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# THE USE OF REASON:

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# Introduction

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle makes what might strike us as an outrageous claim. He says that studying ethics is only worthwhile for those who are already good (2002, 1095a3-13). What might seem even more outrageous is that part of the ground for this remark is the idea that ethics is characteristically *practical*, meaning that its point lies not merely in the knowledge of truth, but in action. Wouldn't the practicality of ethics indicate that it is *especially* those who are *not* already good who should study it? If those who study it *are* already good, then what is left for ethics to do?

Aristotle's thought, in answer to the first question, is that studying ethics will have no effect on anyone who is not already basically good. Let her study all she wants—if someone is not motivated to do as reason commends, what would argument change? Argument is, after all, addressed to reason.

The argument bears the stamp of Aristotle's elitism and might therefore arouse our suspicions. Is it not too quick, not to mention unduly pessimistic? Yet, while it receives little immediate elaboration, there is no question that the argument has some basis in Aristotle's considered moral psychology, on which our ends are set by the characters we acquire during our upbringings (cf. Moss 2011). That is not, of course, to say that it is beyond question, but it does mean, perhaps, that it is due some consideration.

Two sorts of answers might be given to the second question, about the point of studying ethics for those who are already good. The one that seems to me to have the clearest textual basis is that Aristotle's *Ethics* is meant to be continuous with his *Politics* (2002, 1094a22-b12; 1180a15-25). Ethics is practical, at least, in the sense that it can help already virtuous rulers arrange their cities in such a way as to produce virtuous citizens and to encourage virtuous activity. To do that

well, they need to have more than a passing idea of what virtuous activity is and what are the conditions of its possibility.

That answer is perhaps not so satisfying to those who hope for the study of ethics to make a difference to their own lives, who expect it to help them in answering that illustrious question: *what am I to do?* A different sort of answer might interest them, however. Namely, although the student must be *basically* good if ethics is to have any effect on her, there may remain some non-trivial course correction that ethics can achieve. Ethics, perhaps, can unearth principles at work implicitly in the thinking of the basically virtuous and help them to apply such principles more consistently, or to hard cases.

Such a conception of the practicality of ethics, on which it articulates principles that are serviceable at least for those whose hearts are in the right place, is not altogether without promise. It seems not, though, to be what Aristotle means to accomplish in his ethical works. He is not very concerned with the explication of principles or with their application to hard cases, after all. He even, famously, suggests that general principles about what to do hold only "for the most part" (2002, 1094b20-23).

I dwell on this not to foreclose the possibility that ethics can be practical in such a way. Aristotle is not the final word on ethics. Nevertheless, the question about the practicality of ethics raised by Aristotle's paradoxical remark seems to me to be important and interesting. From Aristotle, I wish to take the idea that a carefully articulated moral psychology can call into question some of the aspirations of ethical theorizing—or, to put the point more positively, can help us appreciate how necessary for the achievement of ethics' purpose are the theoretically untutored dispositions of ordinary virtuous people. Aristotle's argument exploits what he takes to be a conative requirement on ethics' making a difference in our lives: ethical argument will be pointless

if directed towards those whose characters do not set for them the right ends. My contribution will be to exploit a cognitive requirement on ethics' making a difference: one can only act well if one is able, on the spot, to determine what acting well is. This disposition is, I suppose unfortunately, not something which the study of ethics imparts.

An example might help to illustrate this theme. Rosalind Hursthouse recounts a story which G. E. M. Anscombe once told in a lecture:

> An old woman in Austria under Nazi rule had given shelter to some Jews in her attic, and one evening, there was the dreaded knock on the door and a young SS officer saying "We believe you have some Jews here?" "Clearly," said Anscombe, "she must not lie." And there was a long embarrassed silence because we all thought that obviously she must—that this was the "morally right" thing to do—but did not dare to say so. And she let the pause continue, and then said "Of course, she mustn't tell the truth either," and we were all greatly relieved, but also puzzled.
>
> She went on to describe what the woman had in fact done; she had turned on a brilliant performance of pretending to believe that the young officer was her sister's son, whom she had not seen since he was a boy. "Gustav!" she cried, "how wonderful, come in, come in. How *is* dear Lotte, I haven't heard from her for so long, I never knew you had become an officer, how tall you have grown … !" And she kissed him and babbled on (never once telling a lie) and insisted he have coffee and cakes and, being young and well-mannered, he was too embarrassed to tell her she had made a mistake and press his official question. So he partook of the coffee and cakes and escaped as soon as he could. (2008, 142-143, quoted in Richter 2011, 21-22)

Of course, one central aspect of this example will be controversial. Many of us are not absolutists about lying, and if there were anyone to whom we would lie without a second thought, it would be the proverbial Nazi at the door. One might also query whether something like the old woman's performance really is better than a simple lie. So set those features of the case aside, if you like. Most of us will still agree that we are not to lie with impunity, even where the person inquiring is not *entitled* to the truth. An inquirer who is not entitled to the truth is still, often, entitled not to be lied to.

Suppose, then, that someone has asked you what she reasonably thinks is an innocent question about some matter which happens to be private. There is a confidence you must not betray, but you also should not lie. I think many of us will agree that such cases exist. They are a regular part of navigating our complicated social world.[1] But the question is: in the circumstances, can you see how to do this—how to avoid betraying the confidence *and* telling the lie? That may be no easy matter. And yet you may be faulted for fumbling in the situation, for coming out quickly with a lie, or else betraying the confidence unintentionally, by (for instance) your hesitation. Maybe the right thing to do *is* to lie, but you conclude that too late for your lie to be effective. In any case, what you don't manage to figure out is how to do what needs to be done, whatever that happens to be—at least, you don't figure that out in time for the doing of it. What you lack is what we can call, following Aristotle, practical wisdom, or simply: *wisdom*. The topic of this dissertation is what it is to be wise.

My approach is governed by an old Aristotelian principle, according to which powers—such as that of human reason—are to be understood through their activities, since after all powers

[1] Again, some will think that it is all right to lie with impunity in such cases. But even they should agree to the more general, if less vivid, point that the most obvious solutions to a problem may be rather less desirable than one that takes some insight to recognize. That abstract point is all I need.

are simply *capacities for* those activities. Accordingly, I begin, in Chapter 1, with a treatment of *reasoning*. I distinguish between two related acts which are sometimes called "reasoning": on the one hand, the activity of one's reasoning, the sort of thing that takes time and sometimes effort; on the other, one's rationale for, say, thinking or doing something, the sort of thing on the basis of which one thinks or acts, the sort of thing one produces in response to the questions "Why do you think that?" and "Why are you doing that?". Chapter 1 introduces this distinction and urges its importance in underwriting an account of what it is to reason (in the activity sense) well. I leave the topic of the standard of goodness in rationales to Chapter 4.

What the distinction makes plain, I argue, is that reasoning well is not simply a matter of conforming to rules of reasoning (for instance, rules of inference), however abstractly they might be conceived. It importantly must involve, for example, remembering and noticing things which turn out to be helpful for the solving of whatever problem or question one is confronted with. And so, to be a good reasoner, one must be such that one tends *so* to remember and notice; one needs a particular kind of disposition—a disposition, to put it briefly, for good mental conduct, which might not unreasonably be called *rationality*, or in the more general practical case, *wisdom*.[2]

In this way, my consideration of the nature of reasoning approaches the topic of virtue, which is after all, as Aristotle says, a disposition. What sort of thing a virtue is is the topic of Chapter 2. There I seek to extract and defend a conception of virtue which I find in the later work of Philippa Foot, the goal being to articulate an account of virtue in which the dispositional account of rationality developed in Chapter 1 can neatly be situated.

[2] Here, and throughout, by "rationality" I refer to a disposition, a kind of excellence of the power of reason. Sometimes "rationality" is used to refer to the power of reason itself, for instance in the characterization of humans as rational animals.

I argue that the role of human nature in Foot's argument for the rationality of acting well is not what it has seemed to be to many philosophers. Foot has been taken by the readers I have in mind to hold that facts about human nature are among the premises of (good) practical reasoning. They have understandably balked at that thesis, which for various reasons seems so implausible. I argue that Foot's basic argument for the rationality of acting well does not rely on any such claim. This becomes evident if one gives appropriate priority to Foot's conception of virtue as a certain kind of disposition, a disposition to respond to what I call situational reasons—particular facts about one's situation such as that one made a promise or that someone else is in need. The account of reasoning and rationality developed in Chapter 1 fits cleanly into this account of the nature of virtue, for rationality as conceived there is a *sine qua non* of virtue in Foot's sense.

While Chapter 2 aims to rescue Foot from some of her readers, Chapter 3 aims to rescue Foot from herself. Foot's good account of the rationality of virtue is, I think, entrenched within an objectionable account of the teleology of life. I raise two kinds of objection to Foot's account of life. First, I think it renders puzzling just how virtue *could be* a disposition to recognize and respond to the right sorts of situational reasons, because such a disposition must also, given Foot's neo-Aristotelian naturalism, be a disposition to recognize certain truths about human nature. Foot's conception of human nature in terms of human need—what she calls Aristotelian necessity—renders such a disposition incredible, or so I claim. The second objection concerns a kind of vicious circle in Foot's account. Foot is pulled into the circle by the particularities of her attempt to extend her account of life and natural goodness to human beings, in which attempt she tries to satisfy desiderata that pull in opposite directions. I argue that an account of life which shelves the notion of Aristotelian necessity can respect those desiderata without being subject to the vicious circle.

Importantly, the account also makes space for a sensible and realistic epistemology of morals and *in turn* of human nature.

Chapter 4 completes the account of wisdom by providing an account of what makes for a good—valid, sound—practical inference (or rationale), since good practical inferences are what, after all, it is the business of practical wisdom to *make*. I treat first the instrumental component of practical inference, arguing that it is best conceived as identifying sufficient rather than necessary means to one's end and that it should not be modeled too closely on theoretical inference. Second, I argue that situational inference—inference from situational reasons to actions—is also a fundamental component of (at least many) practical inferences. Taking note of this fact helps us to formulate a neo-Aristotelian account of the interdependence of wisdom and the various virtues of character and likewise to give accounts of practical reason and the will.

# Chapter 1: Reasoning and Rationale

Deliberation is a certain sort of inquiry. (Aristotle 2002, 1142a32)

## 1.1 Introduction

In one sense, reasoning is something that we do. It is a process that develops over time. It is an activity, to some extent under our control. In another sense, we sometimes say to someone, for instance, “Explain your reasoning.” In this sense, reasoning is a particular kind of ground for belief or action, an account that one normally would or could give if asked. Finally, by ‘reasoning’ we might mean a certain kind of abstract object, namely an argument or proof.

I will reserve the term *reasoning* for reasoning in the first of these senses, and I will refer to someone’s reasoning in the second sense as a *rationale*. Though it is not my aim to treat the third, I will assume that we all have a serviceable sense of what is meant by ‘argument’: a collection of considerations, one of which (the conclusion) is meant to be grounded or supported by the others (premises).

The topic of this chapter is the nature and assessment of reasoning. The goal is to give an account of reasoning in general, of what is common to both theoretical and practical reasoning. In doing so, I will develop some conceptual resources that I will make use of in the remainder of my argument.

The argument will proceed by developing and defending the distinction between reasoning and rationale, a distinction which seems to me important and underappreciated. I will argue that reasoning is a kind of inquiry, the aim of which is a rationale, or a response on the basis of a good rationale. Seeing this distinction aright sheds some light on, and accommodates well our

pretheoretical conception of, what it is for someone to reason *well*. Negatively, I will suggest that the failure to appreciate the distinction between reasoning and rationale has led to distortion of the assessment of reasoning. Positively, I want to urge that in a correct account of good reasoning, essential reference must be made to the concept of a *disposition*. Good reasoning is, very roughly, the sort of reasoning a good reasoner is liable to engage in.

### 1.2 Activity and Argument-Evaluability

In recent literature, there are two features reasoning has commonly been supposed to bear.

One recurring idea is exemplified by the emphatic remark that reasoning is something we *do*. As I will put the idea:

(1) Reasoning is *active*.

By this what is meant is not that 'reason' appears in English as an active verb. 'Believe' appears in English as an active verb, but in a natural, intuitive, and familiar sense, believing is not something we do. The thought meant to be captured here is that reasoning involves agency.

The expression of this point varies from author to author. Some call reasoning a process (Harman 1986; Wedgwood 2006; Boghossian 2012; Broome 2013; Dancy 2018). Some add that it is an action or activity, a voluntary action, or an intentional action (Boghossian 2012; Wright 2012; Broome 2013, 207, 234ff; Ford 2016, 155-156). Most agree that reasoning is in some degree under the control of reasoners.[1] The idea raises questions that are not always answered. Reasoning will be casually described as being an attempt or as having an aim (Boghossian 2012, 5; Dancy

[1] Harman (1986, 2) says that "it may well be that reasoning is a relatively automatic process whose outcome is not under one's control," presumably because he separates the process of reflection ("in which one thinks about one's beliefs, plans, desires, etc., and envisions various possibilities in more or less detail") from what he calls reasoning: actual change in view, the updating of one's attitudes in accordance with principles of revision. Philosophers treating inference specifically rather than reasoning in general tend to think of it as more (though still not fully) automatic (e.g., Boghossian 2012).

2018, 6), without an apparent consequence of this—that reasoning is an intentional action—informing the account, or else being explicitly addressed and denied.[2] There are various disagreements in matters of detail, concerning, for instance, the extent to which reasoning involves effort or is deliberate. I conjecture that these disagreements are in large part traceable to differences in how authors stipulate their subject matter—whether, for instance, they mean to treat reasoning in general or inference more specifically, and what sort of examples they make central. There does seem, though, to be a signal in this noise, a truth which various authors are approaching: simply, that there is such a thing as active reasoning, reasoning as an activity or "something we do." Reasoning in this sense is what we are talking about when we say of some subject *that she is reasoning*, that reasoning is what she is doing.

Active reasoning is a process. It bears, that is, the characteristic marks of processes: it takes time, has a describable trajectory, can be interrupted, and can be ascribed to subjects in progressive aspect.[3] More than that, it is indeed an intentional action; those whom we can describe as reasoning are able to say why they are reasoning, what goal they are seeking by engaging in this activity. This would explain why it is natural to say, as many authors do, that reasoning has an aim, takes effort, or is a kind of attempt.[4] The claim that reasoning is active distinguishes it from such attitudes as belief and intention, for believing and intending cannot be interrupted, only bear progressive aspect in extended or ironic senses, are not aptly described as attempts, and so on.[5]

The second recurring idea I want to highlight is this:

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[2] A notable exception is Raz (2015). Broome (2013, 235ff) provides an account of reasoning as an act in terms of rule following.
[3] On the distinction between states and processes, cf. Thompson (2008, 122-128).
[4] At least once it is recognized that reasoning characteristically proceeds from doubt and is uncertain of its own success: this qualification is necessary since not all intentional actions take effort, and it is arguably too rough an idealization to say that all intentional actions are attempts, that whoever is φ-ing intentionally is trying to φ.
[5] I do not mean to suggest that *only* processes or actions can *in any sense* be said to be active or agential. Matthew Boyle (2009; 2011) argues that there is a way in which rational agency is expressed in believing.

(2) Reasoning is *argument-evaluable*.

According to (2), reasoning is evaluable according to the standards of arguments. What I mean by this is most evident in accounts of inference itself, for inference involves the conformity of a reasoner's mind to certain canons of logic (Boghossian 2012, Wright 2012, Broome 2012). Even philosophers whose topic is reasoning in some broader sense tend to agree that inferences *are* instances of reasoning, and indeed they tend to treat them as paradigmatic instances. In the development of a theory of reasoning, it is usually a *modus ponens* inference that is wheeled out, at least initially, as an example of the phenomenon in question. What routinely follows is the acknowledgment that reasoning need not take the form of simple schematic inferences; reasoning may be abductive or practical, for instance, and it is generally messy, enthymematic, or inexplicit.

Even with such qualifications in place, active reasoning is commonly understood in the following way. It is taken to proceed from premises to conclusion, such that the subject's endorsement of the premises explains her adoption of the conclusion in virtue of their being its ground, and the adequacy or success of the reasoning is a matter of whether its premise- and conclusion-attitudes (or their contents) are appropriately related—a matter of whether the premises really do ground or justify the conclusion (Kolodny 2005, 520; Wedgwood 2006; Broome 2013, 235ff). In other words, philosophers often take active reasoning to be a process of an argument's unfolding in time within the thinking of a subject, and they take it that reasoning is as such to be assessed. Related ideas include the views that reasoning proceeds in accordance with rules (Boghossian 2012, 11ff; Broome 2013, 235ff), that reasoning is a kind of working with or manipulation of propositions (Broome 2013, 234), and that the contents of reasoning are (or should be) actual or perceived reasons (Harman 1986, 2; Kolodny 2005, 529; Schroeder 2007, 26).

The identification of these two features widely held to characterize reasoning allows me to frame the first major claim I will be making in this chapter—against (2) so long as in it 'reasoning' refers to active reasoning, as most philosophers writing on the topic so take it to refer:

(3) Reasoning is not argument-evaluable.

This is not, of course, to deny that there is an activity in which we engage, largely under our control, which we call reasoning, nor to deny that this activity is central to the conduct of our lives, to our deciding what to think and what to do. But it is to deny that *that* activity is, and is to be evaluated as, the unfolding of an argument in time. To the extent it can be said to have contents, the contents of active reasoning need be neither propositions nor reasons. *A fortiori* they need not constitute an argument. The trajectory of active reasoning is not from premises to conclusion of arguments, deductive or otherwise. What is genuinely evaluable according to standards of argument are what I call rationales, the finding and enacting of which is, roughly, the *aim* of the activity of reasoning.[6]

## 1.3 An Example of Active Reasoning

In this section, I want to present my case for (3). I will not argue for (3) by suggesting that activity and argument-evaluability are incompatible, that there *could not be* a process that is both active and argument-evaluable. My principal argument is rather: "don't think, but look!" (Wittgenstein 1958, §66). Philosophers have conceived active reasoning to be argument-evaluable in large part because in developing their theories they have nourished themselves upon "a one-sided diet" of examples (Wittgenstein 1958, §593). They attend to and give priority to the unrepresentative and

[6] Such a view has some precedent. Neta (2013), for instance, argues that inference is a kind of judgment, which need not take time. Cp. also Harman's distinction between reasoning and argument (1988).

misleading cases of straightforward deductive and instrumental inferences, supposing that even if not all reasoning is of one of those sorts, then they at least supply the *basic cases* by comparison with which others should be understood. Accordingly, to motivate (3), I want to present a case which I take to be, and to be worth calling, reasoning, if anything is. My case indicates the need for a distinction along the lines that I am urging. Since many philosophers treat reasoning in some restricted sense, this example is not intended as a direct counterexample to anyone's views. It is rather meant to reorganize our conception of our subject matter and remind us of possibilities we easily overlook.

My example is this: You are a student who has been asked to prove that there are infinitely many prime numbers. You do various things in order to complete this task; in the remainder of this section, I will speculate somewhat upon this variety. At the end of all of this, you have written down, say, the following:

> Suppose toward a contradiction that there are only finitely many primes $p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_n$. Let $A$ be the integer $p_1 \cdot p_2 \cdot \ldots \cdot p_n + 1$. $A$ is either prime or composite. For each $i$, $p_i$ divides $p_1 \cdot p_2 \cdot \ldots \cdot p_n$, but does not divide 1, so for each $i$, $p_i$ does not divide $A$. So $A$ is not composite, since it is greater than 1 and is not the product of primes lesser than it. So it is prime. But $p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_n$ were assumed to be all of the primes, and $A$ is greater than each $p_i$. So $A$ is not prime. This is a contradiction. Therefore there are infinitely many primes.

In a natural and familiar sense, what you have done in coming up with this proof is mathematical *reasoning*. About this activity, it seems to me that several observations can be made.

(a) This reasoning is an activity; it is, intuitively, "something you do." It is a process; again, it takes time, has a describable trajectory, could be interrupted, and is ascribed to you in progressive

aspect. So your reasoning is, in my terminology, active. Accordingly, what goes on in a case such as this seems likely to be of interest to philosophers whose topic is active reasoning.

(b) Your reasoning is an intentional action. It is done for a purpose, which you could supply were you asked. Your goal is to prove *that there are infinitely many prime numbers*. As is frequently the case in the study of mathematics, you are aware from the context, perhaps from the testimony of your instructor or textbook, that there *are* infinitely many prime numbers, so in this case you are simply seeking a proof. But the question might alternatively have been put to you *whether there are infinitely many prime numbers*, which would be more akin to the sorts of questions practicing mathematicians actually address, and that would affect the shape of your reasoning in various ways. Then you would be seeking not simply *an* answer, for you could get that by guessing randomly, but for an answer that you can *reasonably take* to be correct. You seek a true ground for some answer.

(c) The preceding indicates that your reasoning is an *inquiry*—for an inquiry is an attempt to close an open question, and that is what you attempt to do in this example. I will generalize from the present example by proposing the following thesis:

(4) Reasoning is a kind of inquiry.[7]

Why think that (4) holds quite generally? I invite the reader to survey a variety of cases to test its adequacy. It seems that, in general, we will find it necessary to distinguish the *trajectory* of reasoning from its argument-evaluable *issue*. Consider, for instance, scientific reasoning: what grounded Einstein's conviction in his theory of relativity was not an accounting of what he was up to, what he did, in the patent office in Bern. Or consider instrumental reasoning: one reasons *how*

[7] The Aristotelian view that deliberation (practical reasoning) is an inquiry and therefore an action was brought home to me by Ford 2016. That deliberation is an action is also noticed by Setiya (2007), Arpaly and Schroeder (2012), and Raz (2015).

*to attain some end*, starting from a conception of the end but (perhaps) no idea even of what candidate means are available and sufficient. Non-instrumental practical reasoning could be said to be governed by the question *what to do*. Even where reasoning is not aimed at the evaluation of a determinate thesis, as when, for instance, one learns a new fact and wonders *what follows from it* or *how it is compatible with what else one believes*, one's thinking is governed by an open question.

(4) only claims that all reasoning is inquiry, not that all inquiry is reasoning. For some inquiry seems not to be reasoning. Mere counting, for instance, may be how one comes to answer a question. Breathing deeply and slowly would not be called a technique of reasoning, even if it is part of one's procedure in a hot moment for deciding what to do. Simply asking someone a question is one form of inquiry, but is not reasoning. Finally, one might resolve an open question by way of experiment, as when one manipulates a tool to decide whether it would serve one's purposes, and this too is not obviously what we would call reasoning. (Though it also does not seem obvious to me that we would not call it reasoning.) This raises the question of whether there is some articulable specific difference which would distinguish reasoning from the genus of inquiry more broadly—but it is not necessary for my argument to articulate such a difference, which, as far as I am aware, may not exist, for the boundaries of our concept of reasoning need not be sharp.

(d) Like inquiries generally, your reasoning proceeds from doubt.[8] If you were already to *know* what to do to prove the theorem, then you would not devote so much time and effort to reasoning it out. This is not to deny that one sometimes reasons about a question one has already answered. In such cases, one seems to be, as it were, simulating doubt, or trying to decide whether there is *another* proof.

[8] Doubt, that is, concerning what the answer is to the question specifying the inquiry, not doubt concerning any proposition in particular.

Since your reasoning proceeds from doubt, the course your reasoning should take is not, in general, obvious at the outset. It may not be obvious, for instance, that the proof that there are infinitely many prime numbers should proceed by contradiction. Some students will begin by trying other strategies, like mathematical induction; they might try writing down the first several primes and attempting to find a general formula for the $n^{\text{th}}$ prime in terms of the previous ones. And even those who start by assuming that there are finitely many prime numbers are faced with a decision how to proceed from that assumption.

(e) Crucially, because your reasoning proceeds from doubt, it tends to involve a variety of mental acts besides calculation and the application of rules. Among this variety of acts are *guesses*. These may be more or less methodical, more or less educated. For instance, in proving the theorem, you need to come to consider the number $p_1 \cdot p_2 \cdot \ldots \cdot p_n + 1$—but how *do* you come to consider this? If you are a savvy mathematician, you may be in some sense guided by the principle that if $a$ divides $b$ and does not divide $c$, then it does not divide $b + c$, and that means both *remembering* this principle and *noticing* its salience in the particular case. If you are not a savvy mathematician, you may simply guess, knowing only: that you likely need to make use each of $p_1$, $p_2$, … , and $p_n$; that primeness has more to do with multiplication than with addition; and, yet, that the product of your primes won't do, since it is manifestly composite.

Another sort of mental act your reasoning may involve is *imagination*. Imagination seems to play a role in a lot of mental arithmetic. For instance, in this case, you might try to imagine $p_i$ for arbitrary $i$ being factored out of $p_1 \cdot p_2 \cdot \ldots \cdot p_n + 1$, yielding an integer plus, you notice, a non-integral fraction. Such imaginative activity should be reckoned as part of your reasoning too—for your reasoning's success may well depend on it. Imagination can play an obvious role in instrumental reasoning—for instance, in determining whether a particular material will be suitable

as a lever. Arguably, imagination has a role to play in non-instrumental practical reasoning; one might try to place oneself in someone else's shoes, say, to decide whether some outcome is fair.

Because you are liable not to know how to begin, reasoning may involve *supposition* and other sorts of work that do not directly contribute to your ultimate proof. For instance, the mathematician Terence Tao advises the following when one is unsure how to proceed in proving a theorem: considering an extreme or degenerate case; solving a simplified version; and trying first to disprove the theorem in question (2006, 4-5).

The key idea is that reasoning cannot in general proceed by the application of rules, however abstractly those rules are to be formulated. As we might put it, reasoning must proceed in an *ad hoc* manner.

Of this variety of acts that can be involved in reasoning, what seem to me to be most significant are memory and the recognition of saliences. Those will be my focus in what follows.

(f) Your reasoning is susceptible to a form of evaluability besides argument-evaluability. As I will put it:

(5) Reasoning is means-end-evaluable.

Reasoning involves taking means to an end and is evaluable on the basis of the conduciveness of those means to that end—for all reasoning is intentional action, inquiry in particular.[9]

Reasoning proceeds through various steps. I do not mean to deny that some *steps* of some reasoning are argument-evaluable, as would be the case if they were transitions from ground to what is grounded. For example, if you make the assumption for contradiction that there are only finitely many primes, then this might be said to be an argument-evaluable step, for logic permits one to make assumptions from an empty set of premises.

[9] The point is not that the *contents* of one's reasoning concern means and ends, as they will in the case of instrumental reasoning. That is true, but (5) is making a point about reasoning in general.

Even so, there are indefinitely many assumptions which logic permits one to make at *any* point, and there are a variety of consequences that can be drawn from any set of premises. Most of these logically permissible steps would not only be unhelpful to take, but obviously so, and the reasoner who takes them would be said, in a familiar sense, to be reasoning badly. This is why acts such as remembering, noticing, and guessing what is salient are, in real cases, essential to reasoning's going *well*. Recognizing what sort of assumptions (for instance) will be *helpful* to make in the course of proving a theorem is what separates good from bad mathematical reasoners. The idea of taking a step in accordance with rules, however abstractly those rules are conceived, does not settle the question of which step it would be helpful to take, nor which step one *does* take.

Put another way, your reasoning is going *badly* if you cannot come up with the strategy of argument by contradiction or if you cannot make use of your assumption by coming to consider the number $p_1 \cdot p_2 \cdot \ldots \cdot p_n + 1$. But your mistake is not to have stepped out of conformity with standards of argument. What in general makes your reasoning go well is for the steps you take to be conducive, or likely conducive, to finding the proof.

(g) This point about the conduciveness of means to one's end needs to be handled with care. Of course, means-end-evaluations must be sensitive to the nature and difficulty of one's question (as the evaluation of any intentional action is sensitive to the nature and difficulty of attaining one's goal). The fact that reasoning proceeds from doubt means that reasoners cannot in general light immediately upon promising means of solving their problems. Such is the lot of finite reasoners. In the present example, it need not redound very negatively upon one's competence at reasoning to attempt mathematical induction before trying argument by contradiction. Neither strategy is foolish to consider, even though only one of them in fact works in the given case. It may redound negatively upon one's competence to spend too long on an unfruitful attempt before

turning away from it, but what counts as 'too long' will depend upon the nature of the case. In any case, the sensibility of directing one's efforts in a particular direction does not reduce to correct application of a rule; even where guessing is methodical (that is, where one enumerates possibilities according to some method or rule) the method of enumeration must occur to one.

(h) Conversely, the fact that one's reasoning *does* successfully light upon a correct proof does not mean that it was good reasoning, for it may have so lighted by accident or luck. Some students recently apprised of the power of proof by contradiction will try it immediately in proving every theorem with they are confronted; this means that they will sometimes get an answer more quickly than other more circumspect students, but they accomplish this, when they do, only by accident or luck, and in other cases their wheels spin fruitlessly or they produce inelegant proofs containing unnecessary steps. Their selection of approach was not responsive to the nature of the problem that confronted them. Yet methodical guessing is not always possible, and some difficult problems do simply require that one has some luck or tries sufficiently many possibilities so as to light upon the correct one.

(i) It is true that one way in which reasoning can go badly is calculative error. One might make a mistake in doing some mental arithmetic, say, by forgetting to carry the 1. That this sort of mistake is possible is, probably, a great source of the pressure to consider active reasoning to be argument-evaluable *tout court*. But all that need be true in such cases is that one misapply a good technique—with the result that what one thinks on the basis of such miscalculation is mistaken.

In other words, the steps taken in reasoning are all means-end-evaluable, but they need not be argument-evaluable. Even those that are argument-evaluable are also, and more fundamentally, means-end-evaluable. Reasoning can go badly even if one does not transgress any standards of

argument. Indeed, reasoning can go badly even if one is doing nothing *other than* applying rules correctly.

I believe that a fair survey of other sorts of reasoning will bear out that these observations generalize straightforwardly to regions of thought besides the mathematical. I have chosen a mathematical example to illustrate my theses for a couple reasons. First, antecedently to our considering a particular case, many of us will be inclined to think that mathematical reasoning is an especially plausible candidate for rule-governed reasoning. If anything is a paradigmatic instance of reasoning's purported argument-evaluability, one would think, then surely it must be mathematical reasoning. Yet, second, while it is clear that the product of mathematical reasoning—the ultimate proof—is argument-evaluable, it becomes equally clear, in the inspection of an actual case, that the reasoning leading up to that product is not. Reasoning proceeds in all sorts of ways. The clarity with which a mathematical example can be described helps us to see this.

### 1.4 Rationales

None of this is meant to suggest that reasoning is a free for all. The appellation 'reasoning' suggests that the process is a rational one. My proposal is that this rationality is a matter, not directly of how reasoning proceeds, but rather of what it aims at.

But what does it aim at? The example of the previous section might lead one to say that reasoning aims at a proof or an argument. That is all right, if it is understood in the right way. The wrong way to understand it would be if one meant that reasoning aims at *producing* a proof in the sense of an abstract object, as a carpenter's activity aims at a house—for abstract objects, of course, cannot be produced. Rather, it is the *discovery* of an argument or proof that one is after; one wants to believe some answer to one's question, *on the ground of* an argument. To mark this distinction,

I say that what one aims at is a rationale, rather than a proof. In this section, I say more about what I mean by 'rationale'.

To get the notion of rationale in which I am now interested in view, I find it helpful to reflect upon G. E. M. Anscombe's account of the practical syllogism in *Intention* (2000, 57-81, hereinafter cited as *I*). Anscombe turns to the topic of practical reasoning or practical syllogism (she says that these are the same) because she thinks it will help us understand practical knowledge, about which she thinks we ought to be puzzled. The sections of *Intention* on practical reasoning contain a battery of interesting and suggestive theses, most of which do not concern us here, as well as interpretation of Aristotle. I want to highlight what Anscombe argues a practical syllogism does and what it does not do.

Whereas a theoretical syllogism shows the truth of a proposition, a practical syllogism does shows the point of an action (*I*, 60). What a practical syllogism does not do is describe "actual mental processes" or considerations that agents "go through" before or in acting, for often what is made explicit in the representation of a practical syllogism is not the sort of thing agents "go through" at all. Her examples are such thoughts as "I am human" and "Lying on a bed is a good way of resting." She says that Aristotle's practical syllogisms have "an absurd appearance" because it is absurd, implausible, to imagine someone thinking such things before taking a nap (*I*, 79). But it is in fact not absurd to include such thoughts in a practical syllogism, because its function is otherwise than to report how someone has deliberated: "In several places Aristotle discusses them only to point out what a man may be ignorant of, when he acts faultily though well-equipped with the relevant general knowledge." The premises of a practical syllogism are supposed to represent what an agent knows, or at least believes, insofar as this sheds light on what she does:

> The interest of the account is that it describes an order which is there whenever actions are done with intentions; the same order as I arrived at in discussing what 'the intentional action' was, when the man was pumping water [pumping water, that is, in order to replenish the water-supply of a house, in order to assassinate the party chiefs housed there, in order to put some good men in power, in order to bring about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth]. (*I*, 80; cf. 37ff for Anscombe's example)

So Anscombe's view is that the practical syllogism covers the same ground as her special sense of the question "Why?" by appeal to which she defines the class of intentional actions (*I*, 5-28).[10] A theoretical syllogism would correspond to a different question "Why?" ("Why do you think that?"), the answers to which are reasons for belief rather than reasons for action (cp. Anscombe, 1981a, 229-230).

This draws out the fact that rationales have two dimensions. As answers to questions "Why?", they provide *explanations* of belief and action. But they also indicate what the subject takes to support or *justify* believing or acting as she does, for they show the truth of some conclusion or the point of doing something. Further, these two dimensions, explanatory and justificatory, are connected. Rationales provide appropriate and truthful answers to explanatory questions "Why?" *in virtue of* indicating what the subject takes to support or justify her belief or action. In other words, the distinctive way in which a rationale explains a belief or action is by giving the ground or justification appreciated by the subject.

This dual role of explanation and justification is familiar from the philosophical debate over the nature of reasons (e.g., Williams 1979). Rather than speaking only of a subject's reasons, I have chosen 'rationale' to gesture toward the fact that a subject's reasons for a belief or action

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[10] Whether this is so is questioned by Ford 2017.

are structured into a case or argument for her belief or action.[11] Since we ask whether this case is a good one independently of the truth of the agent's reasons, we may say that rationales are assessable on the basis of something akin to validity: that is, whether the case really does ground the response.[12] In other words,

(6) Rationales are argument-evaluable.

This accommodates, I want to say, what seeming truth there was in (2).

Now, Anscombe famously gives her account of intentional action in terms of a piece of language, a certain kind of question. This Wittgensteinian approach is controversial, and its execution calls for a delicate navigation between Cartesianism and behaviorism—a major theme of *Intention* (*I*, 41-49). My argument in this chapter does not depend on Anscombe's method. Even philosophers who do not wish to adopt Anscombe's approach should agree with this: there are such things as rationales for beliefs and actions, and they are not merely abstract arguments, because it is only by belonging in some sense to a subject that they discharge their explanatory function. Further, like believing and intending themselves, having a rationale for one's belief or action is not a process; to have a rationale for a belief or an action, to believe or act for reasons, is not to *be thinking* of something at a particular moment or for a time.

Further, it cannot be held that what it is to believe or act on the basis of a rationale is itself provided by an account of active reasoning, by an account of the process of reasoning that leads up to belief or action. For reasoning is itself done on the basis of some rationale. If you interrupt

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[11] There are related advantages. A means-end belief is not one's 'reason' for doing something, but it is certainly part of the agent's perspective on her action, in light of which that action is intelligible.

[12] Note that Anscombe uses 'syllogism' and 'reasoning'—and, in a later paper, 'inference'—essentially interchangeably. Except occasionally when discussing Anscombe, this is not my usage. I use 'rationale' for what Anscombe calls a syllogism = a reasoning = an inference, and I distinguish rationales from episodes of reasoning, which are instances of what Anscombe calls—a bit too derisively, perhaps—"actual mental processes." I have no objection to the use of 'reasoning' for what I call rationales, except that it has led philosophers to confuse two distinct phenomena.

someone's reasoning with the question "Why are you doing that?", the reasoner will be able to give an answer that provides a rationale for engaging in some reasoning on this particular occasion, and this rationale must be different from the one being sought—since that, of course, has not yet been found. And so if we were to hold that actions are done for reasons in virtue of issuing from deliberation, we would face a vicious regress.[13]

Active reasoning is an essential part of how human beings come to know the world and act within it. But since reasoning is itself an action, acting for a reason cannot be accounted for exhaustively in terms of reasoning. Our account of acting for a reason needs rather to appeal to what I have called rationale.[14]

## 1.5 Doing Without the Distinction?

The interest of the distinction between reasoning and rationale is not just that it renders explicit an ambiguity in the ordinary word 'reasoning'. The distinction is important because the failure to recognize it, embodied in the tendency of philosophers to treat active reasoning as argument-evaluable, tends to obscure what it is for reasoning to go well. In defending my conception of reasoning, I have at times appeal to our sense of what it is for reasoning to go well, but now I want to consider how neglect of this distinction tends to lead to obscurity about the assessment of reasoning.

The tendency to see reasoning as argument-evaluable is the tendency to see it as proceeding from premises to conclusion. John Broome, for instance, takes this to be a representative example of the topic he aspires to treat:

[13] Similar arguments are suggested by Müller (1979, 96-99); Setiya (2007, 7-8); and Arpaly and Schroeder (2012).
[14] Thus I believe that there is an important philosophical role to be played by the notion of a practical syllogism, and I disagree with Dancy (2018, 23-24) and Harman (1986, 6), each of whom argues that it is dubious.

> You believe it is raining and you believe that if it is raining you ought to take an umbrella. As you head for the door, thinking about what to pick up, you bring these beliefs together in your mind and end up believing you ought to take an umbrella. Going through this process is something you do. (Broome 2013, 207)

Such a picture of reasoning emphasizes the role of logical (or at least quasi-logical) rules, along which the steps taken in reasoning run. Rules, of course, are normative. They provide standards to which activity may conform or fail to conform. This conception of reasoning, accordingly, appears to supply the following picture of what it is for reasoning to go well rather than badly: reasoning goes well when it actually does conform to rules of reasoning.

The example is typical of the literature on reasoning and inference. Broome acknowledges that it is unnatural, for it is difficult, he says, to find good examples of what he too calls active reasoning. He conjectures that this is because it happens too fast. "To minimize this problem," he says, "I shall imagine your mind is slowed down by dopiness." This seems to me to be a sign that something has gone wrong. It should not be difficult to come up with examples of reasoning, for the progressive action descriptions 'is reasoning' and 'is deliberating', no doubt, commonly have application. The mistake is to think that they apply to people who are precisely in the middle of drawing inferences—indeed, that there is such a thing as being in the middle of drawing an inference. For, notice, 'infer' is a near synonym, in many contexts, of 'assume', and like the latter, does not bear progressive aspect and so does not signify a process that can be interrupted.

But let us set aside Broome. It is instructive to consider in detail Jonathan Dancy's account of reasoning. For one might think that if anyone could accommodate the messiness of actual episodes of reasoning, then it would be Dancy, since he has long urged the attractions of

particularism in ethics (cf. Dancy 1983; 2006), and accordingly has denied that rules or principles play a preeminent role in reasoning.

Active reasoning, in the sense adumbrated in Section 1.2, is the topic of Dancy's recent book *Practical Shape* (2018). He holds that reasoning is "an attempt to determine what sort of response is most favoured by the considerations at issue, and responding in that way if one can" (2018, 6). He represents such reasonings on what he calls grids, the left column of which name the reasoner's attitudes, the right their contents, like so:

| Belief | *p* |
|---|---|
| Belief | If *p* then *q* |
| Belief | *q* |

**Table 1:** Dancy's *modus ponens* grid

Although this grid looks like an abstract argument, Dancy cautions that it is meant to represent rather an *episode* of reasoning, the reasoning someone does on some occasion, and such episodes are processes, not arguments:

> [T]he grid represents a process, not a steady state. A deliberator adduces considerations one after another, and comes to act (or believe or intend) accordingly. So there is a temporal order from top to bottom. Of course it is not vital that the process should have had this rather than that order, and often actual cases of reasoning are pretty much of a jumble anyway. (2018, 25)

Further, even though his treatment begins with a schematic example of *modus ponens* reasoning, Dancy means ultimately to be faithful to his particularist roots. Codifiable rules of inference are not to play any special role in his account of the nature of reasoning (2018, 54-55). For Dancy, what is essential to reasoning is the assemblage and appreciation of considerations that *favor* some response, and considerations might favor a response even without conformity to any general rule.

This abstract favoring relation thus characterizes how, according to Dancy, reasoning's starting-attitudes and concluding-attitudes ought to be related, if reasoning is to go well. So even a particularist such as Dancy, who holds that reasoning in actual cases is "pretty much of a jumble," takes reasoning to be argument-evaluable in the sense I specified in Section 1.2.[15]

Dancy's question is how the considerations adduced in his grids are (or should be) related to the response in which they issue. His answer is that they (should) favor it. But when we consider a realistic example of an episode of reasoning—like the case of mathematical reasoning of Section 1.3—we can appreciate that this account is not really an account of what it is for *reasoning* to go well but rather of what would make a complete, filled-in grid provide a good *rationale* for some response.

Dancy acknowledges that if we are to represent someone's reasoning, then we need really to understand the grids as possessing a temporal dimension, as being filled in gradually. But having made this point, he makes nothing of it. He continues to take the problem of the nature and assessment of reasoning to be a problem of how the reasoner's attitudes are to be related to the response, rather than (say) how the reasoner comes to have the relevant attitudes that ultimately ground that response. For Dancy, the fact that reasoning is "pretty much of a jumble" does not mean more than that the considerations which compose his grids might come in any temporal order (and, we may add, may be inchoate, inexplicit, or enthymematic).

We might put the point this way: Dancy says that reasoning is an attempt to determine what is the most favored response to the considerations "at issue." But in what sense are there considerations *at issue*? The relevant considerations are either, as it were, *given*, or they are not. If

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[15] Dancy discards the language of 'inference', 'premise', and 'conclusion' in the case of practical reasoning (2018, 23-24), but he still takes reasoning to have starting-attitudes and a concluding-attitude that are appropriately related when the former favor the latter.

they are assumed to be given, if the reasoner is assumed already to be aware of them once reasoning is taking place, then the account of reasoning fails to appreciate that reasoning often begins without any premises. So it was in the mathematical example of Section 1.3. This is clearly not a special feature of mathematical reasoning—instrumental reasoning often begins without the agent's having any sense of, for instance, what means are available and sufficient for the attaining of her end. If the relevant considerations are *not* assumed to be given, then the reasoner's becoming aware of them is itself a significant problem which the reasoner faces, the resolution of which is not itself a matter of determining what response is most favored by *other* considerations at issue, on pain of regress. In either case, Dancy's account assumes that the success of reasoning hinges on considerations' favoring, rather than not favoring, the response. Bad reasoning turns out to be reasoning that possesses, in a highly abstract sense, a kind of invalidity. It is a transition from grounds to a response which those grounds do not actually favor.

It is no wonder that Dancy does not find illuminating examples of reasoning in some of the places where he looks. He writes that he tried to test and develop his theory by modeling the reasoning found in legal judgments. But the results were underwhelming:

> The written judgments were often impressively long, which looked promising, but large parts of the judgments usually consisted of an elaborate laying out of the case at issue, and then a statement of the judgment itself. The reasoning itself was usually fairly brief—one paragraph or two at most. I remember one that was of the form 'We just don't do things this sort of way in Britain.' (2018, 57)

But Dancy should not have expected to find what he was looking for here. Legal judgments do not report on active reasoning—on how a judge reasoned in deciding a case, on the process a judge went through in figuring out which judgment to render. They are meant to explain the judgment

and justify it to a particular sort of audience; they are thus much closer to embodying rationales than they are to recounting courses of reasoning. As a consequence, even if such a judgment turns out to be good according to whatever standard there is for goodness in legal judgments, that does not mean that the judge reasoned well in rendering it. For instance, the judge may have labored far longer to reach a decision than another might have.

Dancy has also looked to literature for models of good reasoning. He highlights a passage from Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds*:

> One of the elder Fawn girls had assured her that under no circumstances could a lady be justified in telling a gentleman that he had spoken an untruth, and she was not quite sure that the law so laid down was right. And then she could not but remember that the gentleman in question was Lord Fawn, and that she was Lady Fawn's governess. But Mr. Greystock was her affianced lover, and her first duty was to him. And then, granting that she herself had been wrong in accusing Lord Fawn of untruth, she could not refrain from asking herself whether he had not been much more wrong in saying in her hearing that Mr. Greystock was not a gentleman. And his offence had preceded her offence, and had caused it! She hardly knew whether she did or did not owe an apology to Lord Fawn, but she was quite sure that Lord Fawn owed an apology to her. (quoted in Dancy 2018, 57)

I have no objection to this passage as a plausible example of active reasoning. But Dancy goes on to comment: "The fact is that in the present deplorable state of the theory of reasoning we are entirely unable to reveal the rational coherence of this train of thought." Is *rational coherence* what *trains of thought* should be expected to have? The series of thoughts that occur to a reasoner need not be a matter of coherence or implication, and whether this train of thought is a good one depends

on various material facts of her situation—for instance, whether there is some other important detail that she has forgotten or overlooked, how immediately these thoughts occurred to her, and whether they are true. It is doubtful that there is anything very determinate for a philosophical theory of reasoning to say about what sort of things it would be a mark of a good reasoner to remember or notice, other than that a good reasoner will tend to remember and notice things which *need* to be remembered and noticed, for the adequate addressing of her problem.

It seems to me, then, that the distinction between reasoning and rationale should not be ignored, if we would like to do justice to the assessment of reasoning as good or bad. We need to appreciate that reasoning and rationale are subject to distinct standards—to standards of means-end efficiency and of argument, respectively. They are, of course, related, since what one seeks, in reasoning, is to respond reasonably (on the basis of some rationale) to one's question, but this does not mean that reasoning itself is argument-evaluable.

### 1.6 Reasoning Well

What does it mean to say that reasoning is means-end evaluable? As I pointed out in Section 1.3, this point needs to be understood carefully. For reasoning, as a kind of inquiry, proceeds from doubt, and the path to an answer to one's question cannot in general be known to the reasoner in advance. So reasoners are not necessarily to be faulted for considering dead-end possibilities, for instance, even though the consideration of dead-end possibilities is, in a sense, *not* conducive to answering one's question. In what sense, then, can a reasoner be reasoning well in considering a dead-end possibility? Intuitively, a reasoner will be reasoning well if what she is considering is a sensible thing to consider. But what makes something a sensible thing to consider?

In thinking about the assessment of reasoning, we must keep several points in view, some of which we have encountered above. First, someone reasoning badly might *happen* across not only a correct answer, but a correct rationale, by luck or by accident. Thus:

(7) Successful reasoning is not necessarily good.

Conversely, someone reasoning well might not attain an answer, whether by some sort of accident or some factor such as lack of time or difficulty of question. Thus:

(8) Good reasoning is not necessarily successful.

To these points, we can add one that Aristotle makes in giving his own account of excellence of deliberation (εὐβουλία):

> [O]ne person can achieve it by deliberating for a long time, while another manages it quickly. The former case, then, still won't count as deliberative excellence; rather, deliberative excellence is correctness as to what one should achieve, and the way in which, and when, all in accordance with what is beneficial. (1142b27-29)[16]

In other words, there is some kind of requirement of efficiency on good reasoning. I will frame this requirement fairly weakly:

(9) It may redound negatively on the quality of reasoning if it takes longer than it might have.

The grounds for this observation are, it seems, multiple. In the case of deliberation, or practical reasoning, it has an instrumental basis. One who takes too long to deliberate about some prospective good may thereby fail to attain it at all, since the opportunity for it may be gone by the

[16] The account given here has much affinity with Aristotle's in *NE* VI.9. Aristotle, for instance, argues that excellence in deliberation cannot be knowledge or judgment (or 'opinion': δόξα), since these are settled, determinate states. One does not inquire when one already knows or takes oneself to know (NE VI.9, 1142a35-b13).

time he has figured out how to attain it, and anyway he may take so long deliberating that he loses out on other opportunities.

But some sort of requirement on efficiency plausibly holds in other domains of reasoning as well. All else being equal, one's reasoning is shown to be better if one answers one's question more quickly than one might have (or than other people do), at least if this is not merely attributable to accident or luck. I do not mean to imply that this requirement is very stringent. Moreover, its ground may, in some cases at least, be indirect. The issue with a prolonged episode of reasoning may be, for example, that it was delayed by *difficulty*, or even bias, and it reflects badly on one's reasoning that one struggled, e.g., to think of relevant possibilities. Think back to Dancy's example of the judge. A seasoned judge who is not able to recall any relevant precedents is to that extent reasoning badly, but the same may not be true of a judge who takes longer to reason because he is at liberty to do so in a more leisurely manner; he has, say, a light day.

So what faster reasoning at least sometimes seems to show is that the person reasoning is more *capable* as a reasoner. This suggests that in our treatment of what it is for reasoning to go well, we might look in the direction of the notions of capacity or disposition. (I will say more below about the distinction between these two notions, and why I appeal to disposition in particular in my own treatment of the assessment of reasoning.)

Aristotle has recourse to such notions in his own treatment of what is required for someone's action to be deemed skillful:

> One can do something literate both by chance and at someone else's prompting. One will only count as literate, then, if one both does something literate and does it in the way a literate person does it; and this is a matter of doing it in accordance with one's own expert knowledge of letters. (2002, 1105a23-27)

The problem Aristotle is confronting is parallel to our own. Production (ποίησις) aims at bringing about a certain result—for instance, a house. A house may be better or worse relative to the standards there are for goodness in houses: whether it provides shelter, is stable, and is comfortable. But what is the relationship between the goodness of the product and the goodness of the production? The latter cannot *simply* be a function of the former, for reasons parallel to (7), (8), and (9). We see Aristotle here appeal to the producer's knowledge, a kind of capacity to produce. The move aptly captures the fact that—although a skilled producer will occasionally make a bad product and an unskilled one a good product—it is no accident for a skilled producer to make a good product.

Yet we should not simply insist that good reasoning is reasoning by someone disposed to reason well. This would tie good reasoning too closely to the disposition to reason well. It is intelligible that someone might say, for instance, that she was reasoning *unusually* or *uncharacteristically* well during her mathematics exam on a given day. Thus:

(10) Someone without a disposition to reason well might nevertheless reason well.

The possibility envisioned here is distinct from (7), which concerns the bearing of accident or luck on the quality of reasoning. Someone who succeeds merely by accident or luck seems not thereby to have reasoned well; what is now being envisioned is that someone who is not *disposed* to reason well may still reason well. The converse point holds too:

(11) Someone with a disposition to reason well might nevertheless fail to reason well.

That is to say, a good reasoner still might slip up on a particular occasion. (This possibility is in turn distinct from (8).) So having a disposition to reason well is neither necessary nor sufficient for reasoning well, and good reasoning cannot simply be identified as that which proceeds from a disposition to reason well.

Still, I want to insist, the relationship between good reasoning and the disposition to reason well is not merely contingent or extrinsic. It is important that the cases marked out by (10) and (11) are uncharacteristic of the persons in question. When someone who is not generally a good reasoner reasons well, this is, it seems, because she is reasoning *like* someone who does generally reason well. She is, for example, noticing what a good reasoner would notice, even if it is not the sort of thing she would typically notice; or her recall of relevant facts is comparably swift. Thus, I want to propose the following account of good reasoning:

(12) A person reasons well concerning a question Q when she reasons in a way characteristic of someone who is disposed to answer questions like Q correctly and efficiently.

Several comments on this account are in order.

(a) "disposed": A *disposition* to φ is a tendency to φ, perhaps in particular circumstances. For instance, the brittleness of glass means that it is disposed to break when struck. This point requires some care. The dispositions for certain kinds of reasoning, for instance technical reasoning, only need be exercised when one *wishes* to exercise them, e.g., when one wishes to construct a house.[17] It might naturally therefore be called a capacity rather than a disposition. Similarly, it is usually at one's discretion whether one takes up a given mathematical question. But I take practical reasoning—and perhaps, though I will not say more about them, certain fundamental kinds of theoretical reasoning—to differ in this respect. I say more about this in the next section.

(b) "to answer": A subject A *answers* some question Q if A φ-s on the basis of a rationale for φ-ing where φ-ing is a response to Q. For example, one might respond to the question whether

[17] Cp. Aristotle's contrast between skill and wisdom (2002, 1140b23-25).

there are infinitely many prime numbers by believing that there are. One might respond to the question of what to do by dancing a tango or by pressing the detonator.

In marking out these last possibilities, of answering a practical question by *acting*, I have assumed the controverted *Aristotelian Thesis* according to which the conclusion of practical reasoning is sometimes an action, rather than merely an evaluative belief or an intention.[18] This assumption will not substantially affect the arguments I make concerning practical rationality in this dissertation; I assume the Aristotelian Thesis only because I must make some assumption about what it is to respond to a practical question, and the Aristotelian Thesis is, syntactically at least, a simple one, not to mention one I think correct.

(c) "questions like Q": One might have the capacity to rationalize correctly and efficiently as regards, say, mathematical questions but not as regards literary ones. Good physicists need not be good biologists. Good logicians might lack good sense in practical matters. Accordingly, I will assume that the dispositions in question are distinguished roughly by classes of questions to which they are responsive, and I will refer to dispositions to answer questions correctly and efficiently as *species of rationality*.

(d) "correctly": I say that A answers Q *correctly* if the rationale on the basis of which A φ-s is a good rationale.[19] What this means is clear enough in the case of mathematical or technical rationales. (Is it a proof of the theorem according to the standards of mathematical logic? Will a house built according to these plans stand?) It will be less clear, or anyway more controversial, in the more general theoretical and practical contexts. I postpone the treatment of goodness in or

[18] For articulation and defense of this thesis, cf. Aristotle (1984b, 701a6-b1), Anscombe (2000), Tenenbaum (2007), Wiland (2013), Ford (2016), and Dancy (2018). For criticism, cf. Paul (2013), Broome (2013, 250), and Brunero (2021).

[19] 'Correct' is not meant to suggest that there is a unique good rationale for a given question, or even a unique answer.

soundness of practical rationales to Chapter 4, and do not mean to treat goodness in other rationales at all.

Correctness is, at least in some respects and in some cases, gradable. In some domains at least, there may be answers that are better than others, as well as rationales that provide better support for a given answer than other ones do. On such bases, the quality of reasoning will likewise be gradable.

(e) "efficiently": A answers Q *efficiently* if A responds on the basis of a rationale quickly and without wasteful effort, given the nature of her question and her situation. As noted above, this requirement introduces a comparative dimension to the assessment of reasoning. Aristotle approves of the adage that one should deliberate slowly, but he also notes that one's deliberation might be less than excellent in virtue of its taking too long. Plainly there is no contradiction here. How quickly one reasonably can, and therefore should, reason depends on the question and the situation. Some questions are more difficult than others, and it is necessary and reasonable to devote more time to answering them. In some cases this might mean that, compatibly with the reasoning's being good, *years* may be devoted to answering a question. Sometimes, for instance in practical matters, a rough answer is needed immediately, and one must act even without deliberation. Much hangs, then, on the proviso: 'given the nature of her question and her situation'.[20]

Efficiency is, like correctness, gradable. One can reason more or less efficiently, and one's reasoning will accordingly be better or worse.

[20] Note also that this is a requirement on rationalizing, not on the rationales found. It implies that good deliberation issues from a capacity to find means efficiently, not from a capacity to find efficient means (in, that is, the case of instrumental reasoning). No doubt, it is often good to find efficient means, but to the extent that this is true, it will be part of an account of what makes for a good practical rationale, and the argument given here for efficiency is compatible with holding that it is not a requirement of rationality that one take the most efficient means to one's end.

There are, as I have indicated, different dimensions of efficiency—for instance, speed and resource consumption. Pragmatic considerations in a particular case (the urgency of a question or the availability of resources, for example) may dictate that one or the other of these dimensions is especially pertinent, but this need not always be so. I do not assume that there is a single measure by which all instances of reasoning can be neutrally compared. It may be that the most one could say is that one instance of reasoning is better in some respects but worse in others than another instance of reasoning.

(f) "in a way characteristic of someone who …": There may be various ways in which good reasoners reason, especially but not only because good answers and good rationales need not be unique. Accordingly, to reason well, one only need reason in *a* way characteristic of someone who is disposed to answer the relevant kinds of questions correctly and efficiently.

I take it that there is no general theory, from without the perspective of a good reasoner, from which the best ways of reasoning can be derived—for instance, a theory from which it follows that it would be sensible to try proof by mathematical induction in a given case. When we identify someone's reasoning as going relatively well or badly, we draw on our own conception of what sort of things it would be helpful to remember and notice in a particular case.

Now, there are familiar troubles with appealing to an ideal subject in giving accounts of, e.g., what reasons an agent has (cf. Smith 1995). Namely, there are cases in which a *non-ideal* agent should not act as an ideal one would, precisely because the non-ideal agent knows herself to be non-ideal. This sort of possibility leads Michael Smith to suggest that what an agent has reason to do is, rather, what that agent's ideal self would *advise* her to do—a proposal that faces its own problems. I do not believe that parallel worries afflict the present account, however. It may be that a non-ideal reasoner should not reason as an ideal one would (perhaps she should consider

possibilities that an ideal reasoner would know immediately to overlook), but the present account is not about how anyone *should* reason; it is about what makes reasoning go better rather than worse. The non-ideal reasoner who reasons as she, given her limitations, should will still be, in turn, reasoning in a way that is worse than the way the ideal reasoner reasons. That seems to me to be the right result.[21]

(f) "disposed to answer questions …": I specify the disposition in question as a disposition to *answer questions*, rather than as a disposition to *reason well*. Such a disposition is, *but is not only*, a disposition to reason well, because a disposition is general in character, and it is responding to *some* but not all questions that requires reasoning. Such is the lot of finite reasoners. That thought is consistent with the following:

(13) It is a limiting case of the exercise of rationality to respond *without* reasoning to some questions.

This is particularly important, I take it, in the case of practical rationality, where one's situation may demand a virtually immediate response. It is characteristic of the practically rational person to reason well when one's situation is complex and calls for judicious reasoning, but also to 'see' what to do when that is necessary and possible.

We must distinguish responding without reasoning from responding without a rationale. As Aristotle says, the virtue of courage sometimes drives out deliberation (2002, 1117a18-23), but that does not mean that it occurs without what he calls προαίρεσις (choice, decision), which is based on a λόγος, a rationale. A disposition to respond without any rationale is what Aristotle calls εὐστοχία—"a mere capacity to guess correctly" (literally, 'shooting well'). In human beings, such

[21] Owing to the gradability of correctness and efficiency, the present account still captures the fact that a non-ideal reasoner may, on a particular occasion, reason better than she otherwise might have, or better than other similarly situated reasoners do.

a disposition would inevitably be limited, for humans simply cannot guess correctly what to think and what to do in every case. Sometimes they must reason, if they are reliably to hit the truth, which is regularly at some distance from what they already know.

## 1.7 Conducting Oneself

The general idea I have developed in the previous section is that we must appeal to the notion of a disposition in an account of what it is to reason well, due to the *ad hoc* way in which reasoning must proceed—by way of noticing and remembering what is salient. In this section, I want to turn to the topic of practical rationality. In particular, I want to flag a further way in which practical rationality specifically involves a disposition to remember and notice salient features of one's situation. In the next chapter, I will introduce an account of practical rationality that coheres with this datum.

I will introduce the core idea by way of an example. Suppose that among the things I reasonably care about is that my guests enjoy good hospitality at my hands, and I am currently hosting a party.[22] One of my guests is, for some reason or other, uncomfortable, and there is something that could be done about that. But although that fact would stand out to a more percipient and provident host, I do not notice his discomfort, perhaps because I am thinking about some other aspect of my party—whether it would be a good time to put the little quiches in the oven, say—while also trying to follow the conversation. I might be coming up with as fine an answer to *that* question as you like; based on how I am deliberating now, I am liable to put the

[22] I say that this is something I 'reasonably care about' to remain neutral, at this point, between different theories of practical rationality.

little quiches in the oven at precisely the ideal time, as far as the little quiches are concerned. Yet I do not notice, and therefore do not address, my friend's discomfort.

The intuition I want here to register is that in this example there is something wrong with my practical thinking. There is something wrong, even by my own lights; if I were apprised of the fact that my friend is uncomfortable, that is, I would concede that I was reasoning badly. The answer I propose is that while I am doing a fine job of answering the question *when to put the little quiches in the oven*, I am doing a poor job answering the question *what to do*. This latter question is, for human beings, unavoidable. In this way, practical rationality is not simply a capacity to answer practical question, but a disposition to answer what we can call *the agent's question*.

In what sense is the agent's question unavoidable? Anselm Müller (2004a) distinguishes acting, as it figures in the notion of acting well, from intentional action. He interestingly suggests that either *acting well* or *acting badly* is predicable of any "sane adult human being":

> You may produce a video that shows a person repairing a car as opposed to repairing a motor bike, or to climbing a staircase. But what could *acting* be 'opposed to'? How would you go about producing a video that showed a person acting? If any video can do the job, then any video can—as long as it features some sane adult human being. That is, the neutral component of the concept of acting reduces to the *voluntariness* that is characteristic of the way human beings operate. There is nothing else that different 'cases of acting' have in common. (Müller 2004, 18)

The notion of voluntariness in play here derives from a certain tradition of theorizing about ethical responsibility. It is a kind of axiom for Thomas Aquinas that only what is voluntary can be a sin, or—to put it in a less theological register—a fault. This is not meant to be a controversial thesis restricting our understanding of what people can be responsible for to the boundaries of a

preconceived, say physiological, notion of the voluntary. It is, rather, a sort of implicit definition of the voluntary. Anscombe here explains Aquinas's position:

> [Aquinas] asks whether voluntariness can be there without any act [of the will] at all. He says that what is from the will is what is called voluntary. But this 'from something' has two applications. In one way the 'from' is direct because something proceeds from something else which is active, as heating proceeds from what is hot. In the other way it is indirect, from the very fact of not acting, as one says that the sinking of a ship comes from the pilot inasmuch as he was not engaged in piloting it. But it has to be realised that what follows from lack of action does not always go back to an agent as cause from the mere fact of his not acting, but only when he can and ought to act. (2008, 130-131)

The voluntary, accordingly, extends not just beyond the intentional but even beyond the known. The ship's crashing is imputed to the pilot, rather than to other members of the crew, because the pilot could and should have been attending to its path, even though—since he was not—he did not know that the ship was about to hit an obstacle. The pilot, doing whatever else he was doing, was, as I will put it, *conducting himself badly*. Similarly, in the example I have introduced, I am conducting myself badly because I could and should notice my guest's discomfort, but I do not.

Any sane adult human being is conducting himself or herself either well or badly—even one who is asleep. (Perhaps it is her job not to be asleep right now.) The assessment of conduct must make reference to this wider context, and not simply to, say, the particular grounds on which a person does act, in virtue of which her action is the sort of intentional action it is. For the agent may not be acting intentionally at all, or may be doing something which appears to be all right and well-motivated in itself but amounts to negligence of some other duty in the present context.

I want to frame this fact, about the universal imputability of either the description 'conducting oneself well' or the description 'conducting oneself badly', in terms of the unavoidability of the agent's question—since what the agent can and ought to do is what determines how she is conducting herself. For mature human beings, the agent's question is effectively always in the offing. Every human being is, by her conduct, offering a tacit answer to this fundamental question, an answer that will, or will not, measure up to whatever standards there are for practical rationales. Practical rationality then must be not just a disposition to answer specific practical questions—such as when to put the little quiches in the oven—but it must be a disposition to notice which specific practical questions are pertinent to the answering of the unavoidable agent's question.[23]

In the next chapter, I will develop and defend an account of practical rationality that gives it an appropriate place in good human conduct.

## 1.8 Conclusion

The perspective on the nature of rationality which I have introduced in this chapter is distinct from, though at least in some measure compatible with, existing perspectives. Rationality is often thought to consist in one's satisfying requirements on one's attitudes, whether at a given time or over time (Broome 2013, 149-191). Some philosophers take it to consist in one's responding correctly to reasons (Kolodny 2005; 2008). I do not want to suggest that there is nothing to these

[23] This account bears some resemblance to what has been discussed under the heading of the inescapability of agency. Cf. Korsgaard (2009), Enoch (2006), Ferrero (2009). But I do not appeal to the inescapability of the agent's question to explain the normativity of moral thought; rather, I appeal to it to understand the bearing of what an agent is disposed to notice on the imputability to her of the descriptions 'conducting herself well' and 'conducting herself badly'. This is a rather more modest project than constitutivism in metaethics.

ideas, though I do want to insist that there is an important dimension which such accounts leave out. Broome writes, for instance:

> Suppose your attitudes satisfy all the requirements that apply to them. You would not be fully rational if they did so purely by coincidence. To be fully rational, you must have dispositions that would lead you to satisfy the requirements in other circumstances too. Rationality requires you to have those dispositions. But I shall not try to formulate requirements on dispositions. (2013, 149).[24]

We can say something even stronger, perhaps. The world might conspire against a rational person in such a way that he is unable to answer the questions to which he addresses himself, or answers them wrongly.[25] Nevertheless he may have whatever species of rationality is in question. It is simply unfortunate that circumstances are such that that disposition's normal exercise is impossible. Conversely, as Broome indicates, one might satisfy requirements of rationality (or manage to respond correctly to reasons) despite not being rational—having no disposition to satisfy those requirements (or respond correctly to reasons). One might even have such a disposition and not be rational, because one is not disposed to satisfy the requirements of rationality (or respond correctly to reasons) *efficiently*.

Rationality as it is presented here is an excellence not of the states one happens to be in at one time or another but of one's overall disposition for mental conduct. A species of rationality is a disposition to get things right within a certain domain. My focus in the remainder of the dissertation will be on practical rationality, or wisdom: a disposition to get things right in the domain of things to be done.

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[24] Broome attributes the point to A. W. Price.

[25] It must, of course, seem to him at least that he answers them rightfully.

# Chapter 2: The Virtuous Agent's Reasons

> [The thesis that the V person chooses V acts qua V acts] is very roughly right, but only if "qua V" is read *de re*. We say that the agent did the generous (e.g.) thing because it was the generous thing to do, and we understand what this means because we understand what it is about the situation and the action that makes this action in this situation something that would seem to a generous person the appropriate thing to do. It will follow from this that the philosophical understanding of the various virtues will require some, at least, of the understanding that comes from having the virtues: which is of course what Aristotle holds. (Williams 2006, 193)

## 2.1 Introduction

In her little book *Natural Goodness* (2001, henceforth NG), Philippa Foot locates the goodness of virtue in its place in human life. In particular, Foot argues that the goodness of living things (their goodness as the kind of thing they are, or their natural goodness) is measured by reference to their life form (the living and being characteristic of their species). So too it is, Foot suggests, with human beings. But the vital capacities of human beings include not just digestion, locomotion, and sight, but also reason, including practical reason. Thus, the characteristics of the excellent disposition of practical reason—that is, practical rationality—are determined by the role of practical reason in human life, just as the characteristics of excellent canine sight are determined by the role of sight in canine life. On such a conception, Foot thinks, practical rationality will be seen to consist in the possession and exercise of the virtues, which she takes to be habits of responding to certain classes of reasons for acting, in particular to those classes of reasons for

acting to which humans *need* to respond, if they are to attain their characteristic good. To be a practically rational human being is to be a *good* human being, and to act rationally is to act well.

Thus NG accords a central place in the ethics of virtue to human nature. It amounts to a defense of *neo-Aristotelian naturalism*, for Foot encapsulated in the thesis that:

(1) Moral judgments are judgments of the natural goodness and defect of human practical reason. (Cf. NG, 4)

This is supposed to be a claim about the logical character of what would familiarly be recognized as moral judgments—judgments concerning good and bad, right and wrong, and what ought to be done. It is meant to apply not just to the evaluation of particular actions, but also of emotional reactions, persons, and ways of life. So examples would include "You should go, since you promised," "She's a good person," and "What he did was wrong." In Foot's usage, moral judgments are distinguished from prudential judgments—but she ultimately argues that they are on a par, and she holds that prudential judgments too are judgments of the natural goodness and defect of practical reason (cf. NG, 11).

In this chapter, I brush up against one prominent objection to the role of human nature in Foot's account.[1] Namely, as many philosophers have read her, Foot takes the virtuous person's *knowledge* of human nature to provide her with her *reasons* for acting well. Call this view *derivationism*:

(2) The virtuous person's ultimate reasons for acting well are given in judgments of natural goodness of human beings (or in judgments about the human life form, to which such judgments of natural goodness are internally related).

[1] The role of human nature in Foot's neo-Aristotelian naturalism has raised other worries which I here ignore, for instance concerning the implications of modern science for Foot's accounts of life in general and of human nature specifically (cf. Andreou 2006; Woodcock 2006; Millum 2006; Lott 2012a).

Derivationism has seemed to philosophers to be problematic in various ways. For instance, arguably, there are few agents who possess such knowledge, which also seems to provide the wrong sort of reason to perform such virtuous actions as keeping a promise or helping a friend.

Is Foot a derivationist? I will suggest that Foot is at most ambivalent about derivationism. Certain features of NG might seem to require derivationism, and at points Foot seems to endorse it, so it is no surprise that commentators have taken her to do so. However, I want to argue, neither Foot's overall argument, nor her response to skepticism, nor her conception of virtue, requires derivationism. The source of the confusion, I suggest, is a failure on the part of Foot and her readers to distinguish between two candidate sorts of reasons. Once this distinction is made clearly, Foot's conception of virtue as a disposition to respond to certain classes of reasons presents an alternative to derivationism which has much to recommend it even outside its importance in giving a more defensible reading of Foot.

## 2.2 The Basic Argument

NG's pivotal moves draw from two sources: Michael Thompson's conception of life and Warren Quinn's argument against end-neutral conceptions of practical rationality (Thompson 1995; Quinn 1995).

Foot builds upon Michael Thompson's account of Aristotelian categoricals, or what he calls natural-historical judgments. Aristotelian categoricals are general propositions of such forms as "Ss are F", "The S is F", or "An S is F"—for instance, "Olive sea snakes have a venomous bite". Thompson argues that this form is distinctive in being irreducible to familiar forms of logical generality. Although natural-historical judgments have some sort of general character, they do not

assert that all, or even most, Ss are F.[2] They are rather about what is *typical for* or *characteristic of* Ss. As Foot puts it when she introduces Thompson's notion, natural-historical judgments say of Ss *how they live* (NG, 28). Such statements articulate what Thompson calls the "life form" of Ss. One who knows various Aristotelian categoricals about Ss thereby knows something of the "natural history" of Ss, the kind of thing narrated in nature documentaries (Thompson 1995, 280-291). A central theme of Thompson's treatment is that knowledge of the life form of Ss, of the sort expressed in natural-historical judgments, is presupposed even in thoughts about *individual* Ss, since I can only recognize a part of an organism *as* (say) an arm (rather than a leg, a tail, a deformity, or a symbiote) if I know that this is the sort of organism that *has* arms (Thompson 2004, 51-54).

Thompson's account of natural-historical judgments points toward a definition of natural goodness and defect. If Ss are F—if it is part of the nature of Ss to be F—then it is *naturally good* for individual Ss to be F, and in an S that is not F, this is a natural defect.[3] Hence a dog, but not a human, without four legs, is defective (Thompson 1995, 295-296; 2004, 54-56). Part of the interest of such an account is that it promises to go some way toward short-circuiting familiar skepticism about the reality, knowability, and normativity of nature. In establishing a connection between what sort of creature something is and what it is for it to act well or badly, it establishes a connection between what is the case and what ought to be the case, between fact and value. And the homey examples Thompson and Foot adduce are tailored to suggest that knowledge of a thing's nature is hardly rarified knowledge of a *je ne sais quoi*, but is rather eminently familiar and

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[2] He argues also against some variants of these readings, on which, for instance, 'Ss are F' means 'all Ss are F, other things being equal' or 'all Ss ought to be F'.

[3] There are generic sentences of such forms as "Ss are F', "The S is F" and "An S is F" that are not Aristotelian categoricals, such as: "Mosquitoes carry the West Nile virus", and these do not underwrite judgments of natural goodness and defect. On Thompson's view, a generic's being a natural-historical judgment will be a matter of its deeper logical form, of the inferential relations in which it stands—for instance, in the interplay between individual and kind described above.

attainable. The account reminds us of the utter facility we have, in speaking both of human and of non-human life, with the natural-historical grammatical form, and it makes immediately and readily available to us objective talk of goodness and defect—goodness and defect independent of the values and interests human beings happen to have.[4]

It is within this framework of natural goodness that Foot defends neo-Aristotelian naturalism. For—she plausibly (if not uncontroversially) claims—practical reason, the capacity to act for reasons, is just another power of human beings. This power can be, as it were, disposed in one way or another. In what I take to be a key passage (and to which I will later refer as *the key passage*), Foot suggests that to possess a virtue just is for one's capacity of practical reason to be disposed to respond to certain *sorts* of reasons:

> What … distinguishes a just person from one who is unjust? The fact that he keeps his contracts? That cannot be right, because circumstances may make it impossible for him to do so. Nor is it that he saves life rather than kills innocent people, for by blameless mishap he may kill rather than save. 'Of course,' someone will say at that point, 'it is the just person's intention, not what he actually brings about, that counts.' But why not say, then, that it is the distinguishing characteristic of the just that *for them certain considerations count as reasons for action, and as reasons of a given weight*? Will it not be the same with other virtues, as for instance for the virtues of charity, courage, and temperance? Those who possess these virtues possess them in so far as they recognize certain considerations (such as the fact of a promise, or of a neighbour's need) as powerful, and in many circumstances

[4] This is not to deny that there have been forceful objections to the epistemology of natural history in Foot and Thompson's sense. Cf. Woodcock (2006).

> compelling, reasons for action. They recognize the reasons, and act on them. (NG, 12, emphasis in original)

In this way Foot applies Warren Quinn's proposal. Quinn (1995) asked why, if practical rationality could be put to bad ends, it should be thought so important. I find that argument questionable.[5] Whatever one thinks of it, though, I take Quinn's *proposal* to be attractive simply on the assumption that practical reason is a vital power. If practical reason is indeed another power of human beings, then one need not suppose that the standards for its good exercise are given a priori, in advance; it is a mistake "to think that moral action has to be brought under a pre-established concept of practical rationality" (NG, 10). Instead, one can hold that practical rationality, the good state of practical reason, its virtue, is itself sensitive to certain ends and, indeed, that "there is no criterion for practical rationality that is not *derived from* that of goodness of the will" (NG, 11).

Foot says that the conceptual structure of natural goodness "remains intact" even as one turns to the richer and more complicated human good. Human beings are good when they are such as to attain their characteristic good well. This will mean possessing such virtues as there are, since virtues just are good states of practical reason. Foot thinks that the human virtues turn out to look rather like the traditional catalogue:

> [I]f we ask whether Geach was right to say that human beings need virtues as bees need stings …, the answer is surely that he was. Men and women need to be industrious and tenacious of purpose not only so as to be able to house, clothe, and feed themselves, but also to pursue human ends having to do with love and friendship. They need the ability to form family ties, friendships, and special relations with neighbours. They also need codes of conduct. And how could they

[5] Practical reason might be taken to be important even if it can be put to bad ends, just as, say, medical knowledge is important even though it can be put to bad ends.

> have all these things without virtues such as loyalty, fairness, kindness, and in certain circumstances obedience? (NG, 44-45)

Those who act well, from the virtues, are naturally good in respect of their capacity of practical reason, while those who act badly, out of accordance with the virtues, are bad in respect of that capacity. They are practically irrational, and this is a kind of natural defect. This is the thesis of neo-Aristotelian naturalism.

I take what I have just sketched to be, in outline, Foot's argument that acting well requires acting in accordance with the virtues and that it is practically rational to act well. Notice, however, that derivationism plays no role in it. Virtue is conceived as the disposition to act for certain kinds of reason; the reasons which characterize virtue are those on which human beings need to be disposed to act, if they are to achieve their characteristic good. The reasons on which they act are, for instance, "I promised her I'd be there" and "He could use my help"—not "Human beings keep promises" or "It is good for human beings to keep promises" or "Human beings ought to keep promises" or "Human beings need to keep promises because otherwise they could not achieve a great deal of human good" (cp. Anscombe 1969, 73-75; NG, 15). All of these latter claims are, on my non-derivationist reading of Foot, *true*, but they are not among the virtuous agent's *reasons* for keeping a promise.

### 2.3 The Derivationist Alternative

Nevertheless, the reading of Foot as a derivationist predates even the publication of NG, beginning with John McDowell's celebrated "Two Sorts of Naturalism." McDowell invites us to imagine that a wolf acquires the capacity for practical reason (2001b, 169-173). Since reason is (McDowell says) a capacity for reflection and criticism, this acquisition would enable the wolf to call into

question the normative authority of such truths of wolf nature as that wolves hunt cooperatively and share their spoils with the rest of the pack. So McDowell evidently thinks that, for Foot, truths of such form have an essential role in the agent's deliberation, such that their normative authority would be undermined by their being questioned. That is, she is a derivationist.[6]

Now, McDowell's paper is—appropriately, since it was published before NG—ambivalent about ascribing the view it criticizes to Foot herself. It is plausible to suppose that its target was simply one possible way of developing and applying to ethics the account one finds in Michael Thompson's "The Representation of Life." Whatever the case may be, readers of Foot after NG have tended to see McDowell's wolf as posing an urgent challenge to Foot's account, and they have often read her as a derivationist. To take some especially explicit examples:

> The virtuous person [for Foot] is one who makes true judgments about what is choiceworthy for human beings…, and these judgments are grounded in her recognition of the true facts about human needs and goods. (Frey 2018, 60)

> [F]or Foot, *theoretical* knowledge of human nature is supposed to play the role of a major premise in practical reasoning. (Ometto 2023, 136)

Not all readings of Foot ascribe derivationism to her so baldly. Thompson himself has developed on Foot's behalf a response to McDowell's example of the rational wolf (2004; 2022). He agrees that it would be problematic to give a role to *empirical* knowledge of human nature in an account of the reasons the virtuous agent acts on, but he argues that there remains space for holding that the virtuous person acts from *non-empirical*, *a priori* knowledge of the human life form. Lest one doubt that a priori knowledge of the human life form is possible, Thompson invites us to consider the activity of thinking. Thinking is (Thompson claims) a vital activity, and it is also

[6] For an interpretation of the "challenge from reason" posed by McDowell's rational wolf which also takes Foot to be a derivationist, cf. Petrucelli (2020, 301-305).

an activity in which the subject self-consciously represents herself *as* thinking. This self-conscious representation draws on a conception of a life form in just the way that all representation of vital activity draws on a conception of a life form. So, simply in thinking, one must have some knowledge of the human form. In this sense, as Thompson puts it, self-consciousness is a kind of form-consciousness (2004, 66-68). His proposal is that there may be also, and similarly, a kind of a priori *practical* knowledge of the human life form (2004, 72; 2022, 74-79). The idea then would be that, since practical knowledge is "the cause of what it understands," the rational wolf's skeptical question cannot get any purchase, cannot find any gap.

This is, no doubt, an interesting proposal, and it has been an influential one—it has been taken up, in different ways, by readers of Foot such as Micah Lott (2012b; 2014), John Hacker-Wright (2013; 2021), and Matthias Haase (2018). As I read them, authors vary in how explicitly they avoid derivationism (cp. Thompson 2022, 76-77; Hacker-Wright 2013, 85). Often, knowledge of human form is said to be somehow "implicit" in the virtuous agent's perspective. There is, I think, something right about that, to which I will come later, but my immediate interest is that this elaborate reply to McDowell does not begin by questioning his very fundamental assumption that Foot is a derivationist. As will emerge below, I take questioning this assumption to be essential to understanding how Foot herself means to answer the skeptic, whose question is the same as the rational wolf's.

Other Foot-adjacent philosophers are less invested in the Thompsonian framing but likewise think that Foot goes awry in holding that knowledge of human nature could be among one's reasons for acting well. Rosalind Hursthouse was one of the earliest authors to develop an account of virtue indebted to Foot but responsive to McDowell's objection (Hursthouse 2001, 165-166). Other recent examples include Frey (2018) and Müller (2018), who draw from Thomas

Aquinas's account of synderesis for the idea that an immediate and distinctively practical recognition of human goods is the source of reasons for action.

My immediate focus is not the merits of these various alternatives but rather the reading of Foot to which they are each responsive. Since McDowell's "Two Sorts of Naturalism," derivationism has been the standard reading of Foot's late work.[7] This is not, I think, an accident. Notwithstanding the non-derivationist sketch of NG I gave in Section 2.2, certain aims of and considerations within NG seem to support derivationism; I consider these in Section 2.5. Before that, in the next section, I consider some points where Foot simply seems to affirm derivationism explicitly. My suggestion will be that we need to understand these moments in terms of a distinction which is present in the text yet which Foot and her readers fail to draw explicitly.

## 2.4 Situational Reasons and Evaluations

Foot writes:

> [A] human being can and should understand that, and why, there is reason for, say, keeping a promise or behaving fairly. This last may seem a tall order, but this human understanding is not anything hard to come by. We all know enough to say, 'How could we get on without justice?', 'Where would we be if no one helped anyone else?', or 'How could we manage if there were no way of making decisions for us all?' (NG, 12)

These rhetorical questions, which Foot envisions competent agents as raising, are meant to call attention to anthropological considerations similar to those Anscombe (1969) insists upon in her account of promising. Human beings *need* to be just toward one another, to cooperate with each

[7] Though a few authors demur (Thompson 2007; Setiya 2007, 71; Hlobil and Nieswandt 2019).

other, and to coordinate with one another, or else they could not attain many of their goals. A great deal of human good depends on virtuous conduct, or some approximation to it. (For further discussion of Anscombe's account of promising, see Section 3.2.)

Now, one could of course hold that "a human being can and should understand that, and why, there is a reason"—say, the fact that *p*—for some virtuous conduct, without holding that *p* should be *her* reason for performing that virtuous conduct. The place of and need for virtuous conduct in human life might just be the sort of thing of which one should be aware, even if it is not what *motivates* one to virtuous conduct. This is what Hlobil and Nieswandt, in defending a reading of Foot similar to mine, say about this passage (2019, 1511-1512).

Not all of Foot's remarks are susceptible of this kind of reading. For instance, she writes: "One who is the subject of a true moral judgement does not always do what it says he should do, since he may not recognize its truth, *and may not act on it even if he does*" (NG, 18, emphasis added). Here, the moral judgment, which is a judgment of natural goodness, is said to be the sort of thing which agents act on (or are criticizable for failing to act on). If moral judgments are judgments of natural goodness and defect, then Foot appears to affirm derivationism here.

I will consider how we should think about a remark like this in Section 2.6. For now, I want to draw a distinction that will help clarify this material. When Foot refers to the reasons on which a virtuous agent acts, she does not distinguish considerations of two sorts, which I will identify by lists of examples. *Situational reasons* include such considerations as that

(i) I promised to φ;

(ii) She needs X;

(iii) X is his;

(iv) φ-ing might damage my health.

Situational reasons are simply the kind at which Foot gestured in the key passage. They are particular facts about the world, the disposition to recognize and respond to certain classes of which characterizes one as possessing one or another virtue. She gave (i) as an example of a reason associated with justice.

The class of what I will call *evaluations* consists of such considerations as that

(v) There is a reason for me to keep my promise;

(vi) It is good, when possible, to provide others with what they need;

(vii) I ought to respect other people's property;

(viii) It is reasonable to avoid what may damage one's health.

I take it that the label 'evaluations' for these judgments is natural; they each employ evaluative or 'normative' terminology. Foot herself calls considerations such as these evaluations of the human will. For Foot, evaluations all bear some immediate inferential relation to natural-historical judgments, by reference to which the evaluation of human beings as good or bad, non-defective or defective, is made. The 'moral judgments' referred to in (1) are all evaluations.

I will employ this distinction between situational reasons and evaluations in arguing that we need not read Foot as a derivationist.

## 2.5 For and Against a Derivationist Foot

Why has Foot been read as a derivationist? I will consider three aspects of NG which seem to support to a derivationist reading. First, derivationism can seem to follow from a requirement Foot places on any account of practical reason and morality: what she calls Hume's practicality requirement. Second, Foot aspires in NG to provide a response to the moral skeptic, and it might be thought that she does so by affirming derivationism. Finally, and I think most fundamentally,

Foot's inclusion of evaluations among the virtuous agent's reasons seems to commit her to derivationism. I will consider these potential grounds for derivationism in turn.

(a) Foot presents her account as an alternative to the various forms of subjectivism that had been entertained in the latter half of the twentieth century, and while she believes that such forms of subjectivism were misguided, she also holds that they aimed at addressing a genuine requirement on any account of morality and rationality:

> Their theories were devised to take account of something that really is a feature of moral judgement: the 'action-guiding' character of morality, which Hume had insisted on and taken as the foundation of his moral philosophy. Morality, Hume has said, is necessarily practical, serving to produce and prevent action, and I shall call this 'Hume's practicality requirement'. Nor am I denying that his demand must be met. My contention is rather that the theories I am attacking tried to meet it in the wrong way. (NG, 9)

We have, then, the following requirement:

(3) Morality is practical; it is action-guiding; it serves to produce and prevent action.

(3) appears to undergird derivationism because according to neo-Aristotelian naturalism, moral judgments are judgments of natural goodness and defect. If moral judgments are practical in the sense *action-guiding*, this seems to mean that they are among one's (or the virtuous agent's) reasons for acting.[8]

But it is important to appreciate that Foot seeks to make neo-Aristotelian naturalism serviceable by way of a *reorientation* of our thinking about practical reason and practical rationality. The lesson Foot says she draws from Warren Quinn is that it is a mistake "to think that

[8] Frey (2018, 58ff) cites Hume's practicality requirement in ascribing derivationism to Foot.

moral action has to be brought under a pre-established concept of practical rationality" (NG, 10). She accepts (3), but as she says, "Hume's demand is met by the (most un-Humean) thought that acting morally is part of practical rationality" (NG, 9). We can see what she has in mind by this proposal in light of the sketch of the book's argument that I gave in Section 2.2. To be practically rational just is to be virtuous, and a virtuous agent—so the key passage says—is one who recognizes and responds to the appropriate class of *situational* reasons. Accordingly, it would not be arbitrary to call those reasons moral reasons.[9] *That* is how "acting morally is part of practical rationality," so it is also how, for Foot, "morality" is action-guiding.

To put the point differently, (3) is ambiguous. To say that "morality" is action-guiding might mean that the situational reasons which characterize the virtues are, or that moral evaluations are. We should not assume that Foot means to take (3) in the latter manner, just because her subjectivist opponents do, for she says they tried to meet Hume's practicality requirement in the wrong way.[10] To decide what Foot has in mind, we need to attend to how her arguments actually function. When we do, we see that it is not the case that morality is action-guiding because judgments of natural goodness exert a kind of force on just anybody, but rather it is action-guiding because the situational reasons which characterize the virtues are the reasons the virtuous agent is disposed to act on.[11]

(b) Foot takes up Gary Watson's question of whether moral philosophy "can establish an intelligible connection between [the appraisal of a gangster as a bad human being] and what we have reason to do as individuals" (Watson 1997, 67, quoted in NG, 53). She wants, that is, to refute

[9] For Foot, they will also include considerations of prudence (cf. NG, 11, 59).
[10] Contrast Haase (2018, 87).
[11] Nieswandt (2023) argues that no defensible practicality requirement on morality has been given, by any philosopher. I take her to mean: no practicality requirement on moral judgments. Foot's practicality requirement, on my reading, functions differently in her book.

the skeptic, who asks "why he should do that which the good person must do" (NG, 64). It might seem that derivationism is her way of answering this skeptic, just as it has seemed to many that derivationism would be her way of responding to McDowell's rational wolf, whose question is, after all, the skeptic's.

Anselm Müller addresses the adequacy of Foot's response to the skeptic explicitly. He doubts whether Foot has succeeded in answering the skeptic who "denies that he has been given any reason *to do* what he has been given reason to *believe he ought to do*" (2018, 173). The response that should be made here parallels that which I just made concerning Hume's practicality requirement. Just as Foot does not mean to meet Hume's practicality requirement by showing that judgments of natural goodness (concerning what human beings "ought to do") exert a kind of normative force on just anybody who believes them, Foot does not mean to answer the skeptic by showing that he will be persuaded to act well once he has been given an account of human nature. Hume's practicality requirement is met in the "most un-Humean" way of arguing that the practically rational agent just is a virtuous agent—an agent who acts on certain kinds of situational reasons. That is how morality is "practical" and how in failing to act well one is failing to respond to the reasons which there are. Moral reasons are reasons for the skeptic too, and he is practically irrational for failing to act on them. This means that the skeptic, if he is sincere (if he is really a gangster), is a bad person, and argument may well not help him. Indeed, Foot writes: "In spite of recognizing the force of Hume's 'practicality requirement', we must allow for ignorance, for weakness of will, and also for the phenomenon of shamelessness" (NG, 19). So a connection *has* been established between the appraisal of a gangster as a bad human being and what we have reason to do as individuals. But the connection is not one of the appraisal's being one's (or the

gangster's) *reason* for not being a gangster. The connection is that, if the appraisal is correct, then we have reasons for doing, *de re*, the things a good human being does.

This reading makes sense of the character of Foot's response to the skeptic. Immediately before providing her response, Foot distinguishes between

(A) Reasons for acting, which we may call practical reasons.

(B) Reasons for believing, which we may call evidential or demonstrative reasons. (NG, 63)

Then she says:

> As philosophers, and therefore theoreticians, our job is of course to *give* the second type of reason, arguing for or against the truth of a variety of propositions that seem to involve special problems—like those, for instance, about personal identity or the existence of an external world. But among the many 'philosophical' subjects we find that of the nature of practical reasons, and in this special case we shall have to give reasons of type B for theses about reasons of type A. … When Gary Watson issued the challenge described … above, he was asking a question that belongs here …. (NG, 64)

This accounts for the flat-footedness of Foot's reply to the skeptic, which (depending on how his challenge is to be understood) gestures backward to her treatment of the nature of natural goodness or to her account of "the conceptual connection between acting well and acting rationally" (NG, 64-65). In neither case does she take herself to be providing a skeptic with what she calls practical reasons, appreciation of which would *get* him to act well:

> No doubt what our sceptic (especially if he be a gangster) really means to insist is that we have not been able, in anything we have said, to touch his desires; and if he

> is a dangerous person that may be what we shall most care about. But the fact that we might hunt around for something that has a chance of affecting his actions should not be taken as giving any support to a philosophy that takes practical reasons to encompass only reasons of that kind.

The practical reason why the gangster should keep his promise is *the fact that he made it*, and if he were a good person, that would be enough for him. The consideration of the place of promising in human life which Foot undertakes in her book is, by contrast, an avowedly theoretical matter. It is not meant to be the sort of thing one can hand to a non-virtuous agent to get him to act well.[12]

(c) While the key passage refers only to situational reasons, it is also true, as we saw in the previous section, that Foot often treats evaluations as reasons for action. Such statements look to provide perhaps the fundamental ground for ascribing derivationism to Foot. For they seem simply to say that moral judgments, which are (according to neo-Aristotelian naturalism) judgments of natural goodness and defect, are reasons for action.

But *why* does Foot treat evaluations as reasons for acting? With the distinction between situational reasons and evaluations in hand, we will be required to acknowledge that these are distinct claims:

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[12] Lott (2014, 769) takes Foot to miss a possible interpretation of the skeptic's challenge, on which it would be put: "Given your view that moral goodness is natural goodness, you can hold that morality has rational authority only if we have reason to do what our form dictates for us." On my reading, this does not follow. Morality's having rational authority, morality's being practical, just is the fact that we have reason to do (it is practically rational to do) those things which characterize the virtues. It does not require that we have a reason, *de dicto*, to do what our form dictates for us, to be a good human being.

Parish (2020, 315) recognizes the relevance of Foot's conception of virtue, adumbrated in the key passage, to her own strategy to answering the skeptic. But from the fact that "she elsewhere analyzes [the categories of facts to which virtuous agents need to respond] in terms of natural goodness," he infers that, for Foot, "it is constitutive of human practical rationality to see ethical judgments … as reason-giving." This also doesn't follow on my reading of Foot, because the point of those analyses is not to capture the content of the virtuous agent's reasons; it is to capture the role in human life of the disposition to act for such reasons.

(4) A virtue is (*inter alia*) a disposition to be motivated by a certain class of situational reasons.

(5) A virtue is (*inter alia*) a disposition to be motivated by a certain class of evaluations.

In the key passage, Foot only claimed (4) to be true. Given (4), we still need an argument for the truth of (5). In the next section, I will be suggesting that (5) is not true, or at any rate needs qualification. Right now, I will consider a reading on which Foot does provide a ground for inferring (5).

Namely, Foot endorses what I call the qua-good requirement. This requirement on an account of practical reason encapsulates Foot's idea of what it is that distinguishes human action from that of non-human animals. For non-human animals too may be said, in a sense, to act for reasons. Foot approvingly cites Aquinas's idea that "while animals go for the good (thing) *that they see*, human beings go for *what they see as good*: food, for example, being the good thing that animals see and go for and that human beings are able to see as good" (NG, 56). Hence:

(6) Humans pursue goods qua good.

There are, I take it, a couple ways in which (6) might be taken to support (5). One such way might begin from the question: what *is* it to see a good *as* good? A natural answer would be that at least part of seeing a good as good is *judging* the good *to be* good; one judges, of some action φ-ing, that φ-ing is good (or that one should φ, or that there is reason for one to φ). This would be, for Foot, a judgment of natural goodness. Accordingly, on this reading of (6), it seems that judgments of natural goodness are among one's reasons when one pursues the good qua good.

This is not exactly how Foot understands (6). But one might think that Foot's elucidation of (6) comes to more or less the same. In glossing the qua-good requirement, Foot approximates McDowell's idea, mentioned above, that reason is essentially reflective or critical. It is a power

which enables a subject to "step back" from apparent reasons. Of any candidate reason, it can sensibly be asked whether it is a reason and, if so, why:

> Quite early on, a child learns that a 'should' needs a ground, unlike an order, which may simply be reiterated or backed up by a threat.
>
> … A human being a rational animal will ask 'Why *should* I do that?', particularly if told that he should do something distasteful that seems to be for the advantage of others rather than himself. And a philosopher, even if *in propria persona* a respectable person inclined to keep his promises and pay his debts, is honour bound to carry such questioning to the limit. (NG, 56-57)

A mature human agent realizes, Foot says, that a 'should' needs a reason. And one should act as morality requires. So the virtuous agent should be prepared to say why she should do as morality requires. If this questioning is carried "to the limit," presumably it must terminate in a judgment of natural goodness and then in a natural-historical judgment, a piece of knowledge about human nature; it might be asked why, or how one knows that, such a thing is true, but if one grants Foot's account of life, then there is no problem in principle about answering such a question.

Even in this quotation, however, there is a contrast between how a "respectable person" thinks about her reasons to act as virtue requires and what it is incumbent upon a philosopher to consider. Foot, of course, would not suppose that every person is bound to question the requirements of morality "to the limit." Not everyone is required to *be* a moral philosopher.

We should recall that the point of the qua-good requirement is to distinguish human from animal acting for reasons. And when we see how it does so, we see that it does not require derivationism. I quote Foot at length on what it is for a human being to see a good as good:

> [S]peech is crucial here in marking the difference between animals and humans. We know what an animal is going after only by what it does, whereas a growing child will be able to tell us. Moreover, the child learns a language that includes linguistic forms that have no counterpart even in the most intricate 'language of the beasts'. A child gradually comes to use words not only to get what it wants but also to speak about what it is going to do; and comes to understand and use the locutions by which choices are debated and actions explained, justified, and recommended. It is the use of such parts of our language, appearing for the most part in regular ways in the web of actions, that allows us to say, without appealing to a *hidden* mental 'realm', that ends and means may be 'in our minds'. It makes sense to ask what someone *thought* about the pros and cons of a particular choice because we can ask him and be given an answer. And he himself can go through arguments that have as a conclusion 'so that is what I shall do'. When we say that human beings are able to choose *on a rational ground* as no animal can, it is because human action belongs in such surroundings, and so, ultimately, because humans use language not matched by anything in animal life. (NG, 55)

This is a kind of Wittgensteinian gloss on the Thomistic principle that humans distinctively pursue goods qua good. Humans do not simply pursue ends, but they do so intelligently and articulately. Unlike animals, they can explain, justify, and recommend actions, and this is an essential part of the human capacity of practical reason. It is this that formally distinguishes human from animal action. The account thus remains neutral concerning the *sort* of reasons agents communicate and act upon. So Foot's endorsement of (6) does not require that those reasons be evaluations. It does not support derivationism.

This is fortunate, for derivationism is too demanding in its understanding of the qua-good requirement (cf. Nieswandt 2023). The idea that human beings are characteristically articulate about their reasons does not mean that they are always ready and able to answer the question of why their reason for acting is what it is—even, or perhaps especially, if they are virtuous (cp. Williams 1981a, 18). There should be room in Foot's account for the idea that reasons "come to an end somewhere," as Wittgenstein famously says of explanations (1958, §1). This is not a *limitation* on what the virtuous agent knows. Her reasons do not *merely* to come to an end somewhere; they come to an end in a situational reason because such is the ultimate ground for action done virtuously. "The just person *aims* at keeping promises, paying what is owed, and defending those whose rights are being violated, so far as such actions are required by the virtue of justice" (NG, 12).

On Foot's view, there is a further philosophical question that can be raised, concerning why some situational consideration *is* a reason for action. But the answer to this question is not itself a reason for action within the same order of reasons as the situational reason. It is appropriate that, if queried, many virtuous people will simply reject the question of why they are keeping their promises or helping their friends, if they don't simply provide some uninformative stock answer ("I couldn't live with myself if I didn't") (cp. Lott 2015, 84-85). In doing so, they will still be manifesting their difference from the animals.

## 2.6 The Normativity of Evaluations

Still, one might think that there is something importantly right about treating evaluations as reasons for action. It is often thought to be among the principal tasks of practical philosophy to capture

how evaluations are normative, or reason-giving.[13] This is one way of taking what Christine Korsgaard says here:

> [E]thical standards are *normative*. They do not merely *describe* a way in which we in fact regulate our conduct. They make *claims* on us; they command, oblige, recommend, or guide. Or at least, when we invoke them, we make claims on one another. (1996, 8)

The obliging character of certain evaluations might seem to disappear on my reading of Foot, and that, it might be said, surely misses something of the phenomenology of practical thought, as well as of advice.

On the contrary, I want to say that it is precisely wrong to treat evaluations as reasons for action. The obliging character of evaluations is not best captured by enlisting them as reasons. This is especially clear in the case of those evaluations which are themselves reasons statements. My reason for keeping my promise is *not* that I have reason to keep my promise; that is hardly intelligible. But is it much different to propose that my reason for keeping my promise is that I ought to or that I should or that it would be reasonable to?[14] My reason for keeping my promise is the promise itself which I made; that reason is *why* I have a reason to keep it, and also why I ought to, and why I should, and why it would be reasonable.

This objection to treating evaluations as themselves normative reflects the phenomenology of virtuous motivation. The virtuous person does not need to be told that she ought to keep her promise; rather: her promise is already a reason for performance, the only one she needs. Agents,

[13] There are two senses of 'normative'. What is normative may provide a standard by which things are to be measured or may itself provide a guide for action. For this distinction, cf. Railton (1999) and Thomson (2008); for its application to the debate over neo-Aristotelian naturalism, cf. Petrucelli (2020, 302-304) and Parish (2020, 317-319). In what follows, I refer to normativity in the latter sense.

[14] Compare, as Hlobil and Nieswandt (2019) do, the theoretical case: my reason for believing that *p* is, say, *q*, not that I ought to believe *p* or that it would be reasonable to.

indeed, are not primarily in the business of *evaluating* their own actions; they are rather thinking about the world and the kind of response it calls for (cf. Ford 2017). "You ought to do what you promised" is the sort of consideration typically addressed precisely to someone who is *not* inclined to do what she promised. And addressed to such a person, it may well not produce any action.

This is not to say that evaluations have no role to play in the thought of a virtuous agent. Consider the following passage of Foot's:

> 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 is a reason for φ-ing?' … Take, for instance, the consideration that a certain man is my father, as it might stand as evidence for the proposition that there is a reason for me to look after him in old age. (NG, 58)[15]

Now, Foot here is envisioning that a 'should'-statement like "I should help this man in his old age" "gives a reason" for my helping him. What is surely right about that is that such a 'should'-statement gives a reason (in the sense that and to the extent that we want to say that) *only derivatively* from some situational consideration, such as that the man is my father.

In any case, Foot goes on in passing here to make an interesting remark, which I wish to highlight. The situational consideration that a certain man is my father, she says, *stands as evidence for* the evaluative proposition that there is a reason for me to look after him in his old age. This is, I want to say, a way in which the concept of a reason does figure into the deliberative perspective; it is a case where an evaluative reasons statement is made on the strength of a pertinent situational consideration.

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[15] Foot's topic in the broader passage is the defeasibility of reasons, hence her emphasized 'a'. In discussing her example, I set aside the fact that, as Foot develops it, the reason in question is defeated by the fact that the father is a scoundrel.

It makes sense that the concept of a reason can figure into the deliberative perspective in such a way. If I can, as it were, infer the *action* of helping my father in his old age from the fact that he is my father, then presumably I can also infer *that there is a reason* for me to help him in his old age.

What shall we say is going on here? It seems to me that we should say this: a subject's use of a statement such as that *p* is a reason to φ registers the subject's acceptance of a pattern of inference of which "*p*; therefore I'll φ" is an instance. A subject draws on her recognition of the soundness of such a pattern in reflectively acknowledging that *p* is a reason to φ. The thought that *p* is a reason to φ is not independent of the recognition that the corresponding pattern of inference is sound.

To accept a pattern of inference cannot simply be to make another judgment.[16] The judgment that *p* is a reason to φ, after all, *states* the soundness of the corresponding inference and does not explain it. Rather, to accept a pattern of inference is, in the first and most basic instance, to practice it—to φ on the basis that *p*, say. One might also accept the pattern in virtue of *p*'s playing some other role in one's thought—for instance, if one would φ on the basis of *p*, but for the fact that *q* (in other words, one treats the fact that *p* as relevant to the question whether to φ).

That we can make claims about reasons from the deliberative perspective, on the strength of pertinent situational considerations, in the way Foot's example illustrates, seems beyond dispute. The notion of a practical reason (which we saw Foot deploy above in responding to Watson) is one that human agents get a hold of and deploy in their own thought and talk.[17] The use

[16] One might take this to be the lesson that should be extracted from Lewis Carroll's (1895) parable of Achilles and the tortoise.
[17] As indeed she seems to hold (NG, 57-59).

of a practical-reasons statement is licensed not by empirical investigation but by the recognition of a situational reason and one's acceptance of a corresponding pattern of inference.

In making this point, there is nothing special about the notion of a reason in comparison with other evaluative notions. By drawing upon our own inclinations to practice certain patterns of inference, we can make judgments from the deliberative perspective concerning what is reasonable, just, or courageous, what we ought to do, and so on—if these concepts are part of our vocabulary—though the details of the appropriate use of each concept will, of course, vary.[18] Williams makes a parallel point about one sense of 'ought':

> Whatever other *oughts* there may be, we can recognise the use of the expression in the conclusion of deliberation: 'This is what I ought to do' expresses the agent's recognition of the course of action appropriate, all things considered, to the reasons, motives, and constraints that he sees as bearing on the situation. (1981b, 124)

The idea then is that one important use of evaluative expressions is to summarize and abbreviate the results of deliberation and the role of situational reasons within it. When my considered response to a situation is to φ, I may also say that I ought to φ. Let us say that, in this way, some evaluations are *deliberatively available*.

What is the point of this use of evaluative language? It is not to provide a guide to action that is independent of or additional to the situational reasons one recognizes. Those already suffice

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[18] Lott (2015) covers similar ground as I do here but arrives at conclusions that differ in various respects. He writes, "The virtue of justice is not *merely* taking things like 'because I promised' or 'it belongs to him' as reasons for action. Rather the motivational and evaluative outlook of the just person includes being 'alive' to the goods, or values, at the heart of justice" (2015, 88). These goods at the heart of justice include such things as respect for persons, which Lott says the virtuous person might cite in answer to the question of why she acts well in keeping promises (2015, 84-85).

In my view, the recognition of such values is of a piece with one's disposition to respond to the situational reasons that characterize justice. Consider a parallel point. Anscombe writes that in "You can't do that, it's N's to do" "[w]e have a very special use of the name of a person, or a very special way of relating something to a person, which explains (is not explained by) the general term 'right'" (1981b, 142). Likewise, I think, with considerations such as 'because I promised' and general terms such as 'respect'.

for a determination of what is the appropriate thing to do and for the doing of it. Rather, as I have just said, deliberatively achieved evaluations summarize and abbreviate the tendency of one's consideration of the reasons available to the agent—or, importantly, of the reasons available to someone else. To the extent that we can occupy others' perspectives, we will be able to formulate and address to them evaluations which will have the force of advice. To say to someone who is in doubt over, say, whether to attend his sibling's performance or go out with a friend, "You ought to go to the performance," is, as it were, to add: "After all, *you promised*" or "He's your *brother*." Such utterances gesture toward situational reasons which they claim to exist, reasons which the advisee, even if not fully virtuous, may be inclined to recognize and treat as reasons, if only they were called to his attention (perhaps: if only he is denied the opportunity to ignore them). It is still the situational reasons which are one's reasons for acting, not the evaluations. We might put this point by saying that the normativity of practical-reasons statements and of evaluations generally is transparent to the normativity of situational reasons, which is explained through the motivations of the virtuous agent.[19] This strikes me as an attractive explanation of the normativity of evaluations.

In any case, the mistake of including evaluations among the virtuous agent's reasons is an understandable one, for when the situational reasons speak in favor of a particular kind of response, the articulate agent will be able to say so in evaluative terms. The relevant evaluation "gives a reason" for the agent's response, but not in the same sense in which a situational reason does.

Evaluations do not have a force that is independent of that of the situational reasons of which the agent is aware, but nevertheless there is point to saying that an agent φ-ed because it

[19] 'Generally', because someone might urge upon me a practical-reasons statement "there is reason for you to φ" without making me aware of what that reason is. For instance, "there is a reason for you to avoid that topic around her." If I trust the person, I may φ without awareness of the actual situational reason. I take this to be a very derivative case, albeit one that is made possible by the concept of a practical reason.

was reasonable or refrained from φ-ing because it would have been wrong. This is to say that there were some situational reasons which grounded the agent's φ-ing or not φ-ing.[20]

Now, when I introduced the class of evaluations, I noted that for Foot they are internally related to natural-historical judgments. That is a fundamental commitment of neo-Aristotelian naturalism. Can this be maintained, in the case of evaluations that are deliberatively available? I treat this question in the next chapter. It seems to me that there *is* a tension between the deliberative availability of evaluations and Foot's particular conception of natural-historical judgments. For, as I will illustrate in Section 3.2, Foot ultimately holds that natural-historical judgments bear an internal relation to facts about what human beings *need*. In Section 3.3, I will articulate a doubt whether an agent could learn *such* facts on the strength of the consideration of pertinent situational reasons. But I take this worry to be a problem not for neo-Aristotelian naturalism as much as it is for Foot's way of working it out. Foot's commitment to a need-based conception of natural-historical judgments is a consequence of what I take to be an ill-advised departure from Thompson's conception of life (NG, 30-31). On a different, more Thompsonian conception of the teleology of life, which I spell out in Section 3.7, one may instead conclude that one learns human natural history through the experience of virtuous motivation.

## 2.7 Conducting Oneself, Again

Let us take stock. I have said that Foot's conception of virtue and of practical rationality is an attractive one. Some of the reasons for this have already been mentioned in the course of the argument above. It seems, for instance, to be no more demanding than is realistic upon the

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[20] In these examples, the speaker endorses the reasonableness of the agent's response. One can cancel that endorsement by saying, e.g., that she φ-ed because she *thought* it was reasonable.

cognition of ordinary virtuous agents. It captures the fact that a just individual, though not especially articulate concerning the theoretical foundations of justice, may act justly all the same. But it also accommodates nicely the role of practical rationality in conducting oneself well, which I introduced in Section 1.7. In this section, I take note of a couple relevant results, concerning the extensibility of Foot's account to aspects of virtue that are not so easily accommodated by derivationism.

(a) Not only will the temperate, say, accord appropriate weight to prospective pleasures, but in many cases they will not notice them at all. Similarly, a just person does not notice the various ways in which he might advance his own interests by snubbing others. It does not even occur to him to simply *steal* what he wants or needs, and he would be defective as an agent if it did. The wise person will generally be one who habitually grasps plausible avenues of thought in deliberation, without considering many possible but unfruitful ones.

What these examples make evident is that virtue includes not just patterns of response *to* reasons that are noticed but patterns of noticing. To possess a virtue is be disposed to notice, and not to notice, various sorts of considerations. This point is not naturally accommodated on a derivationist account of virtuous agency. For while there is a shred of plausibility in taking virtuous *actions* to be conclusions from considerations about human nature, what one *omits even to consider* cannot be the conclusion of anything.

This aspect of virtue is, it is true, not explicitly thematized by Foot. But it seems to be required by the key passage's characterization of a virtue as a disposition to *respond* to certain sorts of reasons. Here is the relevant bit again:

> Those who possess these virtues possess them in so far as they recognize certain considerations (such as the fact of a promise, or of a neighbour's need) as powerful,

> and in many circumstances compelling, reasons for action. They recognize the reasons, and act on them.

Those reasons that are not noticed cannot be responded to. We need only add to Foot's account that virtue is shown also in what is not recognized.

This helps, I think, to account for why it is worth talking about virtue at all. Korsgaard objects to the key passage in this way:

> One might suppose that in granting that what makes a person "just" is the nature of the reasons on which he acts and the weight he assigns to them, [Foot] is granting that what makes an agent well-functioning is his principles. To say that someone is "just" is simply to say that he has adopted a certain kind of principle: in her words he has "accepted a certain group of considerations as reasons for action." But then why does she want to talk about the virtues? If to say that someone has a virtue is just to give a third-personal name to the fact that he acts on certain principles, surely the principles are what moral philosophy should be concerned with. (2019, 7)

It is true that the fact that φ-ing would be just or temperate or courageous is not (usually) among the virtuous agent's reasons for doing it. These judgments largely have their home in third-personal evaluation; what the agent is thinking about is the world response to which is necessary. But this does not mean that the notion of virtue is otiose. A person is not said to be virtuous just because it is her principle to take the addressable needs of others as reasons for action, for she will only do so if she is generally the sort of person who notices the addressable needs of others. In one way of taking the expression, then, *having the right principles* is not sufficient for conducting oneself well.

(b) I wish to mention—all too briefly—the relationship between virtue and emotion, a topic upon which Foot hardly touches. While emotions often do prompt action, they are also felt and expressed in many other ways. Someone, for instance, cuts me off on the highway, and I feel a surge of anger; or I realize I have forgotten to keep a commitment, and I feel a pang of guilt. Quite plausibly, the possession of virtues is not just a matter of being disposed to act in certain characteristic ways but of being disposed to *feel* in certain characteristic ways. The mild person does not feel anger unless the situation really warrants it, and it will be partly characteristic of the just person that she feels regret upon recognizing her occasional failure to give to others what she owes them.

It is not clear that derivationism can do justice to the relationship between virtue and emotion. It will be possible to ascribe rationales to subjects for their emotions; we will be able to say, for instance, that I am angry because someone cut me off and I am in a rush. But in the case of emotion, it is especially implausible that these rationales will include truths about human nature or evaluations that have such truths among their truth conditions. Derivationism could, of course, grant this point, but then it will give an implausibly disunified account of the reasons on which virtuous agents act and feel, which will—further—be in some tension with the fact that human beings can act *from* emotion.

I conclude, then, that there are some important advantages to rejecting derivationism and the conception of practical rationality which it would underwrite.

# Chapter 3: The Teleology of Life

> [J]ust as *man* has so many teeth, which is certainly not the average number of teeth men have, but is the number of teeth for the species, so perhaps the species *man*, regarded not just biologically, but from the point of view of the activity of thought and choice in regard to the various departments of life—powers and faculties and use of things needed—'has' such-and-such virtues. (Anscombe 2006b, 188)

## 3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, I defended a sympathetic reading of the main thrust of Philippa Foot's *Natural Goodness* (NG). Foot, I argued, is not a derivationist. She does not hold that facts about human nature are among the virtuous agent's reasons for acting well. The virtuous agent, rather, acts on the basis of characteristic sorts of what I termed *situational reasons*—"I promised to φ," "X is hers," "Y is dangerous," and so on. The role of human nature in the argument is different than it would be in a derivationist account; the dispositions to act for the appropriate classes of situational reasons *are* virtues (and the agents who possess them *are* practically rational) because they are dispositions that human beings *need* to have, if they are to achieve their good.

I mentioned but did not treat this last point, concerning human nature and its relation to human need. I want in this chapter to dwell upon it, for it is of considerable importance in understanding Foot's conception of life and its application to human beings. It is an instance of a more general thesis of Foot's concerning the constitution of an organism's natural history:

(1) A feature F is part of the natural history of Ss only if it is an Aristotelian necessity, for the attainment of the good of Ss, that a given S be F.

To say that a feature F is part of the natural history of Ss is equivalent to saying that "Ss are F" is a true natural-historical judgment, so (1) is effectively a claim about the truth conditions of the natural-historical judgment "Ss are F".

(1) refers to so-called Aristotelian necessity. Foot adopts this notion from G. E. M. Anscombe's work on rules, rights, and promises. Much more will be said about it below. For now, suffice it to say that X is an *Aristotelian necessity* for Y if Y is a good the realization of which depends on X. Aristotelian necessity, then, is a species of teleology; X's being an Aristotelian necessity for Y is one sense in which X may be said to be *for the sake of* Y. So (1) is, effectively, a stance on the kind, or at least a kind, of teleology which characterizes life.

This chapter is an argument against invoking Aristotelian necessity, as Foot does, in an account of the teleology of life. I set out Foot's account and take note of the pressures within it that push toward the adoption of (1). I argue that the account faces considerable difficulties, which are thrown into relief by Foot's attempt to apply it to human beings; I argue also that (1) is in tension with what I have called the deliberative availability of evaluations. Finally, I propose an alternative account that meets Foot's desiderata while leaving possible, consistently with neo-Aristotelian naturalism, the deliberative availability of evaluations. The alternative account rejects the role Foot assigns to Aristotelian necessity, putting in its place a *sui generis* form of teleological relation while also reconceiving the relationship among the various elements of a natural history.

### 3.2 Aristotelian Necessity

Before we consider the question of whether Foot's account is satisfactory—and if not, what might replace it—we need to get more of it in view. Does Foot actually hold (1)? And what does the notion of Aristotelian necessity come to? I address these questions in this section.

Foot aims, following Thompson, to provide an account of the logical form of natural-historical judgments, since the thesis she would like to defend—the thesis I labeled *neo-Aristotelian naturalism* in the previous chapter—is that *that very form* is shared by moral judgments. As we saw there, she rehearses Thompson's many arguments concerning the distinctive, "non-Fregean" sort of generality exhibited by natural-historical judgments. But she diverges from his account at a crucial juncture.

Natural-historical judgments are a species of *generic sentence*. That is just what grammarians call general sentences of such forms as "Ss are F," "The S is F," and "An S is F," in which a predicate is attached to a bare plural or (in)definite singular term.[1] Not all generic propositions are natural-historical judgments. According to Foot, Thompson does not give us the resources to distinguish two superficially similar sorts of generic propositions about living things, exemplified by the following:

(2) The blue tit has a round blue patch on its head.

(3) The male peacock has a brightly colored tail.

The color of a male peacock's tail serves a purpose in its mating and thereby in the reproduction of peacocks. If it were the case, though, that the blue tit's blue patch played no such role, then it would not be appropriate, Foot thinks, to say that a particular blue tit was defective in lacking a blue patch. It is therefore necessary to distinguish "the teleological from the non-teleological attachment of predicates to a subject term that is the name of a species" (NG, 30). Natural-historical judgments are those in which the attachment of the predicate is "teleological."

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[1] The target form should be distinguished from two outwardly similar sorts of sentence. There are non-general sentences of such outward forms as well—for instance, "Soldiers are attacking the city" and "The present king of France is bald". And there are outwardly generic sentences that are analyzable as second-order predications. E.g., the sentence "Dinosaurs are extinct" does not predicate *being extinct* generically of dinosaurs, but rather predicates *no longer being instantiated* of the concept *dinosaur*. In this respect it is unlike "Dogs have four legs."

> We could say … that part of what distinguishes an Aristotelian categorical from a mere statistical proposition about some or most or all the members of a kind of living thing is the fact that it relates to the teleology of the species. It speaks, directly or indirectly, about the way life functions such as eating and growing and defending itself come about in a species of a certain conformation, belonging in a certain kind of habitat. This is why the noise made by the rustling of leaves is irrelevant in this context while the development of roots is not. And this is why Aristotelian categoricals are able to describe norms rather than statistical normalities. It *matters* in the reproductive life of the peacock that the tail should be brightly coloured, whereas our assumption has been that the blue on the head of the blue tit plays no part in what here counts as 'its life'. And this is why the absence of one would itself be a defect in an individual whereas that of the other would not. (NG, 33)

Some care should be taken here. Foot writes as though, if a generalization is not a natural-historical judgment, then it is a mere "statistical normality" (cp. also Lott 2018). This is not the best way of putting matters, since even the wider class of generic sentences exhibit non-Fregean generality. Consider, for instance, the statements that mosquitoes carry the West Nile virus or that sharks attack bathers, which are generics but are not natural-historical judgments (Leslie 2015). Granting that point, though, we can find plausible the nearby, Foot-friendly suggestion that what distinguishes natural-historical judgments from the wider class of generics is their teleology. This is a suggestion to which I will return in Section 3.7.

Now, in the case of a non-human species S, Foot says that a feature F, if it is to be relevant to the natural goodness of Ss, must relate in some way to the "life cycle" of Ss: to their development, self-maintenance, and reproduction (NG, 41). What exactly is this relationship of

teleology between the naturally good features of an organism and its life cycle? Foot speaks variously of the relation in question. It is a relation of "playing a part in the life," as "having to do … with self-maintenance … or with the reproduction of the individual," as "being causally and teleologically related to [the life]," as "serving a purpose," as "giving the 'how' of what happens in the life cycle," and as being "determined by what is needed for development, self-maintenance, and reproduction" (NG, 31-33). Her considered, official view, is that the relation is that of Aristotelian necessity, "that which is necessary because and in so far as good hangs on it" (NG, 15). As I have said, Foot borrows this notion from Anscombe's work on promising, rights, and political authority, in which Anscombe cites Aristotle's remark that in one sense 'necessary' means that without which some good cannot be (Anscombe 1969, 73-75; 1981b, 97-103). To get this idea in view, it will help to take a closer look at the use Anscombe makes of it (cf. also Vogler 2020). I will focus on the case of promises.

Anscombe observes that promises are a kind of linguistic instrument. Their characteristic way of operating is in outline like this: if someone has made a promise, then she has to keep it, and in keeping it, she may cite as her reason for performance the fact that she made the promise.[2] This is the "language-game" that is played with the words "I promise …". But to say only this is not to distinguish promise-making and -keeping from the playing of a *mere* game. A chess player, we may say, "has" to move her bishops diagonally, or may "have" to move her king out of check, or "has" to begin by moving either a pawn or a knight. But she only "has" to do these things if she means to be playing chess. There is nothing wrong with walking away. Besides being a bad sport, there may not be anything wrong with breaking the rules or upending the board. We can even imagine, as Anscombe does, a kind of game in which one gives a description of an action,

[2] The actual functioning of the institution of promising is, of course, more complicated, for Anscombe expects that it would incorporate, for instance, conditions of defeasibility.

accompanied by some special sign, and thereby "has" to do it. One might prefix action descriptions with 'Bump!' or write them in green ink, and then one might complain in the game against someone who does not, say, φ: "But you bumped to φ!" or "You green-inked it!"

Such a game would be similar in its workings to the institution of promising. But the objection to someone who does not play this game would be no more than that she is not doing so, whereas the objection to someone who does not keep her promises is more than this: she is *unfaithful*, and *dishonest* too, if it had been a lying promise. She has behaved wrongly, badly. Anscombe's question is: How is this so? How can the keeping of promises be an *ethical* matter? By making a promise, I (typically) make it the case that I will act badly in failing to do something which I did not otherwise, in any sense, *have* to do. How do I come thus to *restrict my future possibilities for acting well*, just by uttering the words "I promise …"? How is it that uttering these words creates a special kind of incumbency upon me? As Anscombe memorably puts it, what needs to be shown is why "You promised but did not do it" is "a reproach of any more significance than 'You eat your peas with your knife'. One may 'go along with' such a reproach to a high degree …—But why not break the spell?" (Anscombe 1969, 72).

The notion of a language-game has been brought in to account for the inner workings of the practice of promising, but Anscombe thinks that that is where its philosophical utility ends. The notion is insufficient to answer this question we have just encountered, of how promising restricts my future possibilities of acting well. It is at this point that Anscombe appeals to Aristotelian necessity. A great deal of good depends on the institution of promising, for it is a tool by which human beings can get others to do what they need done, and the alternative means for addressing this basic and pervasive need are extremely limited (Anscombe 1969, 73-75). In other words, the necessity of keeping promises lies in the fact that humans *need* the institution of

promising. It is, in Foot's phrase, an institution on which good hangs. Such an account of promising, if it works, secures that one generally acts well in keeping one's promises and badly in failing to do so, even when (as occasionally happens) there are not great goods at stake in the keeping of a particular promise.[3]

It is this notion which Foot takes to relate the naturally good characteristics and operations of an organism to its life cycle. "We invoke the same idea when we say that it is necessary for plants to have water, for birds to build nests, for wolves to hunt in packs, and for lionesses to teach their cubs to kill" (NG, 15; cf. 31-33).

### 3.3 A First Worry

This sketch suffices to raise my first worry concerning the role of Aristotelian necessity in Foot's argument. Before continuing my exposition of the relevant parts of Foot's account, I will develop this worry in this section. My worry bears upon the compatibility of Foot's account with what I called (in Section 2.6) the deliberative availability of evaluations.

I suggested there that, in one of its central uses, evaluative language abbreviates and summarizes the weight of what one takes to be one's situational reasons. For instance, suppose that I φ on the basis of the fact that *p*. It seems, and Foot appears to agree, that on the strength of that very situational reason, I can also infer that I have a reason to φ, namely that *p*. But

(4) *p* is a reason to φ

is an evaluation of human practical reason. Evaluations of human practical reason, are on Foot's neo-Aristotelian naturalism, judgments of natural goodness or defect. And judgments of natural

[3] For further questions about Aristotelian necessity, as well as its role in Anscombe's account of promising, cf. Müller (2018, 162-165), Haase (2020, 259-261), and Vogler (2020).

goodness and defect are internally related to natural-historical judgments. The latter are among the truth conditions of the former. That point is central to the conception of natural goodness and defect that Foot and Thompson share.

Now suppose too what (1) implies: that facts about *human need* are part of the truth conditions of natural-historical judgments. By transitivity it follows that facts about human need are part of the truth conditions of evaluations such as (4). If it is true, as the early Wittgenstein says, that "[t]o understand a proposition means to know what is the case if it is true" (1974, 4.024)—if it is true that to understand a proposition means to know what follows from it, to know what its truth means for the world—then it seems that the deliberative availability of evaluations implies the deliberative availability of facts about human need. Given (1), I do not genuinely understand the evaluation of human practical reason which I make, unless I understand also its connection to human need. So if I can infer an evaluation of human practical reason on the strength of the situational considerations that are pertinent in a particular context, then I can likewise infer facts about human need.

But—this is the objection—that is incredible. Take the general facts of human life to which Anscombe appeals in her account of promising; or take the fact, to which Geach alludes, that "any large-scale worthy enterprise" will require some measure of courage and temperance (1977, 16). Are these frankly rather sophisticated facts knowable *on the strength of pertinent situational reasons*, such as that I made a promise or that such-and-such is dangerous? I submit that they are not. The fact that certain patterns of behavior are necessary for human life, *constituted as it is*, to go smoothly, is not the sort of thing one can plausibly be said to know in virtue of one's capacity to recognize the class of situational reasons which characterize one or another virtue.

The argument for this conclusion has, of course, multiple premises, and its incredible conclusion can be avoided by abandoning any one of them. One could, for instance, deny that evaluations are deliberatively available, though in my view that does too much violence to our evaluative thought and talk. (Derivationism is a way of denying the deliberative availability of evaluations. But I have argued that derivationism is not an attractive view.) Alternatively, one could give up neo-Aristotelian naturalism, and hold that in making evaluations we do not tacitly commit ourselves to anything's being the case about human nature. Foot will not want to say that. What I want to suggest is that neither reaction is necessary. Instead, (1) can be given up. Indeed, there are independent reasons for doing so. It is in that direction that I now turn.

### 3.4 Foot on Human Good: I

(1) says that a feature of an organism, if it is to be part of the species' natural history, must be an Aristotelian necessity for *the organism's good*. In light of the foregoing, this might seem odd, for we have seen that Foot takes the natural-historical features of non-human organisms to be, specifically, for the sake of *their life cycle*—their development, self-maintenance, and reproduction.

Foot eventually looks back at her treatment of non-human life and sees an even more general notion than that of the life cycle at work. "[I]n the course of describing 'natural goodness' in plants and animals," Foot says, "we have implicitly adverted to the idea of the good of a living thing as well as its goodness in various respects, and the two ideas, though related, are distinct" (NG, 41). For Foot, then, it is important to distinguish an organism's goodness—that is, of features in virtue of which it is naturally good in particular respects—from its good. In non-human

creatures, the good is said to be the life cycle of development, self-maintenance, and reproduction. "But clearly," Foot says, "this is not true when we come to human beings" (NG, 42).

Human beings are distinctive not only because human life is more complicated but because the human good is genuinely richer than the life cycle. It is not just that survival and reproduction take on a different significance in human life, though they do. Survival and reproduction are also less dominating and central, because distinct goods also come onto the scene (NG, 43). Various examples are given throughout the book. The enjoyment of stories, songs, dances, and jokes, Foot says, fall under human good, and this is indicated by our sense that humans who lack the specifically human powers required for such enjoyment are "deprived," even if they can survive and reproduce (NG, 43). Her comments on the ends that some of the virtues serve indicate that she thinks human good also includes "love and friendship" (NG, 44). Later, Foot denies that the sort of felt contentment sometimes called "happiness" is part of human good (NG, 83-85). Yet, she argues, there is a sort of happiness, "deep happiness," with which the human good can even be identified. Deep happiness is supposed to be incompatible with wickedness and is said to involve "home, and family, and work, and friendship," "the quest for truth," "artistic creation," and "the exploration of strange lands" (NG, 86-97)

Human good includes *more than* the life cycle, *more than* development, self-maintenance, and reproduction. To put the thesis in Foot's terms:

(5) Human good is *sui generis*. (NG, 51)

What role does (5) play in Foot's argument? What Foot would like to establish, in order to secure neo-Aristotelian naturalism, is the view that practical rationality (the good disposition of human practical reason) involves the possession and exercise of the virtues. That is to say, she would like to establish that humans are naturally good in respect of their practical reason to the extent that

they possess and exercise the virtues. Given her amendment to Thompson, establishing this requires arguing that the possession and exercise of the virtues is an Aristotelian necessity for human beings—that their good hangs on it. And this is indeed what we find her arguing:

> [F]or all the diversities of human life, it is possible to give some quite general account of human necessities, that is, of what is quite generally needed for human good, if only by starting from the negative idea of human deprivation. For then we see at once that human good depends on many characteristics and capacities that are not needed even by animals, never mind by plants. (NG, 43)

> Men and women need to be industrious and tenacious of purpose not only so as to be able to house, clothe, and feed themselves, but also to pursue human ends having to do with love and friendship. They need the ability to form family ties, friendships, and special relations with neighbours. They also need codes of conduct. And how could they have all these things without virtues such as loyalty, fairness, kindness, and in certain circumstances obedience? (NG, 44-45)

Foot's claim is that the virtues are among what is needed for the attainment of human good. They are among the Aristotelian necessities of human life. She takes this to establish that they are naturally good and that to possess them is to be practically rational.

(5) will have an intelligible, if not irresistible, appeal to anyone making this argument. If each natural-historical judgment about human beings could only be referred to human development, self-maintenance, and reproduction, Foot thinks, then there would be reasonable grounds for doubt whether the account issues in anything like the traditional catalogue of the virtues, that is, whether its morality is recognizably *ours*. The account would appear objectionably biologistic. I do not mean to understate the no doubt real degree to which even 'mere' development,

self-maintenance, and reproduction among humans would require a textured and at least somewhat familiarly human kind of life. Humans indeed could achieve nothing if they did not live together and cooperate in some significant measure, and this could not be achieved without a great deal of trust, truthfulness, and justice; and they would be substantially hindered in many projects if, lacking courage and temperance, they could not face dangers and resist temptations of various kinds. Much could be (and has been) said on this front, to be sure. But Foot herself concedes that human good needs to be extended beyond the life cycle if her account is to yield a recognizable morality. That is why (5) is so central to her attempt to apply the framework of natural goodness to human beings—she devotes a chapter to articulating and defending it. And that is also why the argument for the natural goodness of the virtues, which we have just seen quoted above, does not come until we have seen (5) defended.

Foot's acceptance of (5) means that she denies that the *form* of natural-historical judgments makes essential reference to the life cycle. For natural-historical judgments about human beings make essential reference to something more. Nevertheless, Foot insists that as we move from the non-human case to the human one, "the conceptual structure [of natural goodness] seems to be intact," for human good, though enriched in comparison with non-human good, continues to play the same role in the evaluation of human characteristics and operations as "flourishing" plays in the evaluation of non-human ones (NG, 44). That is, just as the good features of non-human organisms are Aristotelian necessities for their good (their life cycles), so the good features of humans are for the sake of their good.

### 3.5 Foot on Human Good: II

On what grounds, exactly, does Foot hold (5)? It seems to me that the raising and answering of this question tends to reveal substantial problems for Foot's account. In this section, I will consider her answer to it, which will lead us to recognize some constraints Foot places on an adequate account of life. In the next section, I will argue that Foot's way of satisfying these constraints is objectionable.

Foot does have a kind of method for identifying the good of a species and thus for judging that *human* good is *sui generis*. At various points, she adverts to the notion of a *benefit* to argue that something is or is not part of the good of a species. The initial reason for introducing this notion is to argue that it is necessary to distinguish the good of a living thing from its natural goodness, on the basis that these two can come apart (NG, 41-42, cf. 34). What is naturally good for an organism is what makes it a good member of its species—good qua member of its species. On Foot's account, an organism that is good of its kind is an organism that has such characteristics and engages in such operations as are necessary for its good. But an organism that is naturally good in this sense can still, intuitively, fail to attain its good, as in the case of a bee that dies when it stings what threatens the hive. The bee was a naturally good bee and it behaved well, but intuitively it has not been benefited—as Foot wants to say also in the case of someone who possesses courage unto death, or justice unto penury (NG, 43; cf. 35; following Geach 1977, 17). A naturally good organism can even behave in such a way as leads to the destruction of the group. For example, a bee might sting a gardener who then destroys its nest.[4]

[4] It is worth flagging here the ambiguity between the organism's good and that of its group or species. Each is at times said to be the end of its natural-historically attributable features, but the good of the individual and the good of the community are potentially in competition. I do not here enter into the issues which this potential competition raises.

Foot is consistent in appealing to this notion of benefit as a criterion—a mark by which to judge—for determining what the good of a species is. It, along with the converse notion of deprivation, is her criterion for holding that human good is *sui generis*; as we have seen, Foot remarks that without, e.g., the telling of stories and jokes, human life would be "deprived" and "impoverished" (NG, 43). In other words, she registers an intuition that non-human life is only benefited by what serves its life cycle, while humans are benefited by various other goods. Similar intuitions are employed in her treatment of happiness, to rule out mere contentment or satisfaction as a genuine human good and to argue that deep happiness, by contrast, is part of, or even identical to, human good. *We would not say*, she thinks, that we have benefited someone if we have helped him in the perpetration of grave vice, and so some kind of happiness incompatible with wickedness seems to be the human good (NG, 84-86, 93-94).

Details remain about how such a procedure is to be executed. No doubt it raises various questions, but this does in outline seem to me to be Foot's account. For Foot, the features that make an organism naturally good are those that it *needs* to have if it is to attain its good, which Foot identifies by way of our sense of what benefits the organism.

Some readers of Foot will disagree with this reading because of the prominence it gives to the notion of benefit—for the appeal to benefit, on my telling, is effectively an appeal to intuition, and accordingly it is an odd thing to find in the writing of an author who was so critical of G. E. Moore's intuitionist account of the good (Moore 2004; NG, 2-3).

It is indeed a strange thing to find in Foot's writing. But, I have argued, it is there. And while Foot seems to me to have been insufficiently reflective about what her appeal to benefit involves, it plays an central role in her argument; we can see this if we attend to the shortcomings

of an alternative reading, provided by Micah Lott, which—I think—would not serve all of Foot's dialectical purposes if it represented her view.

Lott argues that the good of an organism is its "good life" and glosses this in the following way:

(6) "THE GOOD OF any creature is the actualization of those well-formed capacities that make it GOOD AS [that is, naturally good as] the kind of creature that it is" (2018, 258).[5]

Lott thus employs a distinction between what Aristotle calls first and second actuality. Aristotle distinguishes two different kinds of transition from potentiality to actuality. There is the acquisition of the capacity, and then there is the exercise of the capacity possessed (1984a, 417a21-b1). Some examples will make the idea clear:

| | *First potentiality* | *First actuality / Second potentiality* | *Second actuality* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Example* | The capacity to learn a language | The capacity to speak | Speaking |
| *Example* | The capacity to become a fast runner | The capacity to run fast | Running fast |
| *Example* | The capacity to acquire virtue | The capacity to act from virtue | Virtuous activity |

**Table 2:** Examples of first and second actuality

Lott uses this distinction to provide a reading of Foot's various uses of 'good'. On his reading, an organism is naturally good insofar as it possesses the first actualities that it is supposed to—those determined by its life form. It achieves its good when those first actualities, or perhaps certain important ones, are themselves actualized.

It is not clear to what extent this is meant to be a reading of Foot. Lott clearly does intend for his account to shed some light on her various uses of 'good'. But Foot never discusses the distinction between first and second actuality. Further, Aristotelian necessity—which is clearly

[5] Lott uses small capitals to highlight different uses of 'good' at work in Foot's argument.

central to Foot's conception of the relationship between natural goodness and the good—is absent from Lott's account. Indeed, Lott is elsewhere (2015) critical of the role of Aristotelian necessity in Foot's argument. Lott's account is perhaps better construed as a congenial amendment to Foot's views.

The distinction between first and second actuality, however, will not quite do all of the work that Foot wants the distinction between natural goodness and a thing's good to do. It handles the cases of the stinging bee and the swift deer, in which what is undeniably a naturally good specimen does not attain its good; on Lott's view, this is because the organism has found itself in less than optimal circumstances in which its natural goodness in one respect happens to thwart its natural goodness in others (2018, 264). The swift deer is naturally good, good qua deer, in respect of its speed, but in its present circumstances in which there is a trap this happens to lead to its premature death, and this prevents the actualization of its *other* naturally good capacities over a whole life—that is, prevents it from living the sort of life that it is the good of a deer to live. But Lott's account does not handle another class of examples important to Foot.

In particular, Foot's distinction between natural goodness and the good of a species is incipient already in the modification of Thompson's view, described above. As we saw, Foot contrasts the hypothetical blue tit's blue patch with the male peacock's colorful tail. Similarly, Foot asks whether dancing (as a kind of signal to the hive) is natural to a certain type of bee (NG, 35, 109). The point is that however typical a feature of an organism *appears* to be, it is not to be judged defective for lacking it unless the feature is actually necessary for the good of those organisms (NG, 30). In both of these cases, it is by adverting to the good of the species, the life cycle, that we can determine *whether* the possession of some feature really redounds to an organism's natural goodness. As Foot says, the naturally good features of non-human organisms "are to be identified

by reference to … 'biological' cycles" (NG, 41). In other words, Foot takes the good of a species to serve an epistemic function, giving us a principle by which to sort out accidental from essential features of species.

Foot is, evidently, interested in prohibiting this hasty inference:

These bees dance.

This bee does not dance.

So this bee is defective for not dancing.

For Foot, this will be sound only if the first premise is a genuine natural-historical judgment in which the attachment of the predicate is "teleological." It must be that dancing is needed for the good of these bees, if such an inference is to be sound. It would be inapposite to say that dancing is needed for the good of these bees *because* (as you can see) these bees dance, and so it is in their nature to dance, and so the good life of these bees includes dancing. This would allow inferences of the form Foot means to block. (In blocking them, no doubt Foot has in mind such evaluatively irrelevant differences among humans as skin color.)[6]

So we have identified certain desiderata Foot would like her account of the teleology of life to meet. In addition to (5), such an account must preserve the following:

(7) There is a difference between an organism of species S's being good *qua* S and its achieving the good for Ss; there is a difference between its doing well and its faring well.

[6] It is also worth noting that the account does not fit with Foot's actual approach to human good. Foot's procedure in her chapter on happiness is not at all to ask what the fully actualized life of a naturally good (and so, she has argued by that point, virtuous) person is like; the key move in her treatment of happiness is rather, as I noted above, an appeal to our sense of what does and what does not benefit humans (NG, 93-94). Moreover, even setting happiness in particular aside, we have already seen that Foot's procedure is to get clear about human good by arguing that it is *sui generis*, *before* arguing that the virtues are necessary for it. She does not characterize human good as *sui generis* on the basis of a prior account of human natural history.

(8) The teleology of an organism's natural features plays an epistemic role in our distinguishing genuine from ingenuine natural-historical judgments.

Foot is pushed to (1) as a way of meeting them. Lott's account of Foot's use of 'good'—(6)—is tailored to accommodate (7), but it does not on its own help to explain the truth of (8).

### 3.6 A Second Objection

Foot argues for (5) by appeal to our sense of what benefits human beings. Moreover, per (8), the *sui generis* account of human good is itself indispensable for providing an account of human natural history, in particular for including the traditional virtues in that account. These commitments betray a fundamental tension in Foot's account.

How do we know that human beings are benefited by what conduces to the *sui generis* human good? It is obvious that part of our ground for making that judgment must lie in our grasp of the fact that human beings are *different from* non-human organisms. Our natural history is different. The problem is that if (8) is true, then it is hard to see how we can appeal to that fact in understanding the *sui generis* character of human good. For our judgment that human good is *sui generis* depends on our already possessing an understanding of human natural history, and our understanding of human natural history depends on our judgment that human good is *sui generis*. We are caught in a circle, which seems indeed to be vicious.

One might suggest that this objection can be answered by way of the so-called Neurathian procedure of gradual modification endorsed by many contemporary neo-Aristotelian ethicists (McDowell 2001b; Hursthouse 2001; Lott 2015). Along these lines, one might suggest that the interdependence of human good and human nature does not pose a problem for our coming to at least an approximate knowledge of human nature, because one's natural-historical judgments need

only begin with a partial, perhaps strictly incorrect, reference to human good. One can refine one's conception of human nature and of human good simultaneously to approach the true natural history of human beings.

But the Neurathian procedure will not help the conception presently under consideration. To see this, consider two candidate natural histories of the human being. In one, each natural-historical judgment makes reference only to the life cycle G of humans; in the other, each natural-historical judgment makes reference to Foot's *sui generis* human good G'. What *is it* to judge that one of these natural histories is wrong and the other right? Foot's account suggests that one would have to judge that what conduces to what is contained in G' over and above G *benefits* humans. On what, though, could such a judgment be based? It cannot depend on a judgment about the natural history of humans, for the first natural history would suggest that what is contained in G' over and above G does *not* benefit humans. Neurathian modification cannot begin, because there are no criteria available for the soundness of individual steps.

Where the good of a species is stipulated, as it were, in advance, as it might *appear* to be in the case of non-human creatures, the problem will not arise. A disagreement over whether it is naturally good for a blue tit to have a blue patch (that is, a disagreement over *the nature of* blue tits) is settled by asking whether it is necessary for the blue tit's life cycle. But if such a disagreement were traced to a disagreement over what is actually good for that species—whether the good for blue tits really just is their life cycle, or whether it is something more—then there is in principle no way to resolve it. To say that it is a disagreement over what *benefits* blue tits is really just to redescribe the disagreement, not to give a procedure for resolving it—unless the procedure is to be recourse to intuition, about which we would then have the question: what is it intuition of?

I said that the problem does not *appear* to arise in the case of non-human creatures. That is because in the case of non-human creatures, it only appears to be the case that the good, the life cycle, is intelligible in advance of understanding the natural history of the organism in question. For even non-human species do not actually all have the 'same' good, 'the life cycle'. The life cycle of blue tits is not the same as the life cycle of peacocks or oak trees or humans. If the life cycle is self-maintenance, growth, and reproduction, then its description tacitly involves a representation of the unity of the organism. A peachick's end is to become a mature *peacock*, to maintain itself *as such*, and to produce more *peacocks*. This suggests that the problem lies not so much in Foot's attempt to defend (5), which concerns human beings in particular, but in her account of life itself.

### 3.7 An Alternative Account of Teleology

Foot opens herself up to the argument of the previous section because she appeals to the notion of benefit to meet her desiderata (5), (7), and (8). The notion is introduced to make sense of (7)'s distinction between doing well and faring well. Once it is in hand, it seems that one can appeal to benefit to specify in what the good of some sort of organism consists, compatibly with its good extending beyond its life cycle, as (5) says is the case with human beings. And once the good is specified, it would seem that one can characterize the natural history of that sort of organism in terms of what is necessary for its good—and thus teleology will help one sort genuine from ingenuine natural-historical judgments, as (8) requires.

In this way of proceeding, the good of an organism is specified in advance of its natural history. We then learn its natural history by referring its features to its good. The argument of the previous section simply exploited a tension involved in regarding this procedure as possible.

The model of Aristotelian necessity, though, does seem to encourage the idea that the good of an organism should be specified in advance of its natural history. For in Anscombe's argument, the goods which the institution of promising subserves are specifiable independently of that institution. They must be, if the argument is to work. It would make little sense to argue that the institution of promising is necessary on the basis that, without it, the great good of *fidelity* cannot be achieved. That is true, but fidelity is only good because promise-keeping is.

This makes Aristotelian necessity a poor model for biological teleology. If the good of an organism is, as Foot says, its good life, then this is not a state specifiable independently of the naturally good features of the organism—because what counts as a good life for an S depends on what Ss are like. We should find an alternative picture of biological teleology that accommodates this point, while doing justice to Foot's desiderata.

Contrary to the impression Foot gives, Thompson does discuss the relationship between natural-historical judgments and teleology—though the discussion is modified somewhat in his book *Life and Action*, published after NG. Thompson writes:

> We are [in the case of biological teleology] … as far as can possibly be imagined from the category of intention or psychical teleology—a fact that is also shown in this, that if the complex thought about, for example, the blossoms is true, then the judgments joined in it are also true. Here, that is, "P in order that Q" straightforwardly entails both P *and* Q. In making out this sort of connection one links a plain fact, not with a possibly unrealized end, but with another plain fact. (Thompson 2008, 78)

Thompson is here concerned to emphasize a formal difference between ascriptions of biological and of intentional teleology. In the course of making this point, he claims that the relevant 'in order that' relation links one natural-historical judgment *to another*. Foot herself makes this point:

> There is an Aristotelian categorical about the species *peacock* to the effect that the male peacock displays his brilliant tail *in order to* attract a female during the mating season. … Plants grow upwards in order to get to the light, [though] it is fanciful to say that that is what my honeysuckle is trying to do or that that is 'its end'. (NG, 31)

But Foot's and Thompson's accounts of this teleology ultimately diverge. Thompson goes on:

> Natural teleological judgments may thus be said to organize the elements of a natural history; they articulate the relations of dependence among the various elements and aspects and phases of a given kind of life. I said above that the conditions required for some natural-historically attributable phenomenon to arise will themselves be natural-historically attributable to the life-form in question and belong to the natural history of the form. If these conditions include a feature of the environment, still the system will contain the judgment that they live in such an environment, and then in turn judgments about how they come to be there—and so we go on, never leaving the system of natural-historical judgments. The teleological connective simply expresses the concept that is converse to this conception of dependence. (Thompson 2008, 78-79)

If P in order that Q, then P and Q are both true natural-historical judgments, *and Q itself is teleologically articulable*. Hence Thompson suggests that a natural-historical judgment might be uniquely identified—that is, to the exclusion of other generic propositions—as a "teleologically

articulable non-Fregean generality" (2008, 79). Thompson's teleological connections thus form what Matthias Haase calls "a closed cycle" (2018, 93-94), for as he says above, as we move from item to item up or down the teleological chain, "we go on, never leaving the system of natural-historical judgments."

Isn't this a component of Foot's view as well? After all, she speaks of life *cycles*. But while we should certainly ascribe to Foot the best view that we can, we cannot ascribe to her the idea that natural-historical judgments form a closed cycle. It is not a point she thematizes or makes use of, even to distinguish organisms from artifacts, as she is keen to do.[7] There is, moreover, no trace of the thought in her transition to discussing the *sui generis* human good. Finally, she simply seems to deny it:

> What conceptually determines goodness in a feature or operation is the relation, for the species, of that feature or operation to survival and reproduction, because it is in that that good lies in the botanical and zoological worlds. *At that point questions of 'How?' and 'Why?' and 'What for?' come to an end.* (NG, 42, emphasis added)

Evidently, Foot speaks of the good of non-human organisms as the life cycle not because she takes cyclic teleology to characterize life and to distinguish it from artifice, but simply because development, self-maintenance, and reproduction form a cycle.

We can appeal to the teleology of natural-historical judgments—their being linked with other natural-historical judgments in a "closed cycle"—to accommodate (7), that is, to address Foot's problem of the blue tit and the rustling of leaves. Genuine natural-historical judgments are distinguished from mere generic propositions by their role in such a teleological system, not by their being necessary for an independently specified good.

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[7] Even Thompson, who originates the idea that a natural history is closed under the 'in order to' relation, does not himself use it to distinguish organisms from artifacts or from the craft process; that is Haase's contribution.

There is no suggestion in Thompson's account that the teleological connections between natural-historical judgments are connections of Aristotelian necessity. There would be something puzzling about that if it were true. For it is not clear that necessity is the appropriate idea for capturing the way in which life gets on. There is a great variety of life, after all, and it accomplishes its ends by a variety of means. Hunting is not the only way of securing nourishment. It is how wolves *do* secure it. Is it how they *must*? Well, considering how they are constituted—perhaps. But how they are constituted is a matter of their natural history; it cannot be invoked in an explanation of what their natural history is.

Foot's appeal to Aristotelian necessity strikes me as basically reductive. It is an attempt to reduce biological teleology to some other more familiar and tractable kind. I am not persuaded that this is possible. It may be, alternatively, that the particular determination of the teleological connective 'in order that' which characterizes natural-historical judgments is *sui generis*. It is something that we all recognize and cotton onto from, as it were, our life with the concept 'life', from our comprehension of the proverbial nature documentary. The comparatively non-reductive character of Thompson's treatment of teleology may explain why Foot saw fit to amend it, but I want to suggest that we should not rush to assume that an *analysis* of biological teleology is requisite and possible.

What Thompson may seem to have a harder time accommodating is (6)—the distinction between doing well and faring well. For that which the natural-historically attributable features of organisms are for the sake of is now not something categorically different, as it sometimes appears to be in Foot's account, but rather: the natural-historically attributable features of a given kind of organisms are for the sake of *other* natural-historically attributable features of those organisms. But now that we have an account of natural history that is independent of what Foot calls the good,

we are free to give an account of the good in terms of natural history, as Lott does. We may say that the good of an organism S is its good life; it lies in the actualization of its naturally good capacities over a whole life. This means that our account of life needs to appeal to the notions of capacity and actualization, but that should not be, I think, particularly surprising.

Space is also made for (5)—the idea that human good is *sui generis*—at least on a certain way of understanding that thesis. It is, on the view being developed, a distinctive kind of teleological unity that characterizes life of all sorts. Something is living if its features can be described—that is, are linked together—in the manner characteristic of life; this is a *formal* characterization of what it is for something to be alive. It is compatible with considerable *material* variation, from species to species, concerning *what* is unified. It will turn out to be a datum, I think, that human life is not a mere struggle for survival—that humans tell stories and jokes, create art and play sports, form friendships, theorize, and so on.

Mere satisfaction of Foot's desiderata does not open up an account of the teleology of life to the argument I developed in Section 3.6. The problem arises for Foot's account as a result of her appeal to the notion of benefit—more generally, as a result of her committing herself to taking the good of a species to be specifiable in advance of the species' natural history. On the present account, if we say that human life is impoverished without, e.g., artistic expression, then this is best regarded as a kind of heuristic device that elicits what we already know about the human life form, rather than a privileged manner of determining what human good is. That is to say, the account we are constructing rejects the special role Foot appears to give to the notion of benefit, and more particularly it rejects also the view that human good could be specified in advance of arguing that the virtues are part of human natural history.

### 3.8 Nature, Upbringing, and Moral Knowledge

The last problem we are left with is the compatibility of neo-Aristotelian naturalism with the deliberative availability of evaluations. I introduced this idea in Section 2.7 and raised a worry about its compatibility with Foot's brand of neo-Aristotelian naturalism in Section 3.3.

Simply by denying (1), we render neo-Aristotelian naturalism compatible with the deliberative availability of evaluations, for we avoid the incredible conclusion that we can learn facts about what humans need by consideration of pertinent situational considerations, if we deny that human natural history is constituted by facts about what human beings need. Still, if we are neo-Aristotelian naturalists, we are committed to the deliberative availability of some human *natural history*, and this may seem mysterious, even if not incredible.

Relatively little is said by Foot about moral epistemology. As I noted in Section 2.3, Foot is predominantly read as a derivationist, and so it is generally assumed that her moral epistemology is something along these lines: even non-philosophers are to develop a (perhaps implicit) theoretical account of human nature and then to derive conclusions from it about what they ought to do. But I have argued in the previous chapter that Foot is not a derivationist.

Foot does speak briefly of moral education. She writes:

> Human life, unlike the life of animals, is lived according to norms that are known and taken as patterns by those whose norms they are. So we have to teach children what they may and may not do. Nor could these norms be taught simply by telling children that they are to be courageous and 'authentic', however important it is to encourage them to be daring and also to allow them to discover their true desires. The norms to be followed must largely be formulated in terms of the prohibition of *actions* such as murder and theft. (NG, 114)

The idea is nothing baroque. We do not give children discourses on human nature. Moral education, rather, consists largely in telling children what to do and what not to do. Maturity, perhaps, consists in children's learning to weigh considerations against each other and in their becoming able to determine what to do when confronted with complex situations where their inclinations pull in different directions (cf. Section 4.6).

How might such a view be consistent with the idea that the virtuous life is *natural* to human beings—as Foot attempts to argue in NG? Does not Foot depend here on the assumption that children will be taught the *right* norms? How is that a matter of nature?

Well, the assumption is not arbitrary, if we agree with Anscombe that "it belongs to the natural history of man that he has a moral environment" (2008, 224). Anscombe has in mind the fact that human beings are social animals, which means that it is no accident—it is natural—for human children to acquire a certain range of moral concepts in terms of which moral norms are framed, as well as inclinations to respect those norms. She is interested, in particular, in the way in which moral action-descriptions are "high-level interpretations" of human behavior. It takes a certain sophistication to be able to identify, e.g., someone's picking some item up as *stealing*. And yet it is as ordinary as anything that a child will acquire this sophistication and come to wield the concept of theft competently—as ordinary as the fact that a child acquires the language of those in its company. As Anscombe says:

> Quite generally: to grow up as a child of normal intelligence in a human society is *eo ipso* to be equipped with a range of concepts which form the raw material for moral action descriptions, and in many cases to acquire these as well, at least in a rough inchoate form. (2008, 225)

In the case of human beings, the division is false between what comes of nature and what of family and society, for it is part of human nature to be part of a family and a society and to react in certain ways to moral training. We may maintain, then, that it is a part of human life to acquire the habits which are the virtues, even if this substantially requires a training at the hands of one's elders, and even if moral training is in many cases poorly accomplished.

It is part of the human form of life to operate with, e.g., the concepts which characterize justice. Thompson claims that the possibility of such a form of life "*can only be realized at all if its bearers grasp it other than empirically*" (2022, 77). That human beings acquire the relevant moral action descriptions *as a matter of course* in a human upbringing is part of what constitutes human life as characterized by such ways of going on as: doing what justice, courage, temperance, and prudence require. The application of such action descriptions for which such an upbringing prepares one is itself a manifestation of a distinctive kind of life, the human one.

We can, after the fact, recognize the necessity of such patterns of response for the achievement of various goods—and that may tell us something important about the virtues and their role in human life (cf. Müller 2018). As we saw in the previous chapter, though, such considerations are not those that characteristically motivate the virtuous agent. I have argued in this chapter, against Foot, that such considerations are not even what secures the goodness of acting from the virtues. They could not be.

This point underwrites another sense in which human good is *sui generis*. Virtuous patterns of motivation are constituted as part of human nature, as being naturally good, in part by being naturally recognized as such by the virtuous individual. Compatibly with neo-Aristotelian naturalism, they are not justified from without the agent's perspective.

# Chapter 4: The Form of Practical Thought

> Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different. (Wittgenstein, conversation with Maurice Drury, quoted in Malcolm 1981)

## 4.1 Introduction

A virtue is a complex disposition. It is, *inter alia*, a disposition to respond to certain sorts of situational reasons correctly and efficiently. The qualification is necessary here because, as I noted in Section 2.7, a virtue is also a disposition *not* to respond to—even not to notice—other sorts of features of one's situation.

All the same, the sorts of reasons for which one acts are a central component of virtue and thereby of practical rationality, or wisdom. The nature of reasons for action is, of course, much debated (cf. Schroeder 2007; Alvarez 2010; Scanlon 2014). It is helpful to frame discussion in terms of the considerations which *collectively* speak in favor of some way of acting on a particular occasion—for indeed such considerations are usually several, and not all of them are, individually, reasons for performing the action in question. (Some such considerations might be, e.g., means-end beliefs or even countervailing considerations.) That is to say, it is helpful to frame discussion in terms of an agent's rationale for an action, or in terms of her practical inference. (For stylistic and dialectical reasons, I will mainly speak here of inferences rather than rationales, but the meaning is meant to be the same. Cf. Section 1.4.) In this chapter, I consider the structure of such

inferences. What does it take for a practical inference to be good—to be, in suitably broad senses, valid or sound?

This topic, the structure of practical justification, is enormous. I do not aim here to treat all of its aspects. My intent is to survey those of its dimensions which are especially relevant, in conjunction with what I have argued in previous chapters, to sketching a picture of the wise individual. I accordingly set aside such topics as the ontology of reasons and the nature of the conclusion of practical reasoning (though, as I noted in Section 1.6, I will assume, for the sake of simplicity, that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an action).

I will divide practical inference into two components, which I call instrumental and situational inference. Instrumental inference, in which one discovers and takes means to one's ends, is the least controversial component of practical rationality, although its nature is a subject of much dispute. I will be concerned to reject two attempts to assimilate instrumental to theoretical validity, one (which I consider in Section 4.2) focusing on inference to necessary means, the other (in Section 4.3) focusing on inference to sufficient means. I argue that the notion of a sufficient means is fundamental to the understanding of instrumental rationality and that there are important differences between instrumental and theoretical validity.

Now, on the face of it, if what I have argued in Chapter 2 is correct—if there are situational reasons—then not all practical inference is instrumental inference. In Section 4.4, I consider an argument to the contrary derived from G. E. M. Anscombe. Although I do not find that argument compelling, I will suggest that it raises the important question of the role of desire in practical inference. In Section 4.5 and 4.6, I will agree with Anscombe that it is neither false nor trivial to hold that, in a certain sense, desire prompts action in every case—that desire is a *sine qua non* of action. This fact helps us to distinguish between forms of practical failure, the cognitive and the

conative, which distinction amounts to the traditional distinction between practical reason and the will.

## 4.2 Inference to Necessary Means

Discussions of instrumental rationality commonly begin with consideration of the requirement that one take means that are necessary to one's ends. Kant is a venerable example in this regard; he wrote: "Whoever wills the end also wills (in so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) the indispensably necessary means to it that is in his control" (2012, 4:417).

A more recent example is John Broome, who says that it is the "most fundamental requirement of practical rationality" to "intend what you believe to be a means implied by an end you intend" (2013, 159-160). A *means implied by an end* is a condition without which the end would not obtain, the intending of which the agent, moreover, takes to be that through which the end will be obtained, if indeed it is obtained. More roughly but more intuitively, a means implied by an end is a means you must take, and believe you must take, if you are to obtain your end.[1]

Why think that this is the *most fundamental* requirement of practical rationality? On the face of it, at least, the requirement lacks in generality of application. In many instances, it seems, we do not think that any specific means is implied by our ends. One wants breakfast, for example, and one might have it by having either eggs or yogurt or oatmeal.

Broome agrees. No *specific* means is implied by one's end in such a case. Yet Broome would insist that his fundamental requirement is still in play:

[1] In what follows, I intend for 'means' to include constitutive means: a means of ψ-ing to one's goal of φ-ing is not necessarily that which causally produces φ-ing but may also be that which (perhaps given the circumstances) constitutes φ-ing. For instance, raising one's hand may (in the circumstances) count as casting a vote.

> You will often be able to identify a number of specific alternative means for achieving your end. That is to say, you believe that a disjunction *m* or *n* or *p* or . . . constitutes an implied means to the end. Then rationality requires you, if you intend the end and you believe the truth of the disjunction is up to you, to intend the disjunction. (169)

A disjunction of specific means is implied by the end of having breakfast: the disjunction of each thing one might eat. One then is required by rationality, on Broome's account, to intend the disjunction.

Intending the disjunction, of course, does not take one to intending any specific means in particular, and thus it does not take one to action. This gap would be closed if one among the disjuncts could be singled out. On Broome's account, one of the disjuncts is to be singled out by way of another requirement of rationality, according to which you are "required to choose what you believe is the best of the alternative means" (170).[2] In this way, Broome intends to handle cases where no specific means is itself necessary for one's end.

What if some of the means are equally suitable? Broome does not say. But it seems clear that then there could not then be a *requirement* to choose one of them in particular but only a requirement to choose among them. Rationality would not require any specific choice among equally suitable means. Sarah Paul makes this point explicitly (after transposing it from the language of rational requirements to that of reasoning):

> In general, the performing of particular actions bottoms out in large part with mere plumping for indifferent, adequate ways of getting it done. And I suggest that once we reach the point of plumping for one of whatever particular means are available

[2] He says, however, that he does not know how to formulate a notion of *best means*.

and perceived as equally acceptable, this should no longer be understood as an exercise of reasoning, for it requires no further judgment of choiceworthiness. (2013, 296).

Broome, unlike Paul, is writing explicitly of rational requirements rather than patterns of inference. Rational requirements have some bearing on reasoning, though, since Broome takes reasoning to be one of our ways of coming to satisfy rational requirements. So although the correspondence between reasoning and rational requirements may not be in every case neat and direct, the account suggests as fundamental a certain picture: We begin with ends and (to the extent that we are rational) infer what we must do as a means to obtaining those ends. In cases where it is natural to say that we have multiple options, what is recognized is that taking *one of them* (either *m* or *n* or *p* or …) is necessary for one's end. If there is no uniquely best option, then the selection of means is not inference; it is mere 'plumping'.

Anscombe speculates about the attraction of such a picture and the prominence it gives to the notion of a necessary means. The truth lying behind it seems to be: "If there is practical inference, there must be such a thing as its validity. Validity is associated with necessity" (2006a, 110).[3] Those means that are necessary for the attainment of one's ends—those which one will have taken, if one achieves one's end—are accordingly a natural place to look, in thinking about the validity of practical thought. The impulse seems to be to assimilate practical reasoning to ordinary deductive reasoning as much as is possible. Hence Broome's characterization of necessary means as means "implied by" an end.[4]

[3] Anscombe is responding to this tendency as it manifests in the work of G. H. von Wright.
[4] This is not to say that such authors are committed to denying the existence of practical inference in every sense, just that they seek to understand practical inference by drawing a close parallel to theoretical validity.

Is this a satisfactory account of the thinking of someone who takes some specific means to an end? I want to argue that it is not. For the account lacks generality of application even after Broome's attempt to extend it to the case where various specific means individually suffice for one's end. For even in such a case, one need not (and generally will not) *believe* that all of those means suffice for one's end. One often will not even be not aware of them all. Thus Broome's disjunction generally is not a means implied by the end, in Broome's sense. Someone who seeks to make breakfast may, simply, make some eggs, because making eggs is a means to making breakfast and it is, say, the first thing one thinks to do.[5] There need then be nothing wrong with the inference to making (or intending to make) some eggs, even if it does not pass through the recognition that making eggs *or* having oatmeal *or* having yogurt is necessary if one is to have breakfast. If Broome's requirement is fundamental, then there would seem to be something, if not wrong, then peripheral about the case in which one simply chooses a means that is sufficient but not itself necessary for one's end. But such a case is not peripheral at all. It is as ordinary as anything.

One might try representing the disjunction of specific means differently, in cases where the agent (reasonably, it seems) does not consider every alternative. One could say that what is a means implied by the end *e* is, say: *p* or some other means to *e*. But if the move from the disjunction to intending that *p* is not in general to be reckoned reasoning—as it seems it will not be, on Broome's account, in the absence of the judgment that *p* is the uniquely best means to *e*—then this suggestion would represent the formation of an intention to bring about *p* or some other means to *e* as the fundamental work that reasoning does in the selection of a sufficient means. But that step is all but trivial. On the face of it,

[5] It will also need to be the case, as is easy to imagine, that there is nothing wrong with making eggs in one's particular circumstances.

I'd like to make breakfast.

Making eggs is a means to making breakfast.

So I'll make eggs.

is a representation of a *non-trivial* bit of thought in which one engages in deciding to make some eggs. (Some of the further questions which such a formulation raises will be addressed below.) Broome's prioritization of the notion of a necessary means renders this inference questionable, elliptical, or non-central, while it seems to be none of those things.[6]

Although (as I have argued in Chapter 1) the course of an agent's active reasoning is at best a defeasible indicator of the content of the agent's rationale, it is instructive in this case to consider the fact that one often—even generally—acts without considering the full variety of alternative means available. This suggests that the necessity of Broome's disjunction is not part of the justification of—the rationale for or practical inference to—one's action. (Of course, it would not often be mentioned if one were asked why one took some specific means.) Broome and Paul both seem to privilege in their accounts a certain kind of choice situation—one in which an agent has been apprised of *all* of the options available to her before acting. In such a case, it looks like the only reasoning for one to do is to select the best of those means, or one of the best. But common as the assumption is that deliberation is a matter of choosing the best among several options, the case in which one does so really seems to be special.

This makes sense if we consider what instrumental reasoning *is*. It is reasoning aimed at the realization of some end. Fundamentally, in instrumental reasoning one seeks to answer, for some action φ-ing, the question *how to φ*. One *may* come up with several answers to this question and then choose among them according to some principle. But one need not do so; one's aim of φ-

[6] My thinking on the primacy of the notion of a sufficient means has been shaped substantially by Anscombe (2006a, 120-121) and Bridges (ms.).

ing, after all, will be served even if one does not apprise oneself of several candidate means and choose among them. The work that is *essential* to deliberation, it seems, is the discovery of means that suffice for, or at least contribute to, one's end. (Several sufficient means must be found, of course, if one is to compare them in the first place!)[7]

What would lead one to suspect that inference to sufficient means should be understood in terms of inference to necessary means? There is at least this connection: one will consider what suffices for one's end only if one needs to do so—that is, only if one is unable to attain one's end immediately, without deliberation. There is often, that is, a necessity of finding *some* means to one's end, if one is to obtain it at all; deliberation, in other words, is frequently itself a necessary means, even where one has a choice between what would more ordinarily thought of as one's means. But it is not necessary that one recognize and choose among all possible means to one's end.

Now, if the fundamental form of instrumental inference is inference to sufficient means, and not to necessary means, will we be able to understand inference to necessary means? It seems that we will be able to do so. The felt pressure to intend to ψ, when one wishes to φ and takes it to be the case that one will not φ unless one ψ-s, is a result of the fact that any answer to the question of how to φ will include ψ-ing.

Some means are necessary but not sufficient. For instance, it is necessary, if one is to save one's baseball card collection, to enter the flaming house. Yet entering the flaming house is not

[7] Does rationality require one to select the *best* means? As Bridges (ms.) argues, what makes a means good at all is its sufficiency for one's end. Those means that equally suffice for the end are thus equally good. Sometimes, though not always, one's ends are comparative in character: one wants, say *to get downtown as quickly as possible*. (Even this is rare; often one simply wants, say, *to get downtown before 4:00 pm*.) Then one can judge certain means to be better than others. But such a comparison of potential means is still made by reference to their sufficiency for the end in question, and it does not follow that there is any neutral sense in which any means whatever can be compared; the comparison is in respect of whatever one is trying, in that case, to maximize. There may be no single correct way to decide tradeoffs between, say, time, cost, and effort.

enough. To save the baseball cards, one must also do some other things too, and it may be doubtful whether anything within one's power will, in conjunction entering the flaming house, suffice for the saving of the baseball cards. They just might be doomed. If it were evident that they were doomed, that nothing one could do would suffice for one's end, then it would not be reasonable to intend what was *merely* necessary for one's end. We see then that the notion of sufficiency must be in the background even where there is inference to necessary means; one must at least have some plan, or think or hope one can find some plan, for attaining one's end, if one is to reasonably decide to do even what is *necessary* for attaining that end.

### 4.3 Inference to Sufficient Means

How, then, should we understand inference to sufficient means? More particularly, how should we understand the *form* that such an inference takes? G. E. M. Anscombe, in her wide-ranging later paper "Practical Inference," makes a proposal. She suggests that the form is in fact just that of ordinary deductive inference—although the assimilation works differently, of course, than what we have just seen attempted in regard to necessary means. In this section, I will consider what leads Anscombe to this account and ask whether it should be accepted.

In "Practical Inference," Anscombe officially revises a view she defended in *Intention*, concerning the nature of practical inference and its distinction from theoretical inference.[8] In *Intention*, Anscombe denies that a difference in *content* is enough to distinguish practical from theoretical inferences. Instead, she writes:

[8] Originally published "Von Wright on Practical Inference" in 1974, the paper was republished in 1995 in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral* Theory and then again in 2006 in Anscombe's posthumous *Human Life, Action and Ethics* (cited here).

> There is a difference of form between reasoning leading to action and reasoning for the truth of a conclusion. Aristotle however liked to stress the similarity between the kinds of reasoning, saying that what 'happens' is the same in both. There are indeed three types of case. There is the theoretical syllogism and also the idle practical syllogism which is just a classroom example. In both of these the conclusion is 'said' by the mind which infers it. And there is the practical syllogism proper. Here the conclusion is an action whose point is shewn by the premises, which are now, so to speak, on active service. (2000, 60)

What does it mean to call the difference between practical and theoretical inference a difference in form? The notion of form at work is logical; theoretical and practical inferences differ in *validity*.[9] They differ in what condition they need to meet to have the kind of inferential goodness which goes by that title. On the assumption of the premises, a theoretical inference needs to show the truth of a conclusion, while a practical syllogism needs to show the point of an action. They differ also in what sort of thing is their conclusion: on the one hand a belief, on the other an action.

So what Anscombe comes to relinquish is this idea that their respective sorts of validity is what distinguishes practical from theoretical inferences. Why? Negatively, Anscombe examines and finds wanting the attempts of philosophers such as Hare (1964, 17-31) and Kenny (1966) to provide logics of practical inference (2006, 120-123). Practical inference (which Anscombe here restricts to instrumental inference) simply does not seem to bear a specifiable form of validity—and that seems odd, given how straightforward it is (relatively speaking) to specify a form for deductive inference.

[9] So, at least, Anscombe puts in in the later paper.

Positively, Anscombe develops a particular example and professes to discover in it that the form of practical inference is simply ordinary deductive validity. Her example is of a man trying to assemble one of several committees (2006a, 123-127). Her idea seems to be that, in such instrumental reasoning, what the man is looking to do is to *make it true* that his end obtains—and he evidently will do that by satisfying some sufficient set of truth conditions for the end. Accordingly it looks like what it is for his practical inference to be valid is simply what it is for a corresponding theoretical inference to be valid.

And so, Anscombe concludes, practical and theoretical inferences need not be taken to differ in form.[10] She writes that "[w]e can represent any inference by setting forth a set of hypothetical considerations," such as

If *p*, *q*.

If *q*, *r*.

so that the considerations comprising practical and theoretical inferences are "exactly" or "just" the same and only differ in the "use" or "service" to which they are put. These considerations, she says, could be used to assert *r*, if one can assert *p*, or to make *r* true, if one can make *p* true (Anscombe 2006a, 128). In this sense, she comes to say, practical and theoretical inference do not differ in form.

Anscombe has introduced two ideas here. Let us call the idea that practical and theoretical inference do not differ in form *formal monism*.[11] Let us call the idea that practical and theoretical

[10] Will Small helpfully traces Anscombe's development of this view from her consideration of what he calls Kenny's "logicist formalism" (2021, 262-263).

[11] Although Anscombe says that she must "make amends" to Aristotle (2006a, 132), it is perhaps more likely that, in joining the teleological conception to formal monism, she has in mind Aquinas, for Aquinas is less ambiguous than Aristotle in expressing a teleological conception of practical reason in terms similar to Anscombe's. As I have mentioned, he explicitly holds that theoretical and practical reason are distinguished by their ends. Moreover, in him, one finds the doctrine that the very same knowledge might be ordered, alternately, to speculative or to practical ends (1920, I q. 14 a. 16c). On the other hand, while Aquinas does hold that the same knowledge that is put to work in action might alternatively be "contemplated," he there also argues that knowledge can be called practical or theoretical

inference are distinguished by the uses to which they are put—or by their teleology—*the teleological conception of practical inference*.[12]

Anscombe's adoption of formal monism raises the question how much of *Intention*'s conception of practical inference she means to give up. Indeed, *Intention* claims not only that practical and theoretical inferences differ with respect to their form or validity, but that the representation of action in practical thinking, which corresponds to the premises of practical inferences, has a distinctive form. As Anscombe puts it, "'intentional' refers to a *form* of description of events" (2000, 84; cf Thompson 2008, 85-146; 2011). It is hard to see how this claim could be independent of the thesis that practical and theoretical inferences differ in form. For, according to one influential and plausible way of thinking about the matter, the logical form of a proposition just is its structure insofar as it bears on inference, and it is only in light of propositional structure that one can frame the question of how an inference's constituent propositions need be related if it is to be valid (cp. Frege 1997, 48-49).

The claim that 'intentional' refers to a form of description of events plays a key role in *Intention*. At what is evidently its climax, Anscombe claims that

> where (*a*) the description of an event is of a type to be formally the description of an executed intention (*b*) the event is actually the execution of an intention (by our criteria) then the account given by Aquinas of the nature of practical knowledge holds: Practical knowledge is 'the cause of what it understands', unlike 'speculative' knowledge, which 'is derived from the objects known'. This means

not just with respect to is object and its end, but also with respect to its "mode": knowledge is practical with respect to its mode when it concerns "how" an end is to be brought about.

[12] I leave open the question of what exactly it means to say that an inference is put to one use or another. I will just note that the teleological conception of practical inference does not as such concern the contents of inferences; it is not the thesis that will in effect be under consideration later in this chapter, that reasons for actions are all *ends*.

> more than that practical knowledge is observed to be a necessary condition of the production of various results; or that an idea of doing such-and-such in such-and-such ways is such a condition. It means that without it what happens does not come under the description—execution of intentions—whose characteristics we have been investigating. (2000, 87-88)

When someone exercises practical knowledge, "what he effects is formally characterised as subject to our question 'Why?' whose application displays the A—D order which we discovered," and the man thinks of his action as such (2000, 88).[13] According to *Intention*, the agent's thought about her action itself has a distinctive form, which in part means that it stands in distinctive inferential relations. So this idea seems, at least, inseparable from a formal *pluralism* about theoretical and practical inference. Yet Anscombe, while signaling a change in view, does not discuss the extent to which the core claims of *Intention* may be retained.

Will Small has argued in some detail that Anscombe's later account of inference in fact does give too much up. Core to his argument is the need for distinguishing, as Anscombe in her later account does not, between *p*'s *being a sufficient means to q* and *p*'s *being sufficient for q* (2021, 266-267). For instance, *my running quickly* is sufficient for *my running,* but is not of course a means to my running; and in general there can be conditions (say, that *p*) that will obtain only if *q* (so that it is true that if *p*, then *q*) that are not means to *q*. It is not, Small concludes, the material conditional 'if *p*, then *q*' but the *practical* conditional "doing A is a means of doing B" that must figure as premise in practical inferences, and "the concept of a 'way' or 'means' is a *formal* concept of *practical* thinking: a practical conditional 'connective' that is a specific determination of '⊃'" (2021, 268).

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[13] The "A—D order" is the order of means and ends in an intentional action. Cf. Anscombe (2000, 37-47); Schwenkler (2019, 63-76).

We are to understand the meaning of this means-end premise “doing A is a way of doing B” precisely by considering the aim of practical thinking: action. Small writes:

> The teleological conception of practicality takes seriously the idea that practical reasoning is for the sake of realizing in action the objective that is its starting point. And taking this seriously requires more than just asserting that the conclusion ‘is an action’: we need to think about what intentional action is, and what its subjective conditions of possibility are, in order to understand what kind of practical thought it is the function of practical reasoning to deliver. (2021, 272)

He sees this task better executed by *Intention* than by “Practical Inference.” On his account, such a premise as “doing A is a way of doing B” is formally distinct in a variety of ways from a mere material conditional. For instance, it is only true, and only practical, if doing A is itself practicable for the agent; it is only true if it is believed by the agent; and its truth must be certified by perception (Small 2021, 267-273).

In *Intention*, Anscombe argues that practical inference, though it *has* a characteristic content (namely, it concerns future contingents within one’s power), is not distinguished by its content but rather by its form. It may be, likewise, that practical inference has a characteristic form, even though it is distinguished not by its form but by its teleology. The distinction in use between practical and theoretical inference may indeed *explain why* practical inference has a characteristic form:

> Practical reasoning itself distinguishes itself from theoretical reasoning through its teleology. Thus far Anscombe is correct. But that practical reasoning distinguishes itself from theoretical reasoning by its teleology does not mean that it does not have a distinctively practical form, or that it is a matter of indifference whether this is

acknowledged. It has a significantly different form: and its formal differences are determined by its distinctively practical function. (Small 2021, 283)

An analogy may be helpful in this regard. A stone and a hammer may both be used to hammer. But the hammer, unlike the stone, is structured the way it is because it is for the sake of hammering nails. The stone and the hammer, one might say, differ in in the character of their teleology; they differ as regards whether their being for the sake of hammering is accidental or intrinsic to them. A stone is used, by some agent, to hammer, while the hammer is such as to be suitable for hammering. The same distinction might be employed in the context of thought and talk. I might use a word because I think that it will evoke a certain thought *in you in particular*, but that is very different from using a word *to mean* what the word standardly means. Anscombe, in her later paper, effectively gives practical thought an accidental teleology, for she assumes that one and the same inference might be put to practical or theoretical use. But if Small is right, then we might say that the teleology of practical thought is in fact intrinsic to its form, and so that the teleological conception of practical inference is not only separable from formal monism, but properly understood serves to show why formal monism is false.

Thus, while the notion of a sufficient means is central to instrumental inference, it cannot simply be understood simply in terms of logical sufficiency. The form of instrumental inference must rather be put this way:

I'll φ.

ψ-ing is a means of φ-ing.

So I'll ψ.

## 4.4 Anscombe on Backwards-Looking Motives

The formal concept of a means characterizes *at least some* of the premises of practical inferences. What other premises might practical inferences might have? Situational reasons are obvious candidates. Those are, again, considerations of particular facts about one's situation such as that one promised to φ, that A is in need, that X is dangerous, and so on (cf. Section 2.4).

Anscombe considers and rejects the idea that there is inference from situational reasons—or what she called backward-looking motives. On her view, in both *Intention* and the later "Practical Inference," practical inference is calculative or instrumental. She indeed acknowledges that some of what seems to be practical inference does not fit the schema of instrumental reasoning:

> 'I want a Jersey cow; there are good ones in the Hereford market, so I'll go there' would seem to be practical reasoning too. Or 'If I invite both X and Y, there'll be a strained atmosphere in view of what X has recently said about Y and how Y feels about it—so I'll just ask X'. Or again 'So-and-so was very pleasant last time we met, so I'll pay him a visit'. (2000, 62)

Yet her ultimate stance is that these are *not* inferences, for they do not involve "calculation," and "[t]he mark of practical reasoning is that the thing wanted is *at a distance* from the immediate action, and the immediate action is calculated as the way of getting or doing or securing the thing wanted" (2000, 65-67, 79).[14]

Anscombe speaks of "the thing wanted." She indeed argues that desire is necessary for action. In regard to the above examples, she writes:

> Now Aristotle would have remarked that it is mere 'desire' in a special sense (ἐπιθυμία) that prompts the action in the last case; the mark of this is that the

[14] Presumably, Anscombe meant to be capturing Aristotle's idea that deliberation concerns not the end but "what is toward the end" (*NE*, III.3*).

> premise refers to something merely as pleasant. The point that he is making here is, however, rather alien to us, since we do not make much distinction between one sort of desire and another, and *we should say: isn't it desire in some sense* [ὄρεξις]—*i.e. wanting—that prompts the action in all the cases?* And 'all cases', of course, includes ones that have as large an apparatus as one pleases of generalisations about morals, or medicine, or cookery, or methods of study, or methods of getting votes or securing law and order, together with the identification of cases. (2000, 62-63, emphasis added)

Further, she writes:

> I am not saying that there cannot be any such thing as moral general premises, such as 'People have a duty of paying their employees promptly', or Huckleberry Finn's conviction, which he failed to make his premise: 'White boys ought to give runaway slaves up'; obviously there can, but it is clear that such general premises will only occur as premises of practical reasoning in people who want to do their duty. (2000, 78)

This claim is controversial. For while Anscombe clearly means to be saying something substantive here, it has been argued by a variety of philosophers that it is either false or trivial to hold that all action is prompted by desire.

I will return in what follows to the question of what role desire has in practical inference and in action. For now, I want to note that despite Anscombe's holding that desire is necessary for practical inference, she denies that any given practical inference must have a premise *stating* that one desires something. "[I]t is misleading," she says, "to put 'I want' into a premise if we are giving a formal account of practical reasoning."

> To understand this, we need to realise that not everything that I have described as coming in the range of 'reasons for acting' can have a place as a premise in a practical syllogism. E.g. 'He killed my father, so I shall kill him' is not a form of reasoning at all; nor is 'I admire him so much, I shall sign the petition he is sponsoring'. The difference is that there is no calculation in these. The conjunction 'so' is not necessarily a mark of calculation. (2000, 65)

The argument that Anscombe is making here might seem to beg important questions. Is "calculation" simply *defined* in terms of instrumental inference? If so, then whence the contestable requirement that practical inferences involve calculation? And if not, then who is to say that inference from situational or backwards-looking reasons is not calculation?

Anscombe's argument does seem to me to be question-begging in this way. She says too little for it to be compelling. But I think it is possible to develop her remarks into another sort of argument, if only a negative one, against counting situational reasons as premises to practical inferences.

Anscombe makes the point that both "I want a Jersey cow" and "He killed my father" can be reasons for action, in the sense that they are answers which do not refuse the question 'Why?' by which she delimits the class of intentional actions. (I will shortly have more to say about Anscombe's question 'Why?'.) Nevertheless it would be a mistake to include a fact about what one wants as a premise in a practical inference. That is what Anscombe is here trying to show; but if we established that point independently, then we might appeal to it to generate some grounds for questioning in addition whether situational reasons are premises to practical inferences. That is the argument I will now develop, on Anscombe's behalf.

How could we establish independently that it is a mistake, "if we are giving a formal account of practical reasoning," to include a fact about what one wants as a premise in a practical inference? Well, we can consider a case where a fact about what one wants *is* a premise to a practical inference, and see that it is not what we were after, in accounting for the necessary role of desire in action. Consider this example that Anscombe in "Practical Inference" attributes to Anselm Müller:

> Anyone who wants to kill his parents will be helped to get rid of this trouble by consulting a psychiatrist.
>
> I want to kill my parents.
>
> If I consult a psychiatrist I shall be helped to get rid of this trouble.
>
> *NN* is a psychiatrist.
>
> So I'll consult *NN*. (2006a, 115)

Here, the agent's wanting something is a premise to a practical inference, and yet the tendency of the inference is *not* to the obtaining of the thing said to be wanted, but to the avoidance of it. The fact that one wants to kill one's parents is part of the fact situation, as it were. In other words, "the thing wanted," in the relevant sense, is *not*: to kill one's parents. It is, rather: to get rid of this trouble. The example shows that the role of the thing wanted is not aptly captured by including the fact of its being wanted as a premise. So—according to the argument I am imagining—it is a mistake to hold that if something is a reason for action (in the sense of being an answer that does not reject Anscombe's question 'Why?') then it is a premise to a practical inference.

So conceived, the argument is purely negative. Its conclusion could be admitted while still holding, on different grounds, that there are inferences from situational reasons. I would like to produce such grounds. Namely, I want to argue that Anscombe herself is committed to holding that

situational (or backwards-looking) reasons are premises of arguments, for otherwise she will lack the resources to identify them as a positive answer to her question ‘Why?’.

Anscombe, famously, seeks to characterize the class of intentional actions as those to which a certain sense of the question ‘Why?’ is applicable (2000, 9-28). She specifies the sense of this question by surveying the sorts of positive answers it can receive. Its positive answers, intuitively, give reasons for action, although Anscombe takes that characterization to be unhelpful for her project—for explaining what a reason for action is and explaining her sense of the question ‘Why?’ are commensurate tasks (cf. 2000, 10).

One type of positive answer to the question ‘Why?’ is, as it were, future-tensed.[15] To recognize such an answer as an admission of the question ‘Why?’, Anscombe thinks it suffices to note its future tense—its reference to an unrealized future possibility (relative to the time of the action). This on its own distinguishes an answer identifying what she calls a *forward-looking motive* (an intention or aim) from other answers to the question ‘Why?’. But the same is not true of the past tense and what Anscombe calls *backwards-looking motives.* Most importantly, a backwards-looking motive must be distinguished from what Anscombe calls a *mental cause*—for example:

—Why did you knock the cup off the table?

—I saw such-and-such and *it made me jump*. (2000, 16)

So the class of backwards-looking motives is not sufficiently distinguished by appeal to the past tense of the answer to the question “Why?”. Nor does so-called knowledge without observation suffice as a differentia, for in the cases of both backwards-looking motivation and of mental causes,

[15] ‘As it were’ because answers need not be literally future-tensed, but may name something future, say, infinitively or using the present progressive. For instance, in reply to the question “Why are you going upstairs?”, ‘future-tensed’ answers would include “I am getting my camera” and “(In order) to get my camera.” Other answers may just suggest the relevant future-tensed answer; e.g., “My camera is up there.”

the agent "knows without observation" 'why' she acted as she did—she is able to say, straight off, without needing to check, why she killed him or knocked the cup off the table.[16]

What does distinguish backwards-looking motives from mental causes, Anscombe says, is the involvement in the former of the ideas of good and evil (2000, 22). We can understand what she has in mind if we attend to her examples of backward-looking motives: revenge, gratitude, remorse, and pity. We have already imagined a bit of dialogue characteristic of revenge, and it is easy to imagine dialogue corresponding to the rest of Anscombe's backwards-looking motives. In each case, the intelligibility of the answers to the question "Why?" depends on certain of the agent's beliefs about good and evil. Revenge, for instance, requires that you take yourself to have been harmed by someone in some way; if you come to be persuaded that you were not after all harmed, then the motive ceases to make your action intelligible.[17] And it requires that you take what you try to do in response to be harmful to your target; if you come to be persuaded that your action will not harm your target, then again your answer ceases to rationalize your action. Mental causality is not like this. One's account of why one jumped ("I saw a face in the window") is not undermined if someone says that there was no face in the window, or that such face in the window is no occasion for jumping.

Anscombe does not say whether she thinks her list of backwards-looking motives is exhaustive. It seems not to be. Indeed the motives she has selected seem to form only a very small sample of what should be regarded as backwards-looking motives. What I have called situational reasons seem to be examples of backwards-looking motives. As we have seen, Foot's work is itself

[16] There are other past-tense answers to the question 'Why?' that are not even known without observation. Cf. Anscombe's (a) and (b) (2000, 13). But these are even more so than mental causes disqualified from being backwards-looking motives.
[17] It is of course not unfamiliar that one's resentment lingers even though one appreciates that its target has been sufficiently excused, but this lingering resentment is recognizably inapt.

based on Anscombe's (1969) treatment of promising. To fulfill a promise is to act for a certain kind of reason, in conformity with a certain language-game, whose structure basically takes this form:

—Why are you φ-ing?

—Because I promised A that I would φ.

Obviously, this answer does not cite a mental cause. But good and evil are not involved here—not, at least, in the straightforward and clear way in which they are involved in revenge, gratitude, remorse, and pity.[18] To take another example from *Intention*, one might do something "because he told me to" (2000, 23). Anscombe wonders whether this is a cause or a reason, and she concludes that it depends on the case. If so, then when it is a reason, what kind of reason is it? It must be a backward-looking reason, but again good and evil are not straightforwardly involved in it. So the involvement of the ideas of good and evil are not necessary for backwards-looking motivation. Nor, for that matter, is it sufficient. The thought of all the evil in the world, for instance, or of the horrible thing A did, could very well serve as mental causes in Anscombe's sense.

Yet the distinction between backwards-looking motive and mental cause is evidently a real one. What *does* distinguish backwards-looking motives from mental causes, I want to suggest, is that backwards-looking motives can sensibly *be argued against*. In Anscombe's examples, the *way* in which they would be argued against is by calling into question certain facts about good or evil. In other cases, they would be undermined in different ways, depending on the pattern of backward-looking motivation in question. For instance, the following might undermine someone's doing something because she promised:

—A released you from your promise—didn't you hear?

[18] Promises *can* be undermined, but they are not undermined *simply* by the fact that the action one has promised to perform turns out, one thinks, not to be good. It is, in fact, as Anscombe argues, the *point* of the institution of promising to secure our doing what we otherwise would not take ourselves at the time of performance to have any reason to do.

—Surely A wouldn't mind, given the circumstances, if you don't keep the promise.

—*That* hardly counts as keeping your promise.

The specific examples Anscombe considers—again, revenge, gratitude, remorse, and pity—make sense only if the agent is taken to have certain thoughts about the good and evil of actions. That is, good and evil are part of the *form* the bearing of which constitutes motivation as revenge, gratitude, remorse, or pity. This is why contesting those thoughts about good and evil can call into question the agent's motive and can potentially undermine it. But if that is right, then why should not *other* ideas be characteristic of *other* patterns of motivation? Even Anscombe's examples bear out, then, that backward-looking motives are distinguished from mental causes in that they *can be argued against*, on the basis of whether they really conform to some pattern characteristic of them.

This is to say that it is a distinguishing mark of situational or backwards-looking reasons that they are in the space of *arguments*, for it is arguments that can be argued against. In other words, the backward-looking or situational inferences that Anscombe said were not reasonings *are* reasonings—they are syllogisms, or rationales, or arguments for actions. So Anscombe should acknowledge that it can be inference to conclude that it is worthwhile to φ on the basis of *facts* rather than on the basis of the conduciveness of φ-ing to one's unrealized *aims*.[19]

## 4.5 Situational Inference

Anscombe calls the motives or reasons in question 'backwards-looking' because she takes them to be past-tense in expression, but as Müller (2011) points out, this seems not to be essential to the relevant form of motivation. One might do something because, e.g., A needs help. Accordingly, in

[19] Müller (2011) argues that backwards-looking inference must be regarded as an important, even fundamental, sort of practical inference.

Chapter 2, I denominated such reasons *situational*. We can say, then, that a *situational inference* is an inference of the abstract form:

*p*.

So I'll φ.

It is an inference from some fact, a situational reason, to an action (or, if you like, to an intention, or to an evaluative belief; cf. Section 1.6).

As I indicated at the outset, situational and instrumental inferences are *components* of practical inference. They are generally, that is to say, combined:

*p*.

So I'll φ.

ψ-ing is a means of φ-ing.

So I'll ψ.[20]

There are various more determinate forms of situational inference; they may be enumerated by considering the sorts of facts on the basis of which one must act, if one is to count as acting from a motive such as justice, fairness, charity, revenge, gratitude, and so on. To act from such motives requires treating one kind of reason or another as ultimate. One can give someone what she is owed for reasons of convenience, say, but one only counts as doing it from justice if one's reason is *that she is owed it*.

Is situational inference a distinctive kind of inference indeed, or might it be assimilated to instrumental inference? Take, for instance, this ostensibly situational inference:

I promised to φ.

[20] This is not to suggest that there must be a situational reason for every action. I don't mean to pass judgment on that thesis. Perhaps one simply pursues an end that one finds desirable. On the other hand, perhaps such cases should be understood as bearing a situational form.

So I'll φ.

This might be cast in non-situational form by characterizing the keeping of one's promise as one's end:

I'd like to keep my promise to φ.[21]

φ-ing is a means to keeping my promise to φ.

So I'll φ.

A parallel treatment might be proposed for each type of purportedly situational inference.

Müller resists such assimilations. He writes:

> [T]he two conceptions of your reason for doing what you promised are not on a par. The *teleological* [or instrumentalizing] interpretation of promise-keeping identifies an aim of φ-ing—viz., keeping the promise—that can itself be specified only in terms of an *already acknowledged backward-looking reason*. In the specification of this *backward*-looking reason, on the other hand, no comparable reference to a forward-looking reason is involved. Even if the rationality of promise-keeping is viewed as forward-looking, the priority of its backward-looking rationality has to be acknowledged. (2011, 260-261)

There seem to be two ways of understanding this point. On the one hand, one might think that the existence of a concept such as that of taking revenge—as the sort of thing that might be made into one's end—depends itself on the existence of a pattern of inference according to which a person harms someone simply because he has harmed her. On the other hand, one might think that the

[21] I use the 'I'd like …' form here to signify one's end, subject to the qualifications of the previous section that the fact of one's wanting something is not itself, properly speaking, a premise to one's inference. Cf. Anscombe (2006a, 116): "there is a good deal of point in having the end somehow specified if we want to study the form."

ascription to an agent of an instrumentalizing, non-situational form inference itself depends on the agent's also, and more fundamentally, being motivated by a situational reason.

Both ways of understanding the point seem to me to be correct. One *can* make something like the taking of revenge one's end. But this is only because there is such a thing as taking revenge: to harm someone because he harmed you. Moreover, you will only succeed in taking revenge if you are motivated by the relevant sort of situational reason. One might, a bit grotesquely, imagine that someone wishes to take revenge (perhaps she wants to know what it feels like), but simply is unable to possess the requisite motivation; she can rehearse the above syllogism, but ultimately she kills the man *not* because he killed her father (though he did and she knows it) but only out of a fruitless attempt to take revenge. She does not, as it were, feel it. She will not really count as taking revenge, due to the absence of the relevant situational reason.

That said, I consider to be relatively academic the question whether situational inferences can be paraphrased without remainder in non-situational terms. What is important for the understanding of practical rationality is that, however situational inferences are to be understood, many of our ends are *situation-sensitive*. Even if the paraphrases are acceptable, it is still true that there are cases where my end is, say, to φ, *because* I recognize that *p*—I wish to kill him, for instance, because he killed my father, or I wish to help her, because she is in need. This phenomenon is sufficiently distinctive to merit its own name.

## 4.6 Faults in Judgment

The stock examples we have seen so far might suggest that situational inference is a relatively straightforward matter. I promised to φ, so I'll φ; she deserves X, so I'll give it to her; and so on. There might seem to be little that can go *wrong* in situational inference—besides not drawing the

relevant inference at all, when one should, or drawing an inference that one shouldn't, like the inference that characterizes revenge. Perhaps that is why Anscombe denies that backwards-looking motivation involves 'calculation'. In any case, this impression is mistaken. The drawing of a situational inference is sometimes complex and difficult.

I will illustrate what I have in mind here by example. Suppose that you have damaged someone else's property. In recognition of this, you might decide to give recompense. But what sort of recompense are you to give? Repairing the damage might be impossible. Doing nothing will in many cases be inappropriate. But if you have not altogether destroyed the property, then replacement may well not be appropriate either (and anyway, replacement will sometimes be impossible). Sometimes an apology will suffice, but not always. So what are you to do?

*In the abstract*, there is evidently no answer to give to this question. It depends on the facts. And there will be no simple way of specifying just how it depends on the facts. Yet in at least a wide range of cases, agents will agree that at least certain sorts of responses are inappropriate. In other cases, there will be less consensus, but still space for right and wrong; those who are capable of making such determinations we credit with sound judgment or—I want to say—wisdom.

Let us put the point this way. There are relatively abstract forms of situational inference. For instance:

I damaged A's property.

So I'll give recompense.

Such a pattern of inference cannot be applied except by being made more specific—for there is no such thing as *simply* giving recompense; there is only giving recompense in a specific sort of way, in light of a specific kind of wrong one takes oneself to have committed. So, for instance, one might infer:

I scratched the chassis of A's bicycle.

So I'll profusely apologize and inquire whether I can somehow make up for it.

Some attempts at instantiating the pattern will be inappropriate. For instance:

I scratched the chassis of A's bicycle.

So I'll replace the whole thing.

This is, presumably, as far as justice is concerned, excessive. The inference in question, accordingly, might be thought to possess a kind of invalidity; the response does not actually 'follow' from the relevant situational consideration, though it is meant to do so, and to certain agents might seem to do so.[22]

There is another—related—dimension of complexity involved in this example and in situational inference generally. As I've said, the appropriate response depends on *the facts*. It is an oversimplification to cite a single situational reason in any given case, for there are generally other relevant facts which will bear upon the appropriateness of one's response. Whether it is appropriate to give a certain kind of recompense depends, for instance, on one's ability to do so. And whether it is appropriate to give recompense *now* as opposed to, say, *later*, depends on what else is going on in one's situation. Perhaps one's resources and attention are, at the moment, more urgently required by one's child. In general, there may be rival situational considerations in play in a given

[22] An equivalent point could be made if one favors an instrumentalizing paraphrase of situational inferences, of the sort mooted in the previous section. We might then formulate the inference:

I'd like to give recompense for scratching the chassis of A's bicycle.

Profusely apologizing and inquiring whether I can make up for it is giving recompense.

So I'll profusely apologize and inquire whether I can make up for it.

Here we must say: what calls for sound judgment is the recognition of the truth of the relevant instrumental belief. In either case, it may be far from straightforward to recognize what is the thing to do, on the basis of what one's situation is like.

situation which suggest altogether different sorts of response. It takes wisdom to be able to see what to do when confronted with a complex situation.[23]

Adapting a term from John McDowell, we might say that the canons of validity of situational inference are not, in general, *codifiable* (2001a, 57-58). As he says:

> If one attempted to reduce one's conception of what virtue requires to a set of rules, then, however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong—and not necessarily because one had changed one's mind; rather, one's mind on the matter was not susceptible of capture in any universal formula. (2001a, 58)

But this lack of codifiability does not undermine the possibility that there are correct and incorrect responses to one's situation. We would face, no doubt, parallel difficulties in theoretical contexts, if we tried to draw up guidelines for deciding what to believe—but that does not defeat the prospect of soundness in theoretical judgment.

Let us summarize this discussion by saying that one kind of fault which someone can commit in the drawing of a situational inference is a fault in judgment. Someone commits a *fault in judgment* if she φ-s because *p* while φ-ing is not really an appropriate response to the fact that *p*—if "*p*, so I'll φ" is an invalid inference.

[23] Hence, in a full accounting of the thought that goes into action, it may be necessary to cite countervailing considerations—considerations *in spite of which* one takes some response to be appropriate.

## 4.7 Faults in Motivation

As I noted at the beginning of the previous section, faults in judgment seem not to be the only possible fault in situational inference. An agent can also be inadequately motivated; she can, despite appreciating a situational reason and the availability of some relevant inference, fail to draw it. The fact that this is a distinct sort of mistake, and needs to be recognized as such, is, I want to say, part of the basis for drawing some important distinctions made within the Aristotelian tradition: distinctions between wisdom and virtues of character, between wisdom and cleverness, and between practical reason and the will.[24]

On what is called the neo-Humean theory of motivation, actions are caused by reasons for action, where a reason for action includes a desire or some other "pro-attitude" (Davidson 2001; Smith 1987). I am interested here not in the neo-Humean theory but in the prominent reaction against it. Namely, it has been frequently suggested that it is either false or trivial to hold that desire is necessary for action. T. M. Scanlon, for instance, writes:

> Rationality involves systematic connections between a person's judgments and his or her subsequent attitudes. A rational person who judges there to be sufficient grounds for believing that P normally has that belief, and this judgment is normally sufficient explanation for so believing. There is no need to appeal to some further source of motivation such as "wanting to believe." Similarly, a rational person who judges there to be compelling reason to do A normally forms the intention to do A, and this judgment is sufficient explanation of that intention and of the agent's acting on it (since this action is part of what such an intention involves). There is no need

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[24] The first two of these distinctions are clearly stated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The last is one that is advisedly ascribed to 'the Aristotelian tradition' rather than Aristotle himself, for it has been argued that Aristotle does not have a notion of the will. Cf. MacIntyre (1988, 156), who cites Dihle (1982). The distinction between practical reason and the will is clear in the work of the medieval Aristotelian Thomas Aquinas (1920, Ia q. 79 a. 11; Ia IIae q. 8 a. 1).

> to invoke an additional form of motivation beyond the judgment and the reasons it recognizes, some further force to, as it were, get the limbs in motion. (1998, 33-34)

The idea is that rationality, whether theoretical or practical, consists in the obtaining of the right sort of connections among one's attitudes. If one is rational, then one believes what one takes one to have reason to believe, and one does (or at least intends to do) what one takes one to have reason to do. There may of course be those who do not so believe and so act; we call those people (in what is perhaps a technical sense) irrational. But we do not need to appeal to some other factor, desire, to *explain* why someone believes and does as she, rationally speaking, should. Rationality simply *is* believing and acting as one, rationally speaking, should. This is especially clear, Scanlon points out, in the theoretical case. Why think it is any different in the practical case?

Of course, there does seem to be *something* right in saying, quite generally, that if A φ-s, then she wanted so to φ. That is, someone's φ-ing intentionally simply is a ground for saying that she wanted to φ. It is such a ground even if A finds φ-ing distasteful or in some other way unattractive—even if she φ-s with regret, so that in what is evidently *another* sense of 'want', we would say that she did not want to φ.

Accordingly, there are at least two ways of understanding the claim that desire is necessary for action, corresponding to two senses of 'desire' and 'want'; and this distinction in senses of 'desire' might be drawn in multiple ways. We saw Anscombe above distinguish what the ancient Greeks called ἐπιθυμία (or appetite) from ὄρεξις (or desire in general). Scanlon himself isolates a notion he labels "desire in the directed-attention sense." One *desires to do something in the directed-attention* sense not only if one is inclined towards doing it but, for instance, if one constantly thinks about it, has trouble directing one's attention away from it, feels a so-called prick of desire at the thought of it, and so on (1998, 39-41). And then Thomas Nagel, in a classic

discussion, draws a distinction between motivated and unmotivated desires—those which are themselves had, and those which are not themselves had, *for reasons*. (1978, 29)

These distinctions are, of course, not quite equivalent, but they might be taken to have a similar force: In each case, it would be substantive, though false, to say that desire in the narrower of the senses is necessary for action. Here is how Nagel puts the point:

> The claim that a desire underlies every act is true only if desires are taken to include motivated as well as unmotivated desires, and it is true only in the sense that *whatever* may be the motivation for someone's intentional pursuit of a goal, it becomes in virtue of his pursuit *ipso facto* appropriate to ascribe to him a desire for that goal. But if the desire is a motivated one, the explanation of it will be the same as the explanation of his pursuit, and it is by no means obvious that a desire must enter into this further explanation. (1978, 29)

Similarly, what Aristotle calls appetite and what Scanlon calls desire in the directed-attention sense seem not to be present wherever there is action. So it is false to say that desire in any of the narrower senses is necessary for action.

On the other hand, though, it is true, but apparently trivial and uninteresting, to say that desire in any of the contrastingly wider senses is necessary for action; it is ascribed, as Nagel says, simply on the basis of the fact that the agent is pursuing a goal, and does not obviously enter independently into the *explanation* of the agent's pursuit.

From the fact that desire in the wider of the senses is ascribed wherever there is action, though, it does not follow that it is otiose in the explanation of action. For if desire is a *sine qua non* of action, then it may be that one explanation of why someone *didn't* φ is that she didn't—in the wider sense—want to.

And it seems that we should recognize this kind of explanation. It is as recognizable as the possibility of *akrasia*, or weakness of will. As we saw above, there is a possibility of *cognitive* failure, fault in judgment, in the drawing of a situational inference—the possibility of someone's responding in some way, but wrongly, to a situational reason. On the face of it, fault in judgment is not the only sort of failure one can commit; sometimes, one might recognize that some situational consideration calls for response, but fail to do anything in response to it. One is not, so to speak, *willing* so to act.

Let us say, then, that in addition to faults in judgment, there are faults in motivation. Someone commits a *fault in motivation* if she thinks (perhaps wrongly) that she ought to φ because *p* but does not.[25] (The 'ought' here is the conclusive 'ought' of deliberation; cf. Section 2.6.) So, to stick with our example from the previous section, someone who makes inadequate recompense for damaging someone's property commits a fault in judgment, while someone who makes no attempt at recompense at all may commit a fault in motivation.[26] A fault in judgment is a kind of invalidity in one's situational inference. A fault in motivation is a failure to draw any relevant inference. It is arguably a distinguishing mark of practical inference that faults of motivation are possible.[27]

[25] As I indicated in Section 1.6, I mean to remain agnostic on the question of what the conclusion of a practical inference is. This will affect the formulation of the distinction between faults in judgment and faults in character but not, I think, the distinction's substance. The formulation of the distinction in terms of what the agent intends rather than does is straightforward. It is slightly more complicated if one takes the conclusion of practical inference to be evaluative belief; then a fault in motivation will be a failure not to draw an inference but to act on the basis of an evaluative judgment.

[26] I say 'may' here because this will depend on whether the person judges falsely that recompense is unnecessary or simply is not motivated to make any recompense, though she recognizes that some recompense is appropriate. In actual cases, it may be difficult to discern whether to ascribe a fault in judgment or a fault in motivation, for agents might lie, for instance, about whether they really think that recompense is appropriate—or they might believe in bad faith that no recompense is necessary.

[27] The point is contested by those who regard epistemic *akrasia* as possible. Cf. Horowitz (2013).

This distinction sheds some light on Aristotle's defense of the unity of the virtues, the thesis that the virtues are mutually entailing, that having one means having them all. His argument concerns the relationship between wisdom (an intellectual virtue) and the virtues of character (such as courage, temperance, and justice). Aristotle says that the former requires the latter, and the latter the former (2002, 1144b18-33). I wish to formulate the argument in terms of what the different virtues *rectify* or make right. Wisdom ensures that one does not commit faults in judgment, that one recognizes the appropriate responses to the relevant facts. A virtue of character, by contrast, is ascribed on the basis of one's motivation to act in accordance with specific patterns of situational inference. That is why, if virtues are characterized as dispositions to respond *correctly* to a certain class of situational reasons, then the possession of any virtue of character requires the possession of wisdom; one will not be responding correctly if one responds inappropriately, for instance by giving someone less than what she is due. The opposite entailment, from the virtue of wisdom to each virtue of character, can be located in the fact that virtues are general dispositions and must, therefore, prepare an agent to respond to potentially complex situations in which a variety of considerations are at stake (cf. Müller 2004b). So wisdom and the virtues of character are mutually entailing.

Nevertheless, even where one commits a fault in judgment by, say, giving inadequate recompense to someone, one is at least *attempting* to give to her what is due; there is sense to be made then in the ascription of *something like* virtue to someone who is motivated to act in accordance with a certain pattern of situational inference but is not good at finding the appropriate response. Such a person has, say, justice, but in a defective sense.

This account of the distinction between wisdom and the virtues of character also dovetails nicely with Aristotle's distinction between wisdom and cleverness—the capacity to find means to

one's ends (2002, 1144a25-26). Aristotle says that wisdom depends on but is not the same as cleverness, for cleverness can exist in the vicious. It can look as though, for Aristotle, wisdom simply *is* cleverness in a person with the virtues—a person who has the right ends. The fact that the wisdom requires the virtues of character then looks like mere stipulation. But on my view, what wisdom does, over and above cleverness, is enable one to hit the mean in the ends one sets for oneself—it enables one to recognize what, exactly, is an appropriate response to one's situation. This is a substantive task that cleverness does not accomplish. The wise and the unwise in a sense do—but in another important sense do not—have the same ends; they may both be motivated to act, say, justly, but what the unwise person tries to do will not really be what justice requires in his situation.[28]

## 4.8 Practical Reason and the Will

Now, McDowell parlays his denial of codifiability into, in effect, a rejection of the distinction between wisdom and the virtues of character—for he defends the Socratic thesis, against which Aristotle himself sets himself, that virtue of character is a kind of knowledge. Here is McDowell's case for doing so:

> On each of the relevant occasions, the requirement imposed by the situation, and detected by the agent's sensitivity to such requirements, must exhaust his reason for acting as he does. It would disqualify an action from counting as a manifestation of kindness if its agent needed some extraneous incentive to comply with the

[28] This account, accordingly, goes some way towards reconciling Aristotle's often repeated claim that the virtues of character set one's end, with the thesis that scholars have tended to find more attractive—namely, that wisdom sets one's ends. Of course, I do not claim to be expositing Aristotle's view itself, for he did not have a developed account of situational inference; he is, indeed, one of the main foils of Müller (2011) in developing an account of backwards-looking rationality.

> requirement—say, the rewards of a good reputation. So the deliverances of his sensitivity constitute, one by one, complete explanations of the actions that manifest the virtue. Hence, since the sensitivity fully accounts for its deliverances, the sensitivity fully accounts for the actions. But the concept of the virtue is the concept of a state whose possession accounts for the actions that manifest it. Since that explanatory role is filled by the sensitivity, the sensitivity turns out to be what the virtue is. (2001a, 52)

The concern here is similar to Scanlon and Nagel's. It seems that an agent's appreciation of the reasons available to him can fully explain his response to them; in the case of virtuous activity, McDowell adds, this even seems to be required, since appeal to an extraneous factor would seem to disqualify the agent's motivation from being virtuous. Perhaps an extraneous factor may need to be cited where things go wrong, but that should not be taken to shed light on what is necessary for the normal exercise of the power of practical reason. So says Sebastian Rödl:

> In general, a power of knowledge [in this case, practical knowledge] does not yield knowledge when its exercise is impeded. And it may be that the will is impeded in its proper exercise in cases in which one fails to do the thing from the willing of which one reasons practically. Then the fact that it may happen that I reason practically from my will to do *A* without doing *A* has no tendency to show that, when in fact I am doing *A* through reasoning, my reasoning does not on its own account for this. (2011, 221)

Rödl represents a Kantian sort of opposition to distinguishing between practical reason and the will—for it was Kant who proclaimed that "the will is nothing other than practical reason" (2012, 4:412; cf. also Fix 2018).

There is a question, of course, of what we even mean when we speak of the distinction, or indistinction, of powers like practical reason and the will. In speaking of such matters, we are evidently in at least semi-technical territory. I take it that powers are coordinate with certain sorts of *activity*, for a power is a power to *do* (in a broad sense) something. Accordingly, the fact that faults in judgment and faults in motivation are distinct sorts of fault seems to me to suffice for distinguishing powers in which to locate these distinctive sorts of failure, which can come apart.[29]

Part of what motivates the Kantian and neo-Kantian identification of practical reason with the will is, I think it, the sense that the activities of these two powers do *not* come apart. When their activities are identified as, say, practical thought and desire, they sound distinct; but the case for identifying practical reason and the will seems stronger when we ask which of them is the power *to act*—for it seems that this is the office of both. If so, then it might seem hard to resist the identification of practical reason and the will.

I want to accommodate this thought by insisting that desire is not an *extraneous* factor in the explanation of action. In an earlier tradition, represented most famously by Thomas Aquinas, practical reason and the will are distinguished by their distinct objects—respectively, the true and the good.[30] But they are nevertheless intimately related—for practical reason is reason for the sake of action, while the will is the *appetite* of reason (1920, Ia q. 79 a. 11; Ia IIae q. 8 a. 1). As the rational appetite, the will is effectively a *part* of practical reason; it is the inclination that one has to act in a certain way, in accordance with one's thinking. Desire in the relevant sense, then, is not

[29] In response to the familiar argument that someone might be aware of a pertinent fact about the situation without being motivated to act on it, McDowell suggests that the virtuous and the non-virtuous do not really share the same view of the situation: "[I]t is highly implausible that all the concerns that motivate virtuous actions are intelligible, one by one, independently of appreciating a virtuous person's distinctive way of seeing situations" (2001, 71). The suggestion might be put this way: wherever there is a fault in motivation, there is also a fault in judgment. This may well be true—but it does not undermine the distinctions between faults in judgment and faults in motivation and between wisdom and virtue of character, for a fault in motivation does not require that the agent *rightly* appreciate what his situation requires of him.
[30] Cf. Pilsner (2006) on the distinction of powers by their objects in the thought of Aquinas.

some extraneous factor like, say, hunger, but is itself an inclination to act in accordance with thought.

## 4.9 Conclusion

Rödl says that, since he is writing about "the will—a power—I speak (must speak) … only of acts of willing that are perfect as willing, that is, of acts that reveal the nature of the power. It is irrelevant that I may want to do something I ought not to do, or may fail to be doing what I want to do" (2011, 213). From his perspective, it may look as though I have tried to build an account of practical reason and the will out of cases where things go wrong—and this, one might say, is as misguided as it would be to try to develop an account of theoretical reason out of consideration of cases where the subject is hallucinating, or is deceived by an evil demon.

In my defense, I would say that my interest has been somewhat limited. I have wanted to highlight the fact that faults in judgment and faults in motivation are both real and distinct sorts of fault. One might lose sight of this if one develops an account of rationality, as for instance Scanlon does, in terms of doing what one takes oneself to have reason to do; for this might make it look like *irrationality* is just a matter failing to do what one takes oneself to have reason to do. True enough, if one would like to speak that way—the important point, of which I do not want to lose sight, is that there is more than one way of failing to do what one takes oneself to have reason to do. Both ways of so failing might be said to be 'against reason', but they are against it in different senses. I take this to indicate that there are distinct *aspects* of practical correctness, even in the 'good case' where one acts as one should, even when what one does is, in a sense, utterly singular: one acts on the basis of a good rationale.

Parallel considerations apply concerning the unity of the virtues. Why distinguish the virtues at all if, as Aristotle argues, they come together? Well, it is only in their perfect form that they come together. That they come together in their perfect form is, to say the least, an interesting and provocative thesis. But virtue is rarely, if ever, found in its perfect form, and the virtues are distinct in those of us who fall short of virtue. We need to distinguish them, therefore, if we are to know ourselves not just as we might be, but as we are.

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