet Taylor does not condemn it for this:

> On the contrary, we need to understand why thinkers who abhorred fascism from the depths of their beings were nevertheless attracted to antihumanism. This is possible because the moral order of modernity can always be experienced as a prison.[45]

Rather than rejecting such views as abhorrent at face value, Taylor suggests that there is something of genuine importance in the two major antihumanist threads of the Counter-Enlightenment. The experience of the modern moral order as a stifling restriction, and the human need for grounds – which antihumanism locates in the "complete absence of a plan in a universe devoid of meaning"[46] – show us the attractions that a Nietzschean ethic can still hold for us.

The better questions are how we are to understand this attraction and live with it as a fact about human beings? Taylor believes that the Christian viewpoint itself provides for a way to recognize, affirm, and transform this dimension of humanity internally. Not to repress, or

[43]Ibid., 234.
[44]Ibid., 235.
[45]Ibid.
[46]Ibid.

believe that cultural progress will destroy it, or that discipline or better political institutions can neutralize it. This would be a mistake, for the heroic warrior ethic can also be something vital and liberating.

This triangular perspective reveals the many ways in which our moral outlook is internally conflicted. We are inspired by various sources of moral goods drawn from religious and theological traditions, which have been in turn refined, deepened, explicated and developed by post-religious secular thought. At the same time we can recognize a certain imprisoning tendency in both religious ethics and their secular counterparts. The antihumanist perspective of the Counter-Enlightenment adds a third dimension, with its rejection of both transcendent religious goods and secular-liberal ideals, providing another source of goods centered on the "darker" side of life and its affirmation.

Rather than endorsing any one of these perspectives, Taylor seems much more interested in the implications of the predicament it imposes on us. All three vertices of the triad get at something right, while being open to criticism from the two opposing viewpoints. The antihumanist standpoint rightly points out the imprisoning and stifling tendencies of religious and secular outlooks. Yet, in a bit of irony, they come to resemble nothing more than conservative theists in their objections to the moral order of modernity.[47]

None of the three claim any special hold over us. But this is not a genuine problem, or at least not quite the problem it has been made out to be. The richness of our moral lives which stems from these points of difference provides us with a historically unprecedented abundance of moral goods, despite the tensions and conflicts between them. Given such a predicament, whatever goodness is, or whatever the background of distinctions of worth (if there is a difference), it is not exhausted by our human apprehensions or judgments or articulations of it. As human beings or agents we do not have a transparent purchase on it. Meanings are meanings and whatever our participation in them, man is not the measure of all things.

The conflicting dimensions of modern moral ideals can lead us to rethink the classical goals of the development of modernity. Contrary to what Taylor calls the *subtractive story* – that the disappearing religion and growing progress and harmony of moral ideals are causally and logically connected – if modernity is leading us anywhere it is likely to be "an ever more highly developed pluralism."[48] This will not be a normative pluralism, rather "an ever more fragmented spiritual pluralism" with many different varieties of living a spiritual life.

This is due to the latent potentials in the creation of immanent forms of Counter-Enlightenment, which yield the power to construct new ethical perspectives. Secular

[47]One sees more than a hint of this in Alasdair MacIntyre's otherwise curious alliance with Nietzsche in *After Virtue*.

[48]Ibid., 236.

humanism has not diminished this power but, rather, deepened it, encouraging the fragmentation of spiritual and moral outlooks. With fragmentation comes a reciprocal weakening. We live among others who seem just as well-intended and intelligent as ourselves, who adopt very different outlooks, a fact we cannot ignore. This leads to a novel understanding of our modern conflicted situation:

> We are dealing here with a kind of pluralism that is not static, but rather in continual motion, and whose final goal is in fact to establish that there is no final goal, but rather a set of spiritual paths that cross and branch out from each other.[49]

We will learn new ways of living with difference, which unavoidably connects our ethical views to their political counterparts. It may not be enough to go for a "negative politics of non-discrimination". Tolerance of difference is a valuable achievement. But to move toward "an ever more human exchange" one must do more than respect differences. We must help them find their voice or path, to the extent that this is both necessary and possible".[50]

> The idea of genuine transformation is that these different voices genuinely have some thing to say and some thing to give one an other; but for this to happen it is necessary that others find their voices or their paths.[51]

While no humanistic or theistic attitude can be the definitive scope of morality, there is also no *further* privileged standpoint outside our pluralistic condition from which anyone can put an end to the question. This, Taylor believes, puts us in a position to have the best of all three standpoints. Nothing rules out the theistic goods which, in their cultural particularities, have given meaning to so many people. Nor must we write off the genuine innovations of modern humanism, the concern with human dignity, rights, and individual self-expression.

All of this said, we must recall that Taylor is concerned with moving beyond subjectivism. He must somehow square this fragmented moral condition with the further proposition that these various moral sources are genuine sources of meaning – that they are standards to which we genuinely respond, rather than being mere responses of individuals or the conventions of a community. Despite the fact that conservative theistic writers and antihumanist Nietzscheans share a skepticism about the modern moral order, turning back the clock is not a live option for us. Liberal humanism seems insufficient, given its insensitivity to higher goods as well as its limitations on human freedom. Religious views are for the most part unsustainable. Modern antihumanism is both an agent of change and of destruction, needing to affirm goods and grounds that it rejects.

[49] Ibid., 238.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

The entire anthropocentric approach to ethics, whether in its pre-modern theistic form or its heirs in modern liberal humanism, seems exhausted. Yet the looming nihilism contained in the Counter-Enlightenment's rejection of all goods is no more plausible. If we agree with Taylor that there are inescapable higher ideals, standards, something that is in fact desirable, worthy, noble, and so forth, then these standards must somehow connect to those desires and emotions that actually move us to action. The goods that transcend our lives must become significant for us in some way or another. But they must also *be there*, and this seems contradicted by the bare fact that these competing and incommensurable stances toward the good are each part of our modern moral outlook.

Is there a way to move past this impasse? In Taylor's view, the path to resolution lies within his account of the self. Because we are already in contact with the world, yet always offering and refining our articulations of what is most important to us, our sense of what is worthwhile is both personal and indexed to the shared world of our community, itself mediated by our shared languages of evaluation. The question of whether our highest ideals are "really real" is in one respect a red herring. The ideal of objectivity which is assumed in asking the question is already a subjectivist notion, presuming that split between the knowing subject and known object which, Taylor has argued, is itself a contingent and morally-laden viewpoint. We are already involved in reality in a deep, intelligible, though mostly inexpressible manner. The sense of "objective reality" at home in the scientific or naturalistic attitude is a form of subjectivism on this view, as it is defined as the withdrawal or absence of the human subject. A truly anti-subjectivist understanding of meaning could not be expressed in such fundamentally subjectivist terms.

Some of Taylor's writings show a deep engagement with Heidegger, especially the latter's writings post-*Being and Time*. For this later Heidegger, language does not represent the world to a subject so much as it opens up a "clearing" (*die Lichtung*, also being the German cognate for "lighting") in which beings can appear.[52] The power of language to open us up to matters of concern, to disclose the meanings things have for us, locates meaning itself outside of all essentially human concerns and interests. The task of thinking then is to allow us to "dwell among things", not to interpret them in terms of our desires and interests, or in terms of the merely instrumental concerns of technical rationality. Language opens us up to a space of radically anti-subjectivist meanings.

Given Taylor's remarks elsewhere, there is good reason to think that Taylor's Heidegger expresses crucial parts of Taylor's own view.[53] Modernity transforms the unspeakable vastness of Nature into a field of objects for technical control, a field which includes human

[52]"Heidegger, language and ecology", in Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*.

[53]His discussion of epiphanic art and the "subtle languages" of modernity in chapter 25 and the conclusion of *Sources of the Self* speaks to this tendency.

animals. Human interests can be no basis for a serious environmental ethics; the unsatisfiable desires of the ego and its illusions of control would always reassert themselves in the instrumentalist thinking of the anthropocentric outlook.[54]

Of course this isn't just a problem that appears for human relations to the natural environment. It can be viewed as another version of the problem we found in the attempt to reconcile happiness and virtue in Footian ethics, if we may understand this as a special case of relating human agents to a world of meanings to which we are *answerable* but for which we are not *responsible*.

A moral theory that takes its basic starting points in a radical subjectivism, grounded in human interests and the impartial instrumentalism of natural science and technology, inevitably leads to an impasse where the agent's interests, narrowly conceived, conflict with the impartiality of moral goodness. Whether these do in fact conflict is less the trouble than the thought that the conflict between the two is made possible.

Heidegger offers us a way of 'dwelling' among things which is not fundamentally a relation of knowledge and control.[55] It is a way of recognizing that there are things which are not ours, qua human beings, which infinitely transcend our limited capabilities, which are nevertheless meaningful for us through our experiences and articulations of them. As Taylor puts it, the clearing of Being is "Dasein-related but not Dasein-centered."[56] Being includes us and involves us but we, human beings, are not its measure.

I find it hard to ignore the resonances between this line of thinking and what Foot herself says about the independence of evaluative goodness from human will and interest. As meaning shows up for us, mediated through language and feeling to be sure but also indicating something beyond just these appearances, so it is with goodness. This is the crucial point here, and Taylor himself I think misses this in discussing Foot's ethics. In a paper written in honor of Iris Murdoch, his opening remarks draw out what he takes to be a central distinction between her moral philosophy and the neo-Aristotelians.[57] It was Murdoch, he writes, "who led us out of the narrow corral of morality into the wider pastures of ethics". But she carried on, beyond even the pastures of ethics and into the wild forests of the unconditional. By this he seems to have in mind various notions of the ineffable, the suprasensible, a sense of the incomparably higher – the sort of thing one finds in religious faith, or theological accounts of intrinsic Good. Plato's form of the Good would count, and Taylor is ready to admit that all long-enduring religious beliefs, even those like Buddhism to which the term "theism" may ap-

[54]A point which again has roots in the later Heidegger's attacks on the "enframing" theories of language which are responsible for metaphysical thinking and scientific thinking as dominants modes. See the "Letter on Humanism" in Heidegger, *Basic Writings*.

[55]Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 123.

[56]Ibid., 116. Taylor's use of Heidegger's term "Dasein" can be taken to indicate what Taylor calls human agency.

[57]Taylor, "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy."

ply only tenuously, have their own sense of the unconditional. In this he is speaking of what he has elsewhere called *constitutive goods*, those species of goods which suggest themselves to us as occupying the highest rank among all our goods.[58] Plato's Good and the Christian notion of *agape* or divine love are both paradigm instances of a constitutive good, that which is incomparably higher, and which provides the light by which all other goods show up to us as good.

Taylor claims here that this is the dimension that the neo-Aristotelians leave out. In turning to Socrates's question, to the matter of the good life over morality's narrow concern with 'ought', neo-Aristotelians remain preoccupied with human flourishing, with human goods, in other words, with the goods of a well-lived human life. To a point he is correct in this. This is what neo-Aristotelians themselves say – a point which has led critics such as Bernard Williams to charge Aristotelianism as an incurably egoistic ethical theory.[59] If this is all there is to say, then Taylor may well be right that Aristotelian ethics is concerned with what he calls "life goods" to the exclusion of higher constitutive ideals.

Furthermore, without further qualification, it is difficult to see how or why an ethics concerned with human flourishing or well-being would not simply collapse into a theory of desire-satisfaction, or a utilitarian theory of well-being, or some such account. The highest ideals of goodness and worth and value would be inseparable from an expression of ultimately human considerations, and that direction lies the spectre of reductionism.

I have argued that there is further qualification to be found, at least in Foot's version of the neo-Aristotelian story. For her, happiness is not a matter of hedonist or egoist concern for pleasure or self-interest, or a matter of having superficial experiences of pleasure or satisfaction. Happiness is aimed at the good in a strong sense, being an appreciation of good things for their own sake. But Taylor's criticism underscores a crucial point. From what we've said so far, it is not yet clear exactly why human flourishing, the deep happiness Foot has in mind, need involve or be answerable to goods of higher moral worth – how such 'transcendent' goods can also be among the goods of a well-lived life and (perhaps) vice-versa.

If Taylor's argument against the neo-Aristotelian position has any bite, then in order to salvage the good as a meaningful non-subjectivist, non-egoistic ideal, at least some of those life goods must also involve higher goods, reaching beyond the goodness of the well-lived lives of human beings to index standards which are not merely to do (directly or indirectly) with the flourishing of a kind of animal. The Aristotelian must have some notion of good in the strong sense, as a transcendent end-point beyond merely human concerns with doing well.

This raises its own paradox. It is necessary to remove the good entirely from the domain of merely human affairs. But if the good (or the Good) is alienated so radically from human

[58]Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, chap. 3.

[59]See my discussion of Williams' objection at the conclusion of chapter 4.

experience and concerns, then how can it have any meanings for us at all? Let us turn to this question.

6.6 The Letter-Writers: some remarks on human goods and the good human life in neo-Aristotelian ethics

The problem facing Foot qua naturalist can be brought out as a problem that appears in connection with "tight corner" cases. One who is called upon to incur harm or even ruin from the demands of morality must reconcile this demand with the good, the benefit or advantage, of his or her own life. This is not a trivial issue. If I am called upon by my commitment to the sacred, and that commitment leads me to bodily harm or death or even destitution, it is hard to say that one has acted well, in the sense of my own benefit, even if I have acted well by the standards of human goodness. But on a properly naturalistic account of ethics, it is hard to see how or where such standards beyond personal benefit can be said to be part of one's doing-well.

A naturalist might find a way to square such transcendent ambitions with the motivational constitution of human organisms, perhaps through some evolutionary story about group survival.[60] We can explain personally costly altruistic behaviors as satisfying some fitness-enhancing function in social animals, let's say. While on the face of it risking harm or reputational ruin for the advantage of another is destructive to the individual, on balance the group as a whole fares better when we individually engage in such behaviors.

Or a naturalist could join with Callicles, Thrasymachus, and Nietzsche in a more skeptical path, writing off personally injurious moral demands as a kind of foolishness or even a sickness of spirit. Morality would simply not be part of our goodness, or at any rate not the goodness of those strong enough to do without it.

Either way, the kind of qualitative goodness that Foot locates in the nature and activities of human animals is hard to reconcile with these functional or dispositional explanations of morality's significance for us.

Fortunately we've already made some headway in answering this problem. The standards are within the life-form of the human being. But this is not a complete answer the present matter, which is to say how it can be to my benefit, in the strong sense, to be a good human being even if this is not to my immediate advantage, understood in hedonistic or egoistic terms. The evolutionary story doesn't get us this far; one's moral actions can be explained

[60]This is the kind of story we find, inter alia, in Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, 25th anniversary ed (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000); Waal et al., *Primates and Philosophers*; Boehm, *Moral Origins*; FitzPatrick, "Morality and Evolutionary Biology."

entirely without recourse to a person's motives and intentions. The skeptical view doesn't get us to morality at all, but to a very different conception of what it is to do well.

It's well and good to argue that justice and charity are "life goods", that is, that they contribute to the goodness of a life. It's another thing entirely to feel moved by this fact, to see it as one's own benefit, when faced with the all too real risk of ruin or death.

This seems to leave Foot in a bind, for now she has to explain how the goodness of a human being could include justice when justice demands sacrificing even one's own life. Her answer is found in her concluding remarks on happiness, with her discussion of the 'Letter-Writers.'[61]

The Letter-Writers were young men imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II for a refusing the S.S.'s efforts to draft them into service. We know them through the letters they wrote back to their families while awaiting almost certain execution. Although all of them were condemned to death, there was certainly a choice they could have made to prevent that outcome. We could imagine these young men saving their own skins by agreeing to go against their own sense of goodness, their own consciences, and going along with whatever evils the S.S. had in mind for them to carry out. Their letters give the impression that these men were well-suited for great happiness. By sticking to their beliefs and securing their own ruin, we could say that they knowingly sacrificed their happiness. But there is also a sense in which we could say, at the same time, that they did not.[62] What they wanted was good, but it was impossible for them to achieve this through just and honorable means.

They would not have gotten their happiness by giving in to wickedness even if it saved their lives and permitted them to return home in the future. It is important to highlight this, as I believe it opens the way into the higher sort of goods that Foot has in mind here. If goodness, as happiness, meant simply to secure one's own flourishing, this seems difficult to square with the thought that someone in the position of the Letter-Writers would *not* be able to secure his happiness by sacrificing principle for the happy life awaiting outside of his imprisonment. If happiness just is "life goods", doing well in the restricted sense of whatever is to my benefit, then how could it also be that, as Foot argues, happiness could not lie in acceptance of the ends judged evil or shameful?

This is possible because of a distinction within the concept of *benefit* as it applies to living things. *Providing generally beneficial things does not guarantee that benefit is being provided.* In relation to human beings, this brings out a conceptual truth that can otherwise be hard to see. Do we benefit rampaging serial killers by enabling their killing sprees? We would not ordinarily think so. What *benefits* someone, if we take the word to mean the satisfaction of their own desires or interests, or the ability to act on their own freely-chosen ends or actions without impediment, or even the crude pleasure-pain hedonism of the old British moralists,

[61] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 94–96.
[62] Ibid., 95.

is not always part of their own good. Desires and perceived interests are not conceptual determinants of happiness, nor is their satisfaction what happiness consists in. Not just "anything goes" with respect to what benefits us, even though desire-satisfaction and freedom are in general beneficial, being part of one's good.

Another way to state this is to say that there are standards beyond personal desire and interest which impose boundaries on what is desirable and on the worth of our chosen ends.[63] In Foot's account of human goodness, *some* of these constraints include our survival and reproduction. Other constraints include, as she wants to say, justice and charity in some highly important sense.[64] In addition to this, as Hursthouse argues, what it means for human beings to *survive* and *reproduce* must be understood in light of our specially human lives. Survival must including the development and maintenance of our rational powers; reproduction is not merely bringing new humans into being, but also ensuring that they have a life ahead of them to live.[65]

In my thinking, Foot is trying to show how the concept of happiness in human beings, brought out in the Letter-Writers and, in a different way, in the case of the serial killers who aren't benefited by having their desires and ends satisfied, is intrinsically connected with a higher sense of what is worthwhile. For human beings our happiness is already and inescapably related to our appreciation of strongly valued goods.

It is possible to speak of happiness as the highest human good without conceding the possibility of a wicked and happy life, because *there is at least one kind of happiness which is conceptually inseparable from virtue*. Happiness here means *the enjoyment of good things*, enjoyment in attaining and pursuing right ends.[66] These right ends both are part of the human life, and yet they transcend it in reaching after higher standards beyond mere life goods.

This comes with a price, however, which the tragic case of the Letter-Writers reveals to us. It is not enough to say that what these men lost, the happiness that could have been, was no loss at all. They did give up a good life, and they could not have won it back by doing evil. There is then a kind of happiness which only the virtuous can achieve, but which chance can place out of one's reach. Moral luck, and the possibility of moral tragedy, are very much live possibilities.[67]

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[63]Despite Taylor's contrasting of Iris Murdoch with Foot, I believe the two are much closer in perspective than his reading allows. I don't have the space here to argue for this specifically, but my reading of Murdoch's ethics, especially the three essays in her *The Sovereignty of Good*, were influential in my interpretations of Foot's writings throughout this project.

[64]See chapter 5 for a discussion of how these qualities vary on her virtue theory, compared to an unmitigated universalism about fairness and love.

[65]Hursthouse, "The Grammar of Goodness in Foot's Ethical Naturalism", in Hacker-Wright, *Philippa Foot on Goodness and Virtue*, 40–44.

[66]Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 97.

[67]Ibid. In conversation I have often been surprised at how uncomfortable a thought this is for many. For

There is a real sense in which Foot is guilty of the formal egoism that Williams identifies in Aristotelian ethics, that is, the requirement that one give reasons to each individual as justification for an ethical choice or action.[68] Yet, contrary to Williams' charge, the justification to the individual is not all there is to say. In Foot's ethics, I have tried to make it clear that justification to the person, while important, is neither the first nor last word on what is good for a human being.

This makes all the difference to Taylor's charge that Footian ethical naturalism is too-narrowly concerned with life goods to the point of excluding higher unconditional goods. The anthropocentric characterization of Foot's ethics is correct in one sense, but mitigated by the fact that the relevant human characteristic involves reaching beyond merely human desires and interests.

This entails two points as a reply on Foot's behalf. First, Foot means by happiness something other than an objectively-characterized and neutrally available notion of flourishing or well-being. The happiness of a life is deeply connected to those things a person takes as good and is ready to enjoy *qua* good things. This relates happiness to personal identity in a deep way, which, as I argued in the previous chapter, is also closely bound up with the virtues as a kind of self-understanding. To be virtuous is to be responsive to standards beyond mere desire and interest. Standards which, furthermore, concern more than the doing-well of an individual construed narrowly.

Second, because happiness is conceptually connected with good ends, and it is possible to say that there is a happiness which is not strictly concerned with the goods of a life, these higher goods connected with happiness are plausibly of that class Taylor invokes when distinguishing higher, unconditional goods from life goods.

On reflection, Taylor's worry about this aspect of Foot's concept of the 'good human life' seems mistaken. The good life as she means it is a life of achievement, bound up in those things that one takes to be good, fine, noble, admirable, excellent, and so on. This is *in one regard* the goodness of a life in the sense Taylor criticizes as anthropocentric. But Foot's discussion of the Letter-Writers complicates this matter, showing the inadequacy and ambiguity of that objection in this context. For the Letter-Writers did have a happiness of the narrow sort that they could have chosen; but because they had a sense of good ends, of what is right and desirable, this *also* foreclosed on that possibility. *That* happiness was not available to them precisely because their happiness was caught up in good ends of a higher sort. They wanted *good things* besides their own satisfaction and fulfillment. Yet, strange as it sounds,

myself I have always found this honest and courageous embrace of real moral tragedy, the sense of loss that arises in real moral conflict between goods, and the realization that there will be cases in which there is no good answer, to be one of the more plausible parts of Foot's ethics – and Aristotle's, for that matter.

[68]As he argues in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, chap. 3. See my discussion at the conclusion of chapter 4.

in just this way these higher good things were also *part of their happiness*.

My point is that because the Letter-Writers took *higher standards of goodness* as a necessary part of their happiness, there is a stronger sense of good at work here than the goods of a well-lived life. It could not simply be the goods *of their own life* that moved them, unless we expand that category to include a sense of higher worth. Thus, while the objection from anthropocentrism is in one way right, precisely because the objection points back to this more sophisticated concept of happiness it does not adequately express what Foot has to say about goodness in a human life.

Foot stresses that it could not be right to say that the Letter-Writers lost nothing of value in their sacrifice. While it is tempting to say that these men had enough, in having their virtue, she believes this to trivialize the sacrifice and negate the real sense that something important was lost. I said in the previous chapter that modern moral philosophy has an uncomfortable relationship with uncertainty and the suspense of lived time. To that list we can add the realities of loss and tragedy. Moral goods conflict, and we cannot realize them all. And, painful as it is, there are cases where there is no right answer and no good outcome.[69]

6.7 Conclusion

I have so far taken it for granted that there is a distinction to draw between the goods immanent to a life and a stronger sense of goodness which, in some respect, transcends the immediate notion of "doing well" as restricted to the course of a particular life, or a particular animal's kind of life. In modern times, the distinction may be traced to Sidgwick's dualism of practical reasoning, which places "my good", what is to my benefit *qua* individual, in opposition to goodness *simpliciter*.[70] But the distinction has a much older pedigree: we find it in a different form in Plato's and Aristotle's respective takes on the virtues. Plato famously claimed that the Good could be understood by the metaphor of the Sun, as the shining source of all warmth and radiance in the moral world. The virtues directed the soul at the Good, quite seriously interpreted as the way the eye directs sight at a visible object. Through the light of the Good human beings and their actions were in turn made good. Aristotle held that goodness was in things in respect of their formal essence. The virtues oriented us not 'upward' to the heavenly Realm of Ideas but rather 'outward' at the ends of practical truth,

[69]It is ironic that Foot ends up agreeing with Nietzsche, of all people, on this matter more than she agrees with any modern moralist. Her differences with Nietzsche amount to a disagreement over the contribution of just and kind acts to the benefit of the one who does them. Nietzsche obviously disagrees, where Foot argues that such things are typically to our own benefit. But both of them take exception to the moralist's belief that we could speak of right and wrong in the abstract, by reference to special "inner" or "higher" qualities, without consideration for the kind of being in question.

[70]"The point of view of the universe: Sidgwick and the ambitions of ethics", in Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity*, chap. 13; Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, chap. 6.

this being intellectual truth joined to right desire. To know things aright meant to have a right desire, to know what was in fact *desirable* in an end.

It is tempting to use this schematic take on the differences between Platonic and Aristotelian takes on goodness as a way to understand the difference between Taylor and Foot, given their respective ambitions to account for goodness as that which lies 'beyond', and that which lies 'within'. But this is too quick. What I have said about Foot, from the beginnings of her Aristotelian anthropology to these thoughts on goodness of a human life, does not fit with a notion of a merely immanent goodness. Whatever moral goodness is, it is a goodness of human beings, in respect of our ways of being, true enough. Yet this cannot be plausibly interpreted as goodness of merely human interests or desires, or even the goods of survival, reproduction, or the flourishing of an organism where these are grasped at a remove from the life of the individual *as a life*. The human form of life involves us in an indeterminate range of goods beyond a concern for our own flourishing, even where flourishing is given a sophisticated gloss.

It might be better to say that human beings flourish when we are free to choose and pursue our ends, but that freedom, our choices, and our ends are answerable to standards beyond those set by freedom or our bare animal natures. It is rather some blend of both – that we are animals who envision a sense of higher worth – that gets us closer to the mark. This is true even though by Foot's lights such higher goods also known to us, motivations for us, in respect of our human nature and the unique perspective that it provides us. Good is always a human interpretation, and yet in expressing a commitment to goodness it simultaneously slips away from merely human concerns.

With Taylor, strangely enough the same point holds from the other direction. For all Taylor looks like a moral 'non-naturalist', I've argued that this is a confusing use of terminology.[71] Taylor's human agent shares in the animal life of human beings; he acknowledges that our sense of moral goodness is inseparable from our lives as concrete beings who offer interpretations of themselves from that embodied standpoint. The moral good or goods shows a similar duality of concrete immanence and abstract universality as in Foot's ethics.

Only this isn't quite right, for either thinker. The problem is in the word "duality". The pervasive dualisms of modern thought, which is so ready to split and divide its subject matter, disguises the kind of unity of the particular and the general, the immanent and the universal, in respect of which the opposed elements can appear as distinct. The primordial unity, of agent or organisms, comes first. This is evident in Taylor, who draws much from Hegel as well as the expressivist's tradition of historical thinking. But long before Hegel or the Romantics, the unity of form and substance was a central premise of Aristotelian philosophy. The nature of things, the human being inclusive, exhibits a primordial fusion of substantial

[71]See Chapter 3

form and prime matter. That Foot expresses her views in the traditional vocabularies of Aristotelianism and Thomism, Taylor in the idiom of the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions, should not lead us into confusions about *what is being said*.

The goodness of a thing is goodness in respect of its particularity as (such) a thing, and this partakes in the Good which lies at the limits of all things. The Good is the limit actualized in all of its concrete expressions. Goodness is not a property, but a way of drawing distinctions in the things themselves; which is itself possible because there is a goodness beyond all things, in respect of which they are judged good. What lies beyond all immediacy of human lives finds its expression and constitution in the immediate. Only the modern fracturing of nature and mind creates the perception of a parallel rupture in goodness itself. Those who lived before that split, and those who have sought to heal it, need not recognize the dualism of goodness and Good.

Conclusion

I began this thesis by remarking on the differences that appear between Foot and Taylor as ethical thinkers and moral philosophers. In the preceding discussion, I have argued that this is largely a superficial difference. There is an agenda which is shared between them, if only in minimal terms. I will briefly summarize the key points argued in the preceding chapters.

1. Philosophical anthropology is prior to ethics. Kant was right that ethics is an activity of practical thinking, being the practical exercise of the intellect which takes voluntary actions as its formal objects. I argued here that Taylor and Foot, each in their own way, share in some version of Kant's insight. We must have a concept of the human person in place in order to do ethics at all, but the concept of the person must be suitably qualified given that it is also the contingent product of the activities of human beings. The life of a human being, qua human agent, forms a horizon of meaning in which ethical actions and ethical judgments occur, and it is in this context that the person can appear. Even though it is tempting to read Foot as setting aside such considerations in favor of a reductive biological theory of norms and goodness, I have argued that this is a mistake. Her account of living nature and human nature does not require eliminating the qualitative, interpretive or phenomenological dimensions of human life from an account of said life. Taylor's intricate account of the psychology of agency and its linguistic and historical dimensions in fact complements Foot's naturalistic account of moral evaluations.

2. Meanings are autonomous from human experiences, thoughts, and exercises of agency. The meanings of ethical evaluations and moral judgments are no exception to this point. Ethics is not primarily concerned with the human subject or with subjectivity as such (if these are different). The normative dimension of ethical thinking is not relegated to a concern with the norms that guide a subject or with the absolute freedom of the will, where the facts and the subject can be conceived as poles along a continuum. The 'should' and 'ought' expressions of moral language are continuous with the should-talk and ought-talk that appears in other circumstances. The expression "One ought not sacrifice the queen to save a pawn" carries normative weight in the same way as a moral proposition judging the worth of an action or the excellence of a personal characteristic. As the normative rules of, and moves in, a game are not left up to the subjective choices or desires of the players, so it is with the

normative prescriptions of morality. Morality is independent of subjectivity though it bears on subjectivity. A useful analogy can be drawn with gravity. Gravity acts on the human body no matter what one wishes or chooses. Understanding how gravity acts on massive objects requires that an agent entertain a thought with that content. The goodness and badness of human beings, even respect of choices and desires, can be evaluated in formally identical terms.

3. The concept of nature need not be ceded to empiricists and scientific naturalists. What is natural transcends human powers of perception and expression. The meaning of the concept of nature is not to be settled on any dogmatic terms. This is the case whether the dogmatism arises from armchair speculation or from the anti-metaphysical doctrines of methodological naturalists. There is no neutral point of view from which such claims could be advanced and justified. Even if the question turns to explanations which are prior to justification – distinguishing between the two senses of "why?" asked of an event's occurrence – the bare fact that someone has to draw the distinction between neutral explanation and justification to or by an agent adds moral content to the distinction itself. To withdraw from ethics in this way only hides the ethical dimension. It does not eliminate it.

4. Moral agents are rational agents, because rationality is a part of moral goodness in human beings. What is rational in moral action does not depend on a prior theory of rationality, nor an account of independent reasons which bear upon the choices of a human agent. Rationality depends on a concrete, situated form of life, which depends on social and language-mediated forms of interaction between individuals. To be rational as a moral agent is to live a particular kind of human life as it ought to be lived. This requires no positive account of obligatory actions. It is enough to specify a minimal and mostly negative sense of how one errs in acting. A rational human agent, qua good human being, need only understand how to avoid vice and other moral defects.

5. The virtues of character can be the basis of ethics, even in different social, cultural, historically-contingent contexts of life. A virtue is a trait which tends to secure the benefit of its possessor in matters of desire and action. What the virtuous person sees and judges as good is good, not because the trait makes it so, but because the virtuous person is rightly constituted as to see and judge well in matters of virtue. What is desired and what is done can be judged according to what is desirable, what is a good action. The apparent incommensurability of values and goods belonging to different forms of life can be understood as a difference which occurs within a shared horizon of human meanings.

6. Moral goodness is a function of human life, a category which cuts across the ontological distinctions between the particular and the universal. There is a sense of goodness which exceeds the narrow conception of right actions, as determined by one's moral duties and moral obligations. The nature of this goodness might belong to the human life, conceived as the con-

crete life of a particular kind of being. Or it might belong to the unconditional world beyond human thought and experience, known to us only dimly through our perceptual, conceptual, emotional and bodily lives. It is a mistake to conceive of the two views as opposed, rather than as differential articulations of the same sense of a good which transcends *my* desires, *my* interests, *my* choices. Different historical and cultural interpretations of the good abound, but these reflect a shared tendency of human beings to articulate a sense of the worthwhile and attach significance to objects beyond the scope of immediate experience or comprehension.

Where does all of this leave ethics? Foot concluded *Natural Goodness* with a brief postscript, writing that

> in a way nothing is settled, but everything is left as it was. The account of vice as a natural defect merely gives a framework within which disputes are said to take place, and tries to get rid of some intruding philosophical theories and abstractions that tend to trip us up.[72]

Foot's rather quietist sentiment seems at odds with Taylor's more ambitious project of retrieving now-suppressed moral sources in order to help reinvigorate a deflated, even exhausted moral outlook. In the conclusion of *Sources of the Self*, he writes that his aim is to

> uncover buried goods through rearticulation – and thereby to make these sources again empower, to bring the air back again into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit.[73]

My contention in this dissertation has been that Foot's account of vice as a natural defect (of a specifically human will and intellect) and Taylor's account of a rich, plural, not always commensurable grasp of the good, are two sides of the same coin.

Does Taylor's work really complement Foot's, or vice-versa? Given the differences of scope, attention, and conclusion, can one really fit into the other, or even exist as complementary positions, as I have tried to argue? I believe that they can, from both sides.

Foot's project could plausibly be understood as, in one way, more modest and, in another way, more ambitious than Taylor's. More modest, as her concern is with the human form of life in its most broad strokes, identifying certain basic, invariant, but indispensable needs and characteristics of the human species-kind. This is also a more ambitious aim, however, in the very fact that Foot wants to elaborate a broad-ranging conception of moral characteristics in connection with those invariant needs, in a way which would precede and necessitate certain

[72]Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 116.
[73]Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 520.

terrains – to borrow Taylor's metaphor of the moral landscape – that realize and constitute the various cultural expressions of our shared moral ideals.

I don't believe the matter must be framed so as to generate a serious conflict, however. The "everything" Foot believes is "left as it was" should be taken, given our preceding discussions, as at least congenial to Taylor's own starting point with the *in medias res* condition that we each find ourselves in, on our journeys through a world which we can only ever glimpse in part.

If her ethics is truly intended to help eliminate certain confusions afflicting modern ethics due to "intruding philosophical theories and abstractions", then surely her work is not so far from Taylor's own aims to rethink the very basis of our ethical views given certain 'natural' human ways of experiencing, desiring, and feeling. Nor is Foot that far from his proposal to retrieve certain suppressed notions of goodness, including that question of *who we are*, as a necessary prolegomena to any subsequent moral philosophy. If Foot's aim is truly a wide-ranging attempt to provide a secure 'ground floor' of moral reasons for any and all human beings, then it is no longer clear to me how Taylor's position would not suffer the same criticism. To my mind, since it seems clear Taylor is not offering any such position, it is not clear to me that Foot's neo-Aristotelian position should be interpreted as doing so either.

Foot – not to mention Elizabeth Anscombe, Iris Murdoch, and Mary Midgley – attempted to reintroduce the virtues and the concept of goodness back into the moral lives of real human beings. I don't know what else this could be if not an attempt to retrieve sources of moral meaning that we have lost. The neo-Aristotelian virtue approach they inaugurated is aimed at retrieving richer, though suppressed, sources of goodness in the person, in the community, and in the forms of human existence and activity. It strikes me as more than plausible that one could read such a program as an attempt to reinvigorate, however modestly, something of modernity's deflated moral condition.

But is that all there is to say? Should Foot's virtue ethics be relegated to one corner of Taylor's triad of modern moral perspectives, being the last gasp of a quaint tradition? Perhaps. Or perhaps one could just as well say that, in providing an account of *who we are* through which notions as moral badness and wickedness can be interpreted as failings for us, Foot is thereby helping to explain certain humanly-universal ambitions, aspirations, and needs relative to our own ends and our ideals of the human-transcendent. Her account can be understood as a backdrop meant to fulfill the same role as Taylor's concept of the self-interpreting animal – a persistent, though thin, framework through which the more acute details of our moral situation can be articulated without pronouncements about secure foundations, universal commitments, timelessly valid norms of conduct, or any of the like.

Approached from the other side, if Taylor's explorations of the historical, cultural, aesthetic, and linguistic nuances of moral ideals as a form of philosophical anthropology and

psychology, then his project can be plausibly understood as a refinement and extension of the agenda set out by Foot and her colleagues.

I have tried to argue that whatever else we might say, the differences between them should not be framed in terms of that inevitable distinction between objective or biological "nature" and expressive or subjective "culture". What I find most complementary in Foot and Taylor is their sensitivity to the details of the lives we actually live – a finely-grained, richly-textured, infinitely variegated portrait of human beings and our sense of the fine, the noble, the worthwhile, the desirable, the vast space of possible expressions of them both. That portrait of the human being is not so easily dissected into a merely natural element to which a cultural life is then added (nor any of the other dualisms that we so easily take for granted).

I am not sure I have succeeded in any of this. This thesis has touched on a wide range of issues, each subtle and laden with potential landmines and pitfalls. Moreover, I am under no illusions that I could do more here than perhaps clarify certain confusions and raise a few more interesting questions in connection with some of the debates addressed herein.

What I have taken away from this study of Foot and Taylor is only philosophical in part. Foot and Taylor, each in their own ways, are relentlessly optimistic about the human condition and the moral predicaments that it leaves us with. That optimism is tempered by a realistic appreciation of a difficult truth: human life is difficult, fraught with peril, opaque to us along many of its important dimensions, and subject to the whims of chance to a degree that should unsettle any of us. These facts are surely important to philosophical ethics, but they range well beyond it.

Many moralists recoil at this thought. If there are moral truths, then let us speak them. If not, if there is no moral knowledge, then so be it, let us accept this and get on with living however we can. Foot and Taylor tell us that this is the genuinely troubling attitude – the demand that all be laid before before us, that the will of the person is the beginning and the end of the ethical. What cannot be seen and controlled is not worthy of our attention. This attitude is the seed of not only hubris, but of the fatal distortions of ethics which Foot and Taylor so clearly brought to light.

We are now living at a time when new ethical problems seem to appear daily. The ethics of artificial intelligence, the proliferating quandaries of medical ethics and bioethics, and the challenges of environmental ethics given the realities of climate change and ecological destruction are all raising their own novel questions, at an ever-increasing pace. And they are badly in need of answers; unlike the thought experiments we routinely use in philosophy, these are issues of immense practical importance. Existing frameworks of contractarian and utilitarian ethics may not be up to the task. They rest on implausible accounts of human life and ethical meaning, as we have seen. But the more damaging point could well be the origins of modern ethical theories in the need for full transparency and control by human will and

action.

If this is the case, then then there is a pressing need for better tools to understand what is at stake and how we can proceed. An ethics focused on the human person as Foot and Taylor call for, not as an anonymous locus of will and choice but as a flesh-and-blood human being immersed in a web of meanings and goods, can and should be a serious contributor to these debates.

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