ABSTRACT

Like the Green Bay Tree: The Necessity of Virtue for Happiness

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It is a generally accepted truth that the wicked flourish, as the psalmist has it,
"like the green bay tree": their evil ways, far from hurting them, actually contribute to
their well-being and vicious contentedness. From Socrates till Kant, on the other hand,
every major moral philosopher believed that a person had to be virtuous to be happy. I
explore why Aristotle accepted this thesis and the role that it played in his account of the
good life, then turn to our contemporary accounts of happiness to determine if our
concept shares any similarities with that employed by Aristotle. Happiness, most
contemporary accounts would have it, is nothing more than a psychological state; I argue
that this is reductive and that we still share much of Aristotle's perspective wherein
happiness tracks objective features of our character and fit with our environment as well.
Even if I am right about happiness, why should we accept that virtue is necessary for
happiness? Joseph Butler, though often misunderstood, provides significant support for
this thesis using specific theistic premises, which, unfortunately, are no longer available
to us today. Bernard Williams and Alasdair MacIntyre, on the other hand, provide a
complex account of ethics that allows us to respond to the serious challenges our central

thesis still faces, most notably cultural relativism and the apparent counterexamples provided by the green bay trees that surround us all. I conclude that there is substantial support for the thesis that some list of virtues, explorable but not entirely known by us, is necessary for the sort of happiness that we are concerned to plan for and achieve in our ethical lives, and that virtue ethics should accept this thesis as it has several important roles to play, especially in education and reflective endorsement. Justice, as a personal virtue, proves an interesting test case as I explore whether it particularly is necessary for happiness.

Like the Green Bay Tree: The Necessity of Virtue for Happiness

by

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A Dissertation

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At the end of this dissertation, I am, in some ways, left at the beginning: still struggling to understand virtue, to be virtuous, and to instill virtue in others. As part of my practice of the virtues of justice, of humility, and of charity, I must acknowledge my deep indebtedness to those whose virtues have helped me to write it.

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To Elizabeth:

with whom I can always keep oceans within reach

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Everyone wants to be happy, but not everyone wants to be good. According to what we will call the necessity thesis, however, it is necessary to be good to attain happiness. It would be swell, we might think, if the necessity thesis were true, but most people seem to find it quite obvious that there are simply too many people like the one observed by the psalmist who writes, "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree."[1]

This quote, or the modified claim that we see the wicked flourish like the green bay tree, has often been used as a quick refutation of the necessity thesis.[2] Simple observation should convince any intelligent person that vice pays, that only the good die young (to quote that other psalmist), or, at the very least, that being wicked is no guarantee of being miserable. Interestingly, the biblical psalmist does not take this view of the matter. As the very next verse makes clear, the wicked may look as though they are flourishing like the green bay tree, but their flourishing has much more in common with a lesser "green herb" that withers in a day:[3] "Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." The wicked appear to spread out and

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[1] Psalm 37: 35, KJV. More modern translations render "green bay tree" as a tall or towering Lebanon cedar. The Authorized Version is certainly appropriate when we consider that victors were crowned with bay leaves in ancient Greece and Rome, bringing a different notion of flourishing to the fore, but certainly one open to the vicious.

[2] Cf. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 172-3. I suspect that the phrase became proverbial because of its use in the Psalter of the Book of Common Prayer (pre-1979).

[3] The following references are all from Psalm 37, KJV.

conquer the world, but in the end the Lord will crush them and raise up the meek to inherit the earth. The wicked appear to be rich and powerful, but it is better to have little and be virtuous than have much and be vicious, for the wealth and power of the wicked will turn against them, and "their sword will enter into their own heart." The psalmist claims to have seen the wicked in great power, but it is a self-destructive power bent toward its own demise; he has seen the wicked person spreading himself like the green bay tree, but while the green bay tree is still putting out its fragrant leaves, the odor of the wicked man has completely disappeared. The psalmist, we can safely conclude, does not believe that there is any true happiness or flourishing without virtue. In fact, he writes as if virtue is not only necessary for happiness, but a guarantee of it.[4]

The flourishing is illusory for at least three reasons. First, the goods of the vicious person (his wealth) are not properly good for him, or at least not so good as he (and we) often believe. The psalmist appeals to some deeper value that is only to be attained through righteousness, a value so much greater than wealth that having righteousness with little wealth is better (*for* the righteous person!) than having much wealth without righteousness. Second, and a related point, the power and strength of the wicked person are not so mighty as they appear, for in being vicious he turns his own apparent strength against himself. Finally, this flourishing appears to be illusory because it does not last. Unlike the tree to which the wicked person is compared, he does not flourish for years, steady and secure, leaving behind a sturdy stump and valuable wood even at its demise, but disappears completely in a day like a puff of smoke.

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[4]Psalm 37: 25: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." And verse 27: "Depart from evil and do good; and dwell for evermore."

For very similar sorts of reasons, Plato appears to agree with the psalmist that

only the virtuous can be happy, and that they inevitably will be. Glaucon braces Socrates

in the *Republic* with a three-pronged worry about justice: first, people think that justice

(righteousness, or right ordering) is simply conventional; second, they only act justly

because they think they must; and third, they have good reason not to want to be just,

because unjust people are much better off.[5] People are only just because they fear

punishment, not through any desire to be just, and if they could be unjust without getting

caught, that is precisely what they would do.[6] What they require, Adeimantus and

Glaucon make clear, is for Socrates to prove that being just has, in itself, a beneficial

effect on the person so that it would be better to be virtuous and thought vicious than to

be vicious and thought virtuous.[7]

Socrates meets the charge through his description of the tripartite soul in book IV,

made up of a rational part, an appetitive part, and a spirited part. It is appropriate for the

rational part to rule, since it is wise and can see what is best for the soul, while the

spirited part should ally itself with the rational part in controlling the appetites. Justice, it

turns out, is just having this natural and appropriate ordering in our soul, while injustice

is a civil discord within the soul.[8] "Virtue seems, then," Socrates concludes, "to be a kind

of health, fine condition, and well-being of the soul, while vice is disease, shameful

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[5]Plato, *Republic*, tr. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co, 1997), 358c.

[6]If, for example, they had a ring that made them invisible like Gyges of Lydia (359d*ff*).

[7]Plato, *Republic*, 367e.

[8]Ibid., 441e-442a; ibid., 444d.

condition, and weakness."[9] It now seems obvious, Glaucon admits, that it must always

be more profitable really to be just, for none of the other apparent goods have any

goodness left and "life is thought to be not worth living when the body's nature is

ruined."[10] There is no happiness without virtue, then, because one of the prerequisites for

any version of happiness, the general health of our soul, turns out just to *be* virtue. No

matter how many goods we might be giving up in holding to virtue, then, surely we are

better off being virtuous than attaining those goods.

A similar conclusion can be drawn from Socrates' arguments in *Euthydemus*

regarding the relationship between knowledge and virtue. Starting with the premise that

everyone desires "to do well," Socrates lists the various goods that appear to be part of

doing well, including health, wealth, the virtues, and wisdom, finally throwing in good

fortune, as the apparent greatest good of all. The appearances, however, are deceptive,

for wisdom is itself good fortune since it assures that in any situation a person will do the

best thing possible, which is all that we mean by good fortune. In other words, "if a man

had wisdom, he had no need of any good fortune in addition."[11] As he applies this to the

other goods, however, Socrates comes to the rather startling conclusion that none of the

goods are actually any good without wisdom, for in themselves they might be used for

ill.[12] The only good thing is wisdom, so virtue (goodness of a human being) must be

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[9]Plato, *Republic*, 444e. In the *Republic* it is not clear how we make the leap from speaking of justice to speaking of virtue in general, at least as we usually mean justice now. It is less mysterious if we remember that δίκη means rightness, right ordering, or well-balanced more generically.

[10]Plato, *Republic*, 445a.

[11]Ibid., 278e-279c; ibid., 280b.

[12]Ibid., 281b-281c. Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith differentiate between what they call the "evaluative principle" in the *Euthydemus*, according to which things that are potentially good become actually good in the presence of virtue, and the "productive principle" in the *Apology*, according to

wisdom (at least of some sort).[13] But if virtue is wisdom and wisdom makes everything

else as good as it can be, then virtue must not only be necessary for happiness, it must be

sufficient for it as well. If we are just able to get wisdom, then we are assured of our

happiness, and without wisdom we cannot hope to have anything but a diseased and

pitiful life.[14]

For Plato, then, or at least for Socrates, it would seem that wisdom, defined

perhaps through a knowledge of the Forms and the true nature of unchanging reality, is

absolutely necessary and sufficient for happiness. But what sort of happiness is he

concerned with? In the *Euthydemus* it is clear that we are talking about a very earthly

sort of happiness, a happiness derived from good fortune in making friends and

influencing people in the here and now. In the *Republic* the picture is a little less clear.[15]

Cephalus shapes the discussion of justice with his opening claim that the benefit of

wealth is the ability not to fear the afterlife, and Socrates concludes the discussion with

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which virtue actually produces other good things. They argue that the principles are not contradictory, because the evaluative principle will make things good, in part, by recognizing through their wisdom and virtue what other goods can be produced in these circumstances. Brickhouse and Smith, "Making Things Good and Making Good Things," in *Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides: Proceeding of the V Symposium Platonicum, Selected Papers*, ed. Robinson, Thomas M. (St. Agustin, Germany: Academia Verlag, 2000), 76-87.

[13]Plato, *Euthydemus*, tr. Rosamond Kent Sprague, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co, 1997), 281d-281e. In other places Socrates seems to speak of other things being good as well (cf. *Apology* 30b); this claim must be that wisdom is the only independent good, or something to that effect (cf. Brickhouse and Smith, "Making Things Good," 77; for the opposite viewpoint, that wisdom is truly the *only* good, cf. Terence Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 57). The details of Plato's/Socrates' ontology of goodness are not important to our purposes here. On the claim that virtue is wisdom, cf. *Charmides* 171a*ff*, and *The Laches* 194d*ff.*

[14]There is some disagreement over these claims, and I have no intention of joining the fray. Due to the argument that I have rehearsed here, Gregory Vlastos, for example, claims that virtue is sufficient for good fortune and happiness generally in Plato (Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 200-235). Brickhouse and Smith disagree because of other dialogues, such as *Crito* (47e) and *Gorgias* (512a), in which illness especially is said to be able to ruin the life of anyone, no matter how virtuous. The disagreement is complicated by Brickhouse and Smith's focus on what Socrates, as opposed to Plato, believed. *Plato's Socrates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 112-136.

[15]The *Phaedo* seems to present a similar picture of an otherworldly happiness.

the myth about the death of righteous Er. The question of the *Republic* is not "What is justice?" but "How does a man attain or forfeit eternal salvation?" A. E. Taylor claims. "For good or bad, [the *Republic*] is intensely 'other-worldly.'"[16]

Variables in the Necessity Thesis

For Plato, is virtue necessary for our earthly well-being, as the original argument from our nature seems to support, or is it only necessary for 'heavenly' happiness, as the myth of Er and the myth at the end of the *Phaedo* suggest? If Plato believes that virtue is a knowledge that brings all other blessings with it, then clearly virtue is necessary and sufficient for happiness, but there is certainly room for rational disagreement on how to interpret Plato on these difficult points. Regardless of what position Plato (and/or Socrates) held, we can apply this distinction to our general discussion of the necessity and sufficiency thesis. The more significant ethical thesis for everyday life is clearly the claim that virtue is necessary (and sufficient) for happiness here on earth. Even though eternal happiness may be more significant in the long run, it is a much 'cheaper' thesis, i.e., one that is much easier to prove given certain assumptions. The thesis that virtue is necessary (or sufficient) for happiness on earth, on the other hand, has to deal with significant evidence apparently to the contrary, such as those wicked people that appear to be spreading like the green bay tree.

A similar point can be made concerning exactly which virtues are necessary for happiness. Plato seems to find it fairly clear just which list of virtues is going to be made possible by wisdom, but certainly there is far more disagreement on the list of virtues if we consider a more diverse cross section of cultures. The virtues of communist China are

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[16]A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 265-6.

not the virtues of ancient China, nor the virtues of Medieval Europe, nor the virtues of the ancient Mayan civilization. There may be significant crossover, and this is not an unimportant point, but there are certainly some significant differences as well. The cheaper thesis here is the simple claim that 'the virtues' (whatever those might be in a given culture) are necessary for happiness. Precisely because it is difficult to come up with any universal list of the virtues that can convincingly be seen as necessary for just anyone's happiness, the more difficult thesis to prosecute is the claim that a given list of virtues is just that list necessary for happiness.

The necessity thesis becomes harder or cheaper, more or less significant, depending on how we manipulate the *meaning* of its key terms, virtue and happiness. The same is true as we manipulate the *relationship* between virtue and happiness and strengthen or weaken the degree of necessity under discussion. Rosalind Hursthouse, for example, in one of very few contemporary discussions of the necessity or sufficiency thesis of any depth, rather quickly dismisses any strong version of necessity (or sufficiency). Instead, she says, virtue ethics should maintain only that virtue is the "only reliable bet" for gaining happiness and, similarly, that while people might flourish without being virtuous, it is rather unlikely.[17] Virtues, according to her analogy, are like a doctor's prescriptions for a long life. It is true that regular exercise, a healthy diet, and good sleep do not guarantee a long life and may even (very rarely) shorten one's life in some way, but they remain one's best bet for attaining health. In the same way, while we occasionally hear about people who smoke, drink, and lie around watching television living until they are 106 years old, these are certainly the rather extreme exceptions to the

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[17]Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 172-3.

general rule, and you are unlikely to be healthy if you engage in such unhealthy behaviors.

Hursthouse is right in these very minimal claims, but in this essay we will try to prove something rather stronger than this weak necessity thesis, and the psalmist and Plato point the way toward many of the answers we will want to consider. Perhaps, as the psalmist suggests, God personally ensures that no wicked people can flourish for long. Simple faith that this is the case is perhaps commendable, but we should hope that stronger support than this for the necessity thesis can be found, especially since there are apparent counterexamples. A related but weaker claim would combine the psalmist and Plato and conclude that God has simply made us with a nature that requires us to be virtuous if we are to flourish. Joseph Butler will provide a complex answer along these lines in chapter four, and we will have to consider it carefully then. Certainly as we consider these wicked, happy people in the final chapter we will reiterate many of the claims made by the psalmist: the wicked are not as happy as they appear, nor as enduring, nor, often, as wicked. Wickedness, as both Plato and the psalmist elucidate, is often self-defeating in a pitiable way.

Unfortunately, the answers provided by the psalmist and Plato do not seem to stand up well anymore. As noted, a simple faith in God's providential care is commendable, but it often seems to run afoul of painfully obvious counter-instances where the vicious triumph at the righteous person's expense, and it would be best if we had something to say in response to such cases. Likewise, Plato's view (which is more complex than I have indicated here) could provide an interesting study, but does not obviously provide an articulation and defense of the necessity thesis that we can employ

today. Most virtue ethicists follow Aristotle in defining virtues in terms of habits of character rather than forms of knowledge, and the description of justice similarly fails to be convincing. There is surely much that could be learned from a careful study of Plato's writings on these matters, but I will not undertake that study here, turning instead to an Aristotelian account that better matches what is done by most contemporary virtue ethicists. While the sufficiency thesis will certainly come in for occasional mention since it is a closely connected idea, the focus of this dissertation is the necessity thesis, both because it remains more obviously plausible, and because Aristotle, the starting point for this account, did not himself strive to defend the sufficiency thesis (nor do any of the other thinkers considered in this essay).

Justification of the Dissertation

Before summarizing the dissertation, however, perhaps we should answer the obvious question: if Hursthouse's minimalistic version of necessity appears to be correct and sufficient for an interesting account of virtue ethics, then why bother attempting to define and defend anything stronger? There are many reasons. The most pressing is the complete dearth of in-depth philosophical discussions about a strong necessity thesis, and there is much that can be said in its defense, as I will show. In itself, then, it should be interesting to see whether a thesis that was held by every Western moral philosopher of note until about the time of Kant can be defended in contemporary ethics, and no one else has undertaken this project.

In this dissertation I will attempt to show that a strong version of the necessity thesis is defensible on two very different sorts of ethical accounts, and plausible given one of those two. We need not so easily accept, as Hursthouse unaccountably does, that

the wicked actually do flourish like the green bay tree at times; we need not give up so much ground as her minimal answer does. Refusing to accept the counterexamples proves to be important for a number of reasons. First, it allows us to accept at face value the definition of the virtues typically given in virtue ethics. Hursthouse, for example, defines a virtue as "a character trait a human being needs for *eudaimonia*, to flourish or live well."[18] But, of course, if Hursthouse is right that people can occasionally reach *eudaimonia* without the virtues, then we do not actually *need* them to flourish or live well; they just increase our chances considerably. It becomes harder to define what a virtue is if we allow that the necessity thesis is not absolute, and so it becomes more difficult to define any particular virtue as well. Justice is not necessary for our flourishing, having only strong statistical correlation with flourishing; more properly for the necessity thesis, Hursthouse would say that a lack of justice has a strong correlation with a failure to flourish. Either way, though, the point is merely a common sense one: if we make the relationship between the virtues and happiness less exact, it will become more difficult to define one in terms of the other.

Second, happiness itself becomes a rather more difficult concept to define or to grasp. As we will see in Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is typically defined, in part, by the character of the person who enjoys the state. While this may not be what we typically mean by happiness now, a fairly significant wrinkle that we will address in chapter two, if people *can* attain true happiness while vicious, then the picture becomes simply impossible, which may be deeply problematic for virtue ethics as a whole and is at least a remarkable alteration of traditional virtue ethics.

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[18]Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 167.

We have seen three different ways to weaken the necessity thesis and make it less astounding, as well as less significant. This dissertation will attempt to defend the strongest necessity thesis possible, which turns out to be the claim that a certain list of virtues, not entirely available to us, is absolutely necessary for true earthly happiness. While there are many original points in this dissertation, especially in the reading offered of Joseph Butler, in the responses to relativism, and in the development of a brief account of justice, its main contribution to ethics lies in its exploration of the plausibility, defense, and roles of the strongest necessity thesis possible. Certainly others have employed the necessity thesis and defended or attacked it in various ways, especially Alasdair MacIntyre and Bernard Williams, but a deliberate exploration and defense of the necessity thesis, as well as a discussion of its purpose and possible roles in ethics, has thus far been lacking. This dissertation aims to help fill this lacuna.

Giving an Account: Summary of Chapters

Given the primary importance of Aristotle's use of the necessity thesis and his particular definition of *eudaimonia*, it is clear that the proper starting place is a summary exegesis of his account and defense. The first chapter provides this exegesis, looking in depth at what Aristotle means by virtue and *eudaimonia* and how he argues for the relationship between these two key terms, especially in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I explore this relationship through the rubric of Aristotle's general methodology, demonstrating that the necessity thesis is central to Aristotle's understanding of *eudaimonia* as a complete life of active virtue adequately supplied with external goods. Aristotle begins with common opinions concerning happiness—that it consists in pleasure, or wealth, or virtue—and demonstrates that each formulation fails to do justice

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to the richness of the life that is going well. Through the function argument Aristotle

sharpens his critique into a definition of his own; then he returns to the common opinions

to ensure that his definition still does justice to their intuitions. In each case he

determines that his definition of happiness as the active life of virtue more than

adequately captures the opinion that he considers, except in the case of external goods.

Contrary to several contemporary philosophers, I argue that Aristotle does intend for the

happy life to include external goods, and that this introduces no tension into his account

of happiness.

We no longer seem to mean by 'happiness' all that Aristotle packed into the term,

however, and as a result, should perhaps no longer be impressed by the idea that virtue

plays any part in our happiness, but only in something like 'the good life' or 'the

flourishing life.' My second chapter argues that there is still one area of life in which we

mean something very much like what Aristotle meant by happiness, specifically when we

are engaged in reflection on our complete lives as ethics requires. Other more

psychological and subjective definitions of happiness fail to match several of our deepest

intuitions about happiness, demonstrating that while we may sometimes mean simple

emotional pleasure by 'happiness,' we must often mean much more than this as well. An

examination of recent psychological literature confirms this diagnosis. I conclude that

when I say that I am happy in the most relevant sense, I convey information about not

only my emotions, but the state of my character and its compatibility with my

environment as well.

It appears, though, that Aristotle's means of defending the necessity thesis is no

longer available to us because it relies on his metaphysical biology in the famous

"function argument." I begin chapter four by urging that this is a mistaken reading of Aristotle, that he is not committed to defending the necessity thesis on non-ethical grounds, and that the function argument should not be read as the linchpin of his argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Perhaps we could defend the necessity thesis in this strong sense, however, if we accept certain theistic premises about the source of our nature, as for example in the arguments of Joseph Butler. While Butler is often taken to be a proto-Kantian by interpreters who ignore many of his teleological arguments, I take seriously Butler's theistic and eudaimonistic commitments and present him as an excellent example of both the benefits and the costs of defending the necessity thesis in this way. Unfortunately, the costs end up outweighing the benefits, since accepting Butler's arguments requires either an acceptance of his belief in the inspiration of the conscience or a dogmatic assertion of correctness in ethics, neither of which is palatable.

Chapter five, therefore, explores the options for a defense of the necessity thesis based solely on normative grounds, while addressing the problem of relativism, both individual and cultural, that these options raise. Having traced the development of MacIntyre's employment of the necessity thesis from *After Virtue*, which leaves the choice of one's narrative up to the individual, to *Dependent Rational Animals*, where the narrative of one's life is fixed by biology, I explain how this account of biology remains normative. By returning to biology, I argue, MacIntyre is not returning to the project of deriving ethics from an external source (because the biology itself is evaluative), but is deliberately offering a further focal use of 'good' that was unavailable in *After Virtue*, a use, importantly, that determines what place various goods should have in a life and a community. If the biology remains evaluative, however, it looks as if this has only

pushed the relativism back one step, rather than removing it. Not so, for relativism, as MacIntyre and Williams both explain, is the denial of any ultimate truth, and while this account admits the tradition-dependent nature of our list of virtues, it does not surrender the possibility that there is ultimately only one right list of virtues. From within our tradition, and specifically from within Christianity, we must carefully and with discernment make the case that our account of ethics *does* apply universally, even as we accept that we might still be mistaken in some of the details.

This leaves the most obvious counterexamples to be dealt with in the final chapter, where I address the charge that vicious people observably do flourish. While I could simply rely on the definition of happiness to make the point, a much stronger approach is to give some general considerations that show the implausibility of vicious happiness. Unfortunately, the cases must ultimately be dealt with on an individual basis, showing in any given case that the wicked are neither so happy, nor so wicked, as they at first appear, as the psalmist pointed out. Particular examples offered by other philosophers are considered and dismissed, often because the cases appear to be too shallow and to give too little information. To solve this common problem with test cases, we examine in some detail a case where the vicious appear to be happy, but actually are not, in *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen. We turn then to a consideration of the proper role of the necessity thesis in ethics and determine that it cannot work to motivate virtuous people to be virtuous in any straightforward way without missing what it is to actually be virtuous. Instead, the necessity thesis plays its most significant roles in education, motivation for the less than fully virtuous, and especially as a means of justifying one's virtue to oneself in reflective endorsement.

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To show what all of this amounts to practically, we turn at last to a consideration of a particular virtue that appears to be most difficult for the necessity thesis: justice. Not only does justice not appear to be necessary for happiness, it often seems to be directly opposed to it, since acting justly will often require surrendering goods that I otherwise could have claimed. As we consider the accounts of justice offered recently by Robert Solomon and Nicholas Wolterstorff, we come to see that this misunderstanding arises largely from a too-easy acceptance of the distinction between altruistic and egoistic actions. Since there is no convincing reason to accept this exclusive division, there is no convincing reason to believe that acting justly may not be necessary, and often beneficial, for one's happiness. Of course, this should not surprise us, for justice is a virtue, and the virtues, we conclude, are all necessary for happiness.

CHAPTER TWO

Human Happiness: Aristotle and the Necessity of Virtue

"Neither angels nor animals but human individuals,"[1] as Iris Murdoch wrote, we must discover what it is for such intermediate creatures to live a good life. Plato, Aristotle believed, had drifted too far toward a vision of human beings as gods, and in losing sight of a common sense view of our own animality, had failed to do justice to the susceptibility of human good and even virtue to the ravages of fortune.[2] Sardanapallus and other lovers of pleasure reject our humanity in the other direction, ignoring the λόγος that sets us apart from the plants and animals that cannot deliberately choose their end but blindly seek to fulfill their form through dependence on fortune and instinct. Human beings are between the animals and the god, and so they must deliberately choose the good, yet are never certain of reaching it; they must actively live in accordance with λόγος, yet complete fulfillment will allude them.[3]

The good for human beings is not the good of animals or of the demigods or the god, but is rather a distinctive *human* good, but how do we determine further what this good is? In what follows, we will begin by exploring Aristotle's methodology, and specifically his overt concern for common intuitions as regards the good life. By

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[1]"The Idea of Perfection," in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter Conradi (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 321.

[2]Martha Nussbaum, in *The Fragility of Goodness*, has an extended and wonderful discussion of all of these points. Much of what follows, especially as regards Aristotle's methods and the role of τύχη, or luck, in his ethics, I owe to her careful reading. Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[3]I ignore, for the moment, the question of whether Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* suggests that such a godly life is ultimately available to certain leisured human beings, but I will come back to it in chapter two.

recognizing his reliance on common sense, we can better understand his ethical account

and its ramifications as we turn in chapter three to a discussion of whether what he is

claiming is in line with common opinion today.

Aristotle's Philosophical Method: Muddling through to Perspicuity

There is an interesting, if rather academic, debate about the relationship between

the justly famous *Nicomachean Ethics* and the less well-known and more corrupt

Eudemian Ethics. For a long time it was doubted whether the latter was even the work of

Aristotle, especially during the nineteenth century, when it was considered that it was

perhaps the work of the later Aristotelian Eudemus of Rhodes. Given the work,

especially, of Ernst Kapp in the early twentieth century, however, it has been admitted

that there is no good reason to deny the authenticity of the *Eudemian Ethics*, which does,

after all, share some three books almost verbatim with the *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as

echoing many individual passages from that work.[4] The more recent work on the

Eudemian Ethics has concerned, naturally enough, the few major differences of emphasis

between the two works, with some, such as Anthony Kenny, arguing that the *Eudemian

Ethics* is the later and more mature work of Aristotle, and should thus be given

interpretive primacy.[5]

One of the minor differences that is quite interesting in this regard is the attitude

that Aristotle displays towards the opinions of the many (literally, the *hoi polloi*).

Famously, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle is careful to consider *both* the opinions

that are "held by many men and men of old" and those of "a few persons," stating that "it

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[4]Michael Woods, ed., introduction to *Aristotle's Eudemian Ethics: Books I, II, and VIII* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), xi.

[5]Anthony Kenny, *The Aristotelian Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

is not probable that either of these should be entirely mistaken, but rather that they should

be right in at least some one respect or even in most respects."[6] In the *Eudemian Ethics*

(*EE*), on the other hand, Aristotle is rather more dismissive of common opinion, at least

at first. Having denied that he is required to do precisely what he does in the

Nicomachean Ethics (*NE*), examine all of the views concerning happiness, Aristotle

defends his claim by arguing that many of them are held by children and the diseased or

mentally unbalanced, and these people need not arguments but maturity or correction,

civil or medical. Not only that, but many other opinions are offered by the οἱ πολλόι,

with whom we need not argue, "(for they talk without consideration about almost

everything, and most about happiness (εὐδαιμονία)); for it is absurd to apply argument

to those who need not argument but experience."[7]

At first blush, then, it would appear that if the *EE* is the earlier and less mature

work, then Aristotle has become more accepting of the opinions of the many over time,

while if it is the later and more mature work, he has rather become more cynical about the

ability of the many to have insight into philosophical problems. Both changes are

perfectly understandable and seem to occur. For every Plato who appears to become less

trusting of common intuitions as he ages, there is a Wittgenstein who becomes more so.

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[6]*Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter *NE*) 1098b26-29. All translations of Aristotle are from The Revised Oxford Translation unless otherwise noted. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, rev. J. O. Urmson, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[7]*Eudemian Ethics* (hereafter *EE*) 1214b30-1215a4. This is not an isolated attitude in the *EE*, even if he does later take a slightly modified line in book 1 chapter 6. In chapter 5, for instance, right before he apparently modifies his stance a bit, Aristotle writes that we must look at virtue and wisdom primarily when it comes to εὐδαιμονία, "since all—or at least all important thinkers—connect happiness with these." Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, trans. J. Solomon, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

There are also considerations, important to our present topic of Aristotle's

methodology, that militate against the apparent discrepancy. In the passage in *EE*, for

instance, Aristotle appears to set up the question of whether the opinions of the many are

worth listening to, but then argues, both in the case of the children and diseased and in

the case of the many, that *argument* will likely prove ineffectual. He appears, that is, to

be answering the question of whether it is worth attempting to educate the many about

happiness, rather than whether it is worth considering their opinions, regardless of what

question he asks in the beginning. Again, later in the *EE*, he takes a much softer line

towards the many, more in line with the *NE*.[8] In book I, chapter 6, Aristotle writes that

we must try to find a convincing conclusion by taking "the phenomena as evidence and

illustration." He defends this assertion by noting that it is best if everyone agrees with his

determination of εὐδαιμονία, or *at least* will agree with it after they have come to

change their mind; "for every man has some contribution to make to the truth, and with

this as a starting-point we must give some sort of proof about these matters. For by

advancing from true but obscure judgements we will arrive at clear ones, always

exchanging the usual confused statement for more real knowledge."[9]

Between these two passages, we find, I believe, as clear a statement as anywhere

of Aristotle's general philosophical method:[10] we begin from what appears to be the case,

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[8]Even in *NE* Aristotle states that he need not explore every suggestion, but only those that seem to be long-lasting or sufficiently famous (1095a28-10); so while he appears to be more exclusive in *EE*, the difference is one of degree.

[9]*EE* 1216b32-35.

[10]This method holds not only in ethics, but in all things; in fact, as Aristotle notes at one point in *EE*, common intuitions are often less helpful in matters where everyone thinks that they already know the truth and that the answers are easy (in addition to the above quoted passage, cf. 1215b15). Common intuitions are perhaps more likely to be helpful, or at least less muddled, in metaphysics than in ethics, for common opinions have not been as corrupted by reflection, as Bernard Williams would perhaps put it.

from the φαινόμενα, and move from the nascent truths hidden within these appearances

by progressive stages to a clearly defined concept with clearly defined relations to other

concepts. The φαινόμενα act as testimony, as witnesses to the truth that must be

carefully interrogated, and also as examples of points that they bear witness to. But how

do we move from the normal confused statement of truth to a more refined formulation?

In the more famous statement of this same method in *NE* VII, Aristotle writes:

> We must, as in all other cases, set the phenomena before us and, after first
> discussing the difficulties, go on to prove, if possible, the truth of all the reputable
> opinions about these affections or, failing this, of the greater number and the most
> authoritative; for if we both resolve the difficulties and leave the reputable
> opinions undisturbed, we shall have proved the case sufficiently.[11]

We begin, then, from the appearances, which we observe not only by looking at our own

experiences, but by taking care to consider what has seemed true to many people over a

long time, and what has seemed true to a few, brilliant people at any time. The

appearances he refers to as our beliefs (ἐνδόξα[12]), and at other times refers to as "the

things we say" or "the things having been said" (λεγούμενα).[13] Clearly, then, we reap

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Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Cf. especially chapter 6.

[11]*NE* 1145b1*ff.* On this passage, cf. Nussbaum, 240*ff.* Here we do see one crucial difference between Aristotle's approach to ethics and other branches of philosophy when it comes to the appearances. While he begins from the appearances in any discussion, in ethics (and the natural sciences) he takes it that he has sufficiently shown a truth when he can show that it arises from the appearances of the matter and unproblematically correlates with all of the other data available. Ethics is not an area where we can be too exacting, as he reminds us many times (cf. *NE* 1094b); in mathematics, or the theoretical sciences, on the other hand, the truth would require a complete demonstration as well. Cf. *Parts of Animals* 640b18-642b4, where Aristotle speaks of the φαινόμενα of animals, such as their flesh, blood, and bone, and how the natural philosopher works from these φαινόμενα to try and determine the *form* of the creature that gives these things their shape, that is, the cause of the φαινόμενα. There are many ways to work from φαινόμενα; working to their cause through reason is one of them. Here, too, the method only allows of relative proof, for the necessity is only hypothetical necessity. Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, trans. Ogle, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* ed. Jonathan Barnes, Vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[12]Interestingly, ἐνδόξα comes from ἐνδοξος, which means to be held in high esteem or honor, or of things, to be notable.

[13]Plato, *Republic*, 509d-511e.

these appearances from the common opinions current in society as a whole, both as they are evidenced in action (cf. his disdainful comments about the masses and pleasure (1095b)), and as they have been captured in the common sayings gleaned from poets, prophets, and perhaps 'old wives' tales.' We then dig out the truth that is likely concealed in all of these more-or-less confused notions by comparing them to each other and testing which seem reasonably superior to others at capturing the truth in one detail or another. Finally, we show that our final perspicuous opinion best captures the truth of as many and as authoritative of the original φαινόμενα as possible.[14]

Only by studying this method in practice can we more fully understand it, but before continuing on to see how Aristotle applies this method to his determination of the nature of εὐδαιμονία, we must first face one urgent question: why is Aristotle so unabashedly certain that "every man has some contribution to make to the truth"? Why the sudden democracy of truth from someone who is often a decided elitist? Aristotle is not oblivious to the oddness of his position; he does not rely on common sense because it is the normal practice. As Nussbaum points out, Aristotle deliberately repudiates the starting points of much of Greek philosophy by calling these common beliefs φαινόμενα, the same Greek word used notably by Plato and his predecessors to designate the false appearances of the world that we must get beyond to find the truth.[15] In Socrates' famous image of the divided line in the *Republic*, the φαινόμενα are what everyone sees, shadows and images as well as things about which they have beliefs;

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[14]Nussbaum also helpfully notes a number of places in Aristotle's writing where he criticizes other philosophers for not comparing the results of their argument to the *phainomena*, especially the *De Caelo* and in *On Generation and Corruption*, where he criticizes the Platonists and Eleatics respectively for falling in love with their arguments and thereby going beyond what experience could reasonably support. *The Fragility of Goodness*, 247.

[15]Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 241.

reality, truth, and knowledge are at the opposite end of the spectrum, where only philosophers and those trained in the esoteric arts can ever hope to go. In the image of the cave, the φαινόμενα are the shadows cast by cutouts, and it is only when the philosopher leaves these behind and struggles up to the sun that she can begin to see reality.[16] Nussbaum notes that the etymology of ἀλήθεια, the Greek word for truth, indicates a bringing out from concealment, a revealing. The earliest images of Greek philosophy, she writes, especially in Parmenides and Heraclitus, involve moving beyond what can be easily seen, getting away from the common opinions that lead us astray.[17] Aristotle is rebelliously denying his teacher's assertion that the appearances have nothing to show us about truth by claiming that they are our only viable starting point in any field of enquiry.[18]

Oddly, or perhaps not oddly at all, Aristotle never gives an explicit argument against the more rationalistic model of philosophy in general, and the particular arguments that he gives often rely upon his own philosophical methodology. The apparent oddity arises from his making a decisive departure from one major strand of philosophical practice without a general argument against this practice that does not rely upon his own contrary method, but the oddity is only apparent. Aristotle offers no such argument because no such argument is possible. There is no starting point from outside of a particular philosophical method to show that one is better than another. The proof lies in the ability of the method to arrive at truth, but truth itself is primarily at issue. In

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[16]Plato, *Republic* 514a-517c.

[17]Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 241.

[18]Nussbaum believes that Aristotle can be seen as returning to a particular view of truth held by tragedians, even if he is rebelling against a particular philosophic tradition. Ibid., 242.

his response to the Eleatics' belief in the One in *On Generation and Corruption*, for example, Aristotle criticizes them for holding to a theory that, so far as the argument goes, seems right, but which not even a lunatic would actually accept, for no one thinks that fire and ice are the same.[19] The Eleatics, of course, would be unimpressed with his argument, since they already are committed to the ultimate falsity of the appearances, but Aristotle's response is merely a way of highlighting the advantages of his own method. Rather than rely upon esoteric reason only available to the elite, he has cast in his lot with common sense and experience, and his theory of knowledge explains why.

In the deservedly famous beginning to his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle grandly proclaims, "All men by nature desire to know."[20] Every person, he believes, naturally wonders how things work and why they happen, and in that wonder begins to search for an adequate and systematic response. Our essence is to be 'systematic understanders' of the world around us, to use Jonathan Lear's phrase in *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, an exploration of Aristotle's philosophy through the rubric of this desire.[21] This natural desire leads in two directions: first, it shows that each individual constantly acquires the sorts of experiences that give her φαινόμενα from which to work in seeking to understand the world. But on the downside, it also means that we will naturally tend to *over*simplify in our desire to reach systematic understandings, and we will tend to be overly receptive to systems that make everything simple. It is natural, then, that Aristotle both believes in the worth of every individual's beliefs about the world, and that he is

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[19] 325a13*ff.* Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption*, trans. H. Joachim, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[20] 980a22. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[21] Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

concerned to complicate the overly simplistic theories that have been held, commonly or by preeminent people, over time.

Our investigation begins with common opinions because we are human beings who must begin with the particulars around us and only then attempt to move to more general knowledge, including the definition of εὐδαιμονία; this is the *human* way of reaching knowledge and understanding. Nussbaum relates that Aristotle chides some of his students in *Parts of Animals* because they are disgusted at dissecting animals and wish to move on to more rarified materials, such as the stars. They are human beings, he tells them, and if they are disgusted at flesh and blood, they loath themselves as well. He recites a story about some men who came looking for Heraclitus and were surprised to find him warming himself at the furnace in the kitchen rather than contemplating the heavens. Heraclitus "is reported to have bidden them not to be afraid to enter, as even in that kitchen divinities were present."[22] So, Aristotle concludes, we should study every kind of animal, "for each and all will reveal to us something natural and something beautiful." Nussbaum writes, "Aristotelian philosophy, then… exists in a continual oscillation between too much order and disorder, ambition and abandonment, excess and deficiency, the super-human and the merely animal."[23] We must constantly know our own limits, as well as the limits of the subject area in which we are enquiring, and must never be contented with less systematization than we could achieve, nor ever seek more than we could achieve. The practice of philosophy, it turns out, is itself an area requiring a great deal of practical wisdom to begin to achieve understanding, and this is perhaps

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[22]*Parts of Animals* 645a18-22.

[23]Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 262.

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most true in the exploration of human character and that elusive end which our character both partly constitutes and toward which it is directed, εὐδαιμονία.

Finding the Relevant Φαινόμενα and Puzzles

Aristotle does not begin his ethical reflection by attempting to define εὐδαιμονία, but rather by attempting to determine whether there is one final end (τέλος) for human life, and if so, what it is. A τέλος, in Greek, is not a target, a σκοπός, which is achieved by action but once achieved is finished; it is rather the *activity* of achieving the target, the *fulfilling* of the action. The τέλος of archery, then, is to shoot well and to hit the target, whereas the σκοπός of archery is the bulls-eye.[24] In searching for a τέλος for human life (and for the political science that studies human life), we are searching for the *activity* (ἐνέργεια) of human life, the doing of which is our fulfillment. 'Activity' generally works in this context as a translation, but we must remember that we are using it as the opposite of ἕξις, possession or, as applied to character, disposition or habit, so that it always retains something of the meaning of the not-yet-accomplished. Our τέλος is an activity in that it involves our *doing* and *being* something that requires effort and is laudable when achieved, and it is also an activity in that it involves a constant work that is never finished while we are human beings. The human good is a life-long project, and never an accomplished feat.

Every skill, enquiry, action, and rational choice, he begins, is thought to aim at some good, and then he generalizes the statement: "and for this reason the good has

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[24]Cf. Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 34. Annas makes this point and notes that Aristotle sometimes seems to suggest that the two are interchangeable, which clearly both his argument and the words would not allow.

rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim."[25] Aristotle begins by claiming

that every practice, such as bridle-making, and every deliberative action and choice aim

at some end, and that their practitioners perceive this end as being good. While not

indubitable, it has generally seemed right to philosophers that our practices and rational

decisions aim at some good; put a certain way, it appears obvious. Bridle-making is

called bridle-making only because it aims at creating bridles, but even more than that, it

does not create bridles for bridles' sake, but to use them to ride a horse, which is a good.

And, to go one step further, especially in earlier times people did not ride horses just to

ride horses, but to go places, or possibly for enjoyment – that is, for the sake of a good.

Similarly, if we keep in mind that choice (προαίρεσις) here means a deliberative choice,

it appears equally clear that when we deliberate, we must use the notion of an end to

order our decisions, and it seems nonsensical to say that we deliberatively choose

something without seeing it as good, whether pleasant, useful, or morally superior.[26]

Aristotle next attempts to define the final end, the "highest of all goods achievable

by action," by turning to another φαινόμενον, or general appearance: "To be sure, the

name [of this end] is called the same by almost everyone; for both the many and the

refined call it εὐδαιμονία."[27] The φαινόμενον in this case must be taken seriously, for

it is not only the opinion of a few distinguished philosophers, or of the masses, but of

both and of almost everyone. No further argument is offered for this conclusion, but it is

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[25]*NE* 1094a2-3. This argument appears rather fallacious as it stands. Cf. Sarah Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 8-9; cf. 31*ff.* Broadie lays out the apparent fallacy clearly, that Aristotle moves from the claim that everyone desires some good to the claim that everyone desires the Good, or some one, single good, and then argues that Aristotle cannot mean this since he immediately goes on to *argue* for this conclusion as if it has not yet been proven. Also cf. Annas, *Morality*, 29-31.

[26]Cf. Annas, *Morality*, 29-31, who likewise shows the common-sense nature of these claims.

[27]*NE* 1095a16-19. My translation.

accepted as a given, as is the brief description of εὐδαιμονία that follows: "and they

suppose living well and doing well to be identical to εὐδαιμονία."[28] The final end, then,

must be εὐδαιμονία, which is living well and doing well.

If it seems as though Aristotle has not proven anything substantial yet, he does not

mean to have done so, but only to have stated what is generally accepted by nearly

everyone. As he continues, we can pick up on three more requirements that appear to be

equally formal and insubstantial as to the nature of εὐδαιμονία, but which are generally

agreed to be aspects of it. The first is that happiness must be something that is intimate

(οἰκεῖον) to us, something that is personal and of ourselves and that cannot be taken

away easily. Interestingly, Aristotle says that we surmise that this is true, not appealing

to any particular belief, but merely to what he judges to be a shared belief among his

readers. The word that he uses is μαντευόμεθα, which generally means to divine or to

come to know through inspiration; clearly he does not mean that we surmise the truth of

this by ratiocination, but in some non-rational and perhaps immediate manner. Perhaps

we can best take it as referring to an intuition that he believes we all share.

The final two formal requirements are perhaps the most famous: Aristotle writes

that "we think" that εὐδαιμονία must be complete and self-sufficient. Each activity and

rational choice is done for some good, but many of these goods, such as bridle-making,

are really only means to another good, such as horseback riding. Horseback riding,

arguably, is only a means (for the Greeks) toward the ends of transportation and warfare,

but clearly each of these activities is only a means to further ends. If this goes on forever,

so that there is no stopping point but everything is done for some further end, then our

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[28]*NE* 1095a19-20. My translation.

desires (ὄρεξις), he writes, are empty and vain.[29] What does it mean for our desires to be

empty and vain, and what would the opposite of this look like?   Unless there is some

point to our activities beyond their immediate outcomes, he seems to believe, there is no

point to our activities at all, and so the desires that motivate those activities are never

fulfilled but are empty and vain. For our desires to be purposeful, they must be ordered

so that they lead to one final end, but for our desires to be ordered in such a way, it is

clear that they cannot be irrational appetites for particular goods. Rather, in Greek,

ὄρεξις (desire) is the term for the most general form of motivation, one which is

counseled by reason even if it is not entirely rational itself. My desires are empty and

vain unless they are organized in this hierarchical manner because they gain their content

and their potency from the final end at which they rationally aim. I am not, of course,

aware of this broad sweep of my desires at every moment, but when I step back and

engage in ethical reflection about my life, I see that *really* my desires have no content

unless they aim at some final τέλος.

　　As one does stand back and engage in ethical reflection, it is clear that our ends

are ordered hierarchically, but does this require that there be just *one* end toward which

everything aims and which organizes all of one's life?[30] We naturally long to be

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[29]*NE* 1094a21.

[30]This seems to raise the question of whether a human life could have multiple final ends, so that
one person, for example, seeks a successful career, a fulfilling spiritual life, and a functional family full of
happy members, but none of these is subordinate to any of the other ends. There has been a fair amount of
discussion concerning this problem, with Cooper, for example, arguing that having a plurality of ends in
one life cannot be rational because the ends will inevitably clash, leaving one, apparently, to decide on a
whim which end will take precedence at any given time, and this cannot be rational when the decisions are
so important (Cooper, J., *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge, MA: Hackett, 1975), chap. 2,
pt. 1). Lear provides a similar diagnosis of the situation, writing that having so many ends would
ultimately lead to a neurotic life rather than a unified and rational one, and, as we have already seen, he
emphasizes that the essence of a human being is to be structured appropriately (*Desire*, 160). Annas
criticizes this reading, for it appears to her to add unsupportable premises regarding rationality that
Aristotle does not have in the text. We can have more than one end, according to Annas; all that Aristotle

systematic understanders, and this alone should give us pause before positing one single

end, for perhaps we are oversimplifying to satisfy our desire for structure where it doesn't

exist in nature. This is the point in the argument at which Aristotle introduces the notion

of completeness. An end is less complete the more it is done only as a means to a further

end, and more complete as it is closer to being a final end. The more complete an end is,

then, the more it is worthy of being pursued simply for itself, and the most complete end

is pursued entirely for itself and not for any other good which may come from it. Now it

appears (φαίνεται) that the chief good is something complete,[31] and "such [an end] as

this εὐδαιμονία, above all else, seems (δόκει) to be."[32] So it appears that there is one

most complete end, and this is εὐδαιμονία. The same conclusion, that εὐδαιμονία is

equivalent to the final good, follows from a consideration of self-sufficiency as well, for

the complete good "is thought" (δοκεῖ) to be self-sufficient (αὔταρκες), and εὐδαιμονία

appears to be the most self-sufficient end.[33] Completeness requires that the end be sought

for itself and not for anything else, while self-sufficiency requires that the end be such

that even alone it is able to make life desirable and lacking in nothing. Our common

opinion decrees that the final end be most complete and self-sufficient, and only

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is pointing to is what we actually do when we stand back and look at our life as a whole. We are not logically required to have only one end, but as systematic understanders we *will* organize our lives around one end. Annas's response avoids doubtful logical claims and nicely emphasizes the extent to which this problem only arises as we take a certain viewpoint on our lives.

[31]*NE* 1097a28.

[32]*NE* 1097a34. Δόκει, the word translated 'seems,' is from the verb meaning 'to think,' so we could likewise think of it as saying 'it is generally thought that…'

[33]1097b6-7. Interestingly, Annas notes that the self-sufficiency requirement is dropped by all following Hellenistic schools, including the later Peripatetics, as a requirement for the final end (42), but since the requirement does little work for Aristotle, it is not clear that this matters much. Annas tries to use self-sufficiency when dealing with external goods, as we will see later, but I think that she rather over-applies the concept. It may also have seemed to the later schools that self-sufficiency naturally followed from completeness, for if the end is choiceworthy *in* itself, it may have seemed just obvious that it is choiceworthy *by* itself as well.

εὐδαιμονία satisfies these various criteria that he has plucked from intuition and shared opinion.

We can now move on to consider the φαινόμενα as they relate to εὐδαιμονία; that is, what is it that the masses or the refined have said concerning *what it is* to live well and act well and to be εὐδαίμων?

The first, and perhaps most obvious, φαινόμενον, is that happiness refers to some sort of *good* state; as noted above, the many and the refined identify εὐδαιμονία as involving living well and doing well.[34] The same conclusion could equally come from the term itself, for it is εὐδαιμονία that we are concerned with, and ευ is a Greek prefix meaning well, a prefix we keep in words such as eulogy and euphonic. To be εὐδαίμων, therefore, is to be well-δαίμων-ed, a δαίμων being a spirit or demigod that controls much of the fortune of your life. Εὐδαιμονία is the state of having good fortune, or being blessed by the gods, and it is used more-or-less interchangeably with μακαριότης, or blessedness.[35] Εὐδαιμονία, then, must involve having a good state of life, and this may or may not have much to do with fortune.[36]

After this point, however, there is little agreement on the substantive nature of εὐδαιμονία. The first suggestion is that εὐδαιμονία might be the life of pleasure, but such a life, Aristotle writes, is one fit for cattle. We cannot dismiss such a possibility out

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[34]*NE* 1095a16-17.

[35]The only notable difference is that you must be alive and active to be εὐδαίμων, whereas the μακάριοι include the gods and some of the dead (who go to the isle of the blest). While I will discuss the fittingness of happiness as a translation for eujdaimoniva later, it is interesting to note that our word '*happy*' has the same fortune-based etymological roots as εὐδαιμονία, as we see in other words such as 'happenstance' and 'hap.' Note too in EE 1215a10, where Aristotle seems to note, but dismiss, anyone who considers it 'invidious' to equate εὐδαιμονία with μακαριότης.

[36]It is beyond the purview of my paper to consider the relation of fortune to εὐδαιμονία in any detail, though I will consider one aspect of this problem when I discuss the external goods, but an excellent source for this discussion is chapters 11 and 12 of Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness* in which she discusses the crucial book VIII of *EE*.

of hand, since many people, including some sophisticated ones, have held that pleasure is the end of life, and yet he seems ill-inclined to spend much time discussing it as a candidate or giving reasons for why it cannot be εὐδαιμονία, noting out of hand that such a life cannot possibly be the chief good for rational human beings, but rather only for animals. Εὐδαιμονία, the *human* good, must be an active state; it is unnatural to think that the highest good for creatures such as us might be the passive, settled life of pleasure fit only for cattle. We can likewise rule out wealth immediately, for it too fails to be an active τέλος. Equally, εὐδαιμονία cannot consist in the life of honor, because honor is not something intimate that is difficult to take away, but lies in the ones honoring rather than in the one honored.[37] Aristotle notes as well that it is important that we be honored by virtuous people and for virtue, so clearly those who value honor value virtue more. Perhaps virtue, then, is our τέλος? This, also, raises a problem, however, for we can be virtuous when we are asleep or inactive, but we know that εὐδαιμονία involves activity; moreover, we can still be virtuous even when we undergo tremendous suffering, but clearly no one would call such a person εὐδαίμων "unless he were maintaining a thesis at all costs."[38] Clearly Aristotle is appealing to the intuition we just noted, that εὐδαιμονία must involve a life that is going well, as well as the intuition that a life of torture and suffering does not qualify as a life going well.

The consideration of completeness likewise helps us eliminate many of these options as the final good for human beings. Wealth is not a complete end, for we seek it only so that we can have other goods that it buys. Nor can εὐδαιμονία consist in honor, pleasure, the (perfection of the) intellect, or virtue, for while all of these are sought for

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[37]*NE* 1095b23-25.

[38]*NE* 1096a1-2.

themselves, they are also sought for the further good of εὐδαιμονία, and so they are not complete without qualification.[39] In this way, by working through the various problems that the φαινόμενα raise, Aristotle has worked his way to the conclusion that the final end must be εὐδαιμονία, and that εὐδαιμονία is not simply one of the substantial goods thus far considered.

The Fruition of Human Life: Aristotle's Function Argument

One of the most famous and contested arguments in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is Aristotle's so-called 'function argument.' The account that we have given of εὐδαιμονία thus far, Aristotle says, seems like a platitude. This comment alone should give us some advice on how to take his various claims concerning, for example, self-sufficiency: he does not intend to have said anything very surprising thus far. It should seem relatively obvious that εὐδαιμονία is the sort of thing that people want and by which they order their other projects, as well as that it is something which they desire for itself and which, if they had it, would alone make life worthwhile. The function argument is an attempt to move beyond these platitudes and give a more substantial view of εὐδαιμονία and of what it consists in.

The function argument itself is rather basic.[40] Assume for the moment that human beings have a function, by which he means something like an activity or work that characterizes most basically what it means to be a human being. Examples he gives of functions include that of a flute player, whose function is to make music on the flute, and a sculptor, whose function is to produce sculptures. Now for each of these things, a good

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[39]*NE* 1096a6-7; 1097b1-5

[40]The function argument is given in *NE* 1097b25-1098a17.

member of this class is one who performs this function well. For example, a good flute player is not a good flute player because she is beautiful or dances well, but because she is excellent at music on the flute, and similarly for the sculptor. Since this function is supposed to be the essential activity of a human being, it seems obvious to Aristotle that it must be something unique to human beings, something that we do not share with other things.[41] Clearly we share growth and perception with the plants and animals, respectively, so it cannot consist in either of these. Rather, the function for human beings must consist in rationality, or activity of the part of the soul which includes rationality, for this is the only remaining part of the soul.[42] The function of human beings, he concludes, is activity of the rational part of the soul, so the τέλος for human beings must be an active life of the rational part of the soul.

The τέλος, however, is not *just* such a life, but, since the τέλος is the good, it is to live excellently in accord with reason, for as with flute players, so with human beings: the good human being is the one that excels at her function, which is to live in accordance with reason. What can it mean to excel at living in accordance with reason? For Aristotle, the rational part (speaking loosely) includes both the part that partakes of reason, and the part that is obedient to this first part, so to excel at our function is to excel in both of these parts. The first part, which partakes of reason itself, involves all of the intellectual virtues, while the second part, which obeys reason, involves all of what are commonly called the character virtues. The character virtues require acting in

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[41]Aristotle never argues for the uniqueness requirement, so we can only guess why he considers this obvious. The word translated as 'function,' however, is ἔργον, commonly translated as 'work' or 'characteristic activity,' as it is in the Revised Oxford Translation. The ἔργον of any kind is the work that fits that kind; it seems natural to assume that in fitting that kind, it does not fit any other kind. Cf. *NE* 1139b: Aristotle is considering what the natural end of the intellectual virtues must be, and determines that their proper ἔργον must be truth, for it is this which they are uniquely suited to reach.

[42]According to his division. Cf. *NE* 1102a-1102b.

accordance with reason, for they consist in rational choice related to our appetites and

desires. Not to put too fine a point on it, then, "the human good is activity of the soul

according to virtue, and if there is more than one virtue, according to the best and most

complete."[43] All that remains to fill out Aristotle's substantive definition of ἐυδαιμονία,

then, is to define the virtues and specifically the best and most complete, if there is such,

living according to which makes us ἐυδαίμων.

Excellent Virtues

Ἀρετή, typically rendered as 'virtue,' is translated in the authoritative *Revised*

Oxford Translation as 'excellence.' Though the editors do not defend this translation, it

is likely that they avoid 'virtue' because it seems to set apart the ἀρετή of human beings

as something distinct from the ἀρετή of, for example, horses, flute players, and oak trees,

whereas in Greek the same word, ἀρετή, is used for both. 'Virtue' has come in English

to designate something like moral behavior at best, and perhaps something more like

prudish behavior at worst, and they may wish to highlight the way in which ἀρετή refers

to the 'excellence' of any natural or artificial thing, as opposed to just the moral virtues of

human beings. All of these are apt concerns, and this way of speaking fits in well with

the function argument, which argues for the unique function of human beings by analogy

with the unique functions of other things. Human beings, like eyes, cobblers, and

neckties, are good only if they perform their function well.

I will continue to use 'virtue,' however, both because I think that we do still

sensibly speak of the virtues of things other than human beings, such as the virtues or fine

points of a car or a particular plan, etc., so that it still captures the broader meaning of

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[43] 1098a16-18. My translation.

ἀρετή in that sense, and *because* virtue picks out something a little more unique than just the excellence of any kind. While Aristotle uses ἀρετή to denominate the excellences of animals and particular craftsmen and musicians as well as the excellences of human beings, he clearly thinks that there is something decidedly unique about the human ἀρετή, something that sets it apart from all other excellences of kinds precisely because human beings are unique among all other kinds of beings.

We are unique, Aristotle believes, in that we have λόγος, which I have translated as rationality. As I have put it thus far, we are able to choose our end rationally, hence the point of engaging in ethical thought at all, and we are able to aim at that good that we have chosen. Lear points out that λόγος has a wider meaning than just rationality, which is relevant to our understanding of the function argument.[44] Λόγος means rational or rational principle, but it also carries the meaning of an organizing principle. Just as we might speak of the 'logic' of a piece of artwork to describe the deliberative choice to order the elements in a particular fashion, putting one piece here and another there to create an overall artistic impression, so what is unique about human beings, Lear constantly stresses, is our ability to order ourselves around ends or goods beyond those simply given to us. The virtues represent precisely this ability. A virtue is an ordered desire – ordered according to our overarching desire for the good, or εὐδαιμονία, and ordering our actions by motivating us to act toward this final end. Every natural organism has a given nature, a form, that it is its function to express and fulfill, and for human beings, this is the λόγος, the ordered and ordering principle which allows us to move beyond our base desires for cattle-like pleasure and embrace higher and somehow *more* (humanly) natural pleasures. The virtues or excellences of human beings are not

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[44]Lear, 161*ff.*

natural to us in that we have them innately when we are born, but nor are they unnatural for us. Rather, they are our 'second-nature,' to use the language that Aristotle scholars have long employed; they are the nature that we can attain through habituation, but do not have automatically or without training.[45] Once we are habituated correctly, we find pleasure in acting virtuously, which is inherently pleasurable, and we do not gain any pleasure from acting against the virtues.[46]

Why is acting virtuously truly pleasurable for human beings, and acting against the virtues is not? To put the question more broadly, why is Aristotle so certain that acting according to the virtues will lead to εὐδαιμονία rather than goodness with misery, and even more pertinently to this dissertation, why is he so certain that we must act virtuously to have εὐδαιμονία? One answer, the one that we are going to focus on for now, is that εὐδαιμονία just is the human good, and so our fulfilling our natural form by functioning correctly leads to εὐδαιμονία, just as an acorn operating correctly and fulfilling its natural form by functioning correctly leads to its being a large and mighty oak tree that produces many more acorns. When we accomplish our τέλος, we become a unified part of our environment, just as the acorn in accomplishing its τέλος and fulfilling its metaphysical purpose becomes part of its. Without accomplishing our τέλος, we cannot reach εὐδαιμονία, which just is our τέλος, and so the virtues that are part of that τέλος are equally necessary and part of εὐδαιμονία. We will leave this question for now, but it will come up again.

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[45]*NE* 1103a14-1103b1.

[46]*NE* 1099a5-30.

We now return, after a long segue, to Aristotle's method and his need to harmonize his account of εὐδαιμονία with the φαινόμενα. Having shown that virtue is necessary for εὐδαιμονία, it may also seem obvious that virtue is sufficient for εὐδαιμονία, for there does not seem to be any reason to posit a gap between them: if one has the virtues, then one is εὐδαίμων. As Aristotle returns to his φαινόμενα, however, he promptly complicates this apparent near identity of virtue and εὐδαιμονία.

The first common opinion that he turns to is the notion that for it truly to be εὐδαίμων, such an active life cannot be for just one day, but must cover an entire life. We do not want to take the argument too far—we do not need to wait until someone is absolutely dead to pronounce him happy, nor should we hold the misfortunes of any distant relatives against him, especially heirs long after he is dead—but any misfortunes have an effect, and perhaps complete εὐδαιμονία cannot be judged for many years after one is dead. We may not know exactly how long we must wait before we can judge someone to be εὐδαίμων, but we know that it must be a long time, for one happy day or moment does not εὐδαιμονία make.[47]

He next turns to the things having been said (λεγούμενα) concerning happiness, for truth, he writes, harmonizes well with all of the facts, but they are soon discordant with falsity. To some, he reiterates, εὐδαιμονία "seems to be virtue, and to some practical wisdom, and to others a kind of wisdom, and to some, these things or some of these things with pleasure or not without pleasure; but others also include external

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[47]Cf. Terence Irwin, "Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1985), for a discussion of this issue.

prosperity."[48] Aristotle's account, that εὐδαιμονία is activity in accordance with virtue,

faithfully mirrors each of these concerns. Certainly his explanation corresponds well

with the claim that εὐδαιμονία consists in virtue, for those who are virtuous act in

accordance with their own virtues. As noted above, the correspondence is not simple, for

if we conceive of virtue as a state that one can possess without being active, while asleep

for example, then his definition has put more severe strictures on the relationship between

virtue and εὐδαιμονία: one cannot be called εὐδαίμων who possesses the virtues and yet

lies in a coma any more than one can win the Olympics simply by looking like or even

being the best athlete; rather, one must compete in the games and act virtuously to be

properly called a successful athlete or a virtuous human being.[49] Without action

(πρᾶξις)[50] one cannot most properly be said to be virtuous at all, for the virtue finds its

τέλος in action, not in the disposition or in knowledge: the young need not apply when it

comes to politics or ethical lectures, whether young in years or juvenile in character, "for

the knowledge becomes unprofitable for them, just as for the inconstant," "since the end

is not knowledge but action."[51]

At times, then, Aristotle reinterprets popular opinion as he honors it, meeting each

with a "yes… but…." Yes, εὐδαιμονία is virtue, but it is *active* virtue, not simply the

state of virtue. In the same way, yes, εὐδαιμονία is pleasurable, but it is not *mere*

pleasure, for we are human beings and hence naturally superior to fattened cows, for

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[48]*NE* 1098b 23-26. My translation.

[49]*NE* 1099a 1-7. Cf. also 1096a1-4, and Nussbaum's discussion of these passages, 322-324.

[50]This is not ἐνέργεια, the *activity* of a τέλος that is opposed to the-already-accomplished or habitual, but πρᾶξις, which would fit more closely with what we tend to mean by normal *action* that is opposed to inaction. To return to the archer motif from above, it is the drawing of the bow as opposed to the *being an archer*, or *engaging in the activity of archery*, that characterizes ἐνέργεια in an ideal sense.

[51]*NE* 1095a 8-9, 5-6.

whom this might be true.[52] Again, 'mere' pleasures such as these, the pleasures of the

hoi polloi, conflict with each other, for they are not pleasant by nature (φύσει), but

merely to those who have been ruined or marred (διεφθαρμένοις).[53] The many find it

pleasurable to eat excessive amounts of sweets and drink grande cappuccinos, but also

find it pleasant to be thin, fit, and look like they are in their twenties well into their

forties. The virtuous person, on the other hand, enjoys what is pleasurable in itself (καθ᾽

αὐτόν ἡδύς), for she finds pleasure in that of which she is fond, which is acting

virtuously. Aristotle makes the same move for pleasure as he made for virtue: true

pleasure is acting in accord with virtue, for this is pleasurable in itself and not merely to

those who have ruined their ability to appreciate true pleasure, and so activity in

accordance with virtue is the most pleasant thing of all. Pleasure is not some sort of

appendage or jewelry (περιάπτου) attached to a virtuous life after the fact, but is an

integral part of what it means to live virtuously. The virtuous person must enjoy acting

virtuously, and must not enjoy acting in a way not in accord with virtue.[54] The just

person must not only act justly, but must only enjoy acting justly!

One Tricky Φαινόμενον: *Aristotle on External Goods*

Finally, Aristotle considers the claim that external goods are also necessary for

virtue, but here his move does not parallel those above. That is, he does not claim that

the active life of virtue already possesses the external goods, properly understood, so that

his definition of happiness as activity in accordance with virtue already captures all of the

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[52]*NE* 1095b19-22.

[53]Cf. *NE* 1176a20-22.

[54]Cf. Annas, *Morality*, 368-369.

truth; rather, he appends a further requirement to his definition, that "the happy person is the one who, having been sufficiently equipped with external goods (τοῖς ἐκτὸς ἀγαθοῖς), engages in activities according to complete virtue," and over a complete life.[55] There has been a great deal of recent debate as to how we should take Aristotle's claims regarding external goods, and it is important to our present account that we be clear on this matter, both because it echoes the concern with common opinion embodied in his general method, and because it turns out to be rather central to some later questions regarding the potentially monolithic structure of good in Aristotle.

Aristotle means different things by "external" goods in different places. In the *Rhetoric* external clearly means external to the person, the body/soul composite, and so it involves mostly material goods.[56] Likewise, in his first mention of external goods in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle contrasts them with goods of the soul and goods of the body, here dividing the person into parts but still considering any goods thereof to be internal goods. However, as John Cooper notes in "Aristotle on the Goods of Fortune," when he comes to the crucial passage, Aristotle seems to have shifted his meaning so that any good external to the soul is an external good, including those of the body. For in addition to the normal list of external goods, such as good birth and political power and friends and wealth, he also lists beauty as an external good we're best not to be without.[57] More generally, in the ethics external goods seem to include any good that is external to the soul.

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[55]*NE* 1101a14-15. My translation.

[56]*Rhetoric*, 1360b26-27. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* ed. Jonathan Barnes Vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[57]John M. Cooper, "Aristotle on the Goods of Fortune," *The Philosophical Review* 94:2 (Apr. 1985): 177.

The central passage concerning external goods (1099a31 – 1099b8)[58] is worth

looking at in some detail:

> But, further, it appears that εὐδαιμονία is in need of external goods, just as we
> said; for it is not possible or not easy to do the fine things (τὰ καλὰ) without
> supplies. For on the one hand, many things (πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ) are done through
> friends and wealth and political power, just as through instruments; but on the
> other hand, lacking some resources (ἐνίων δὲ τητώμενοι), such as noble birth,
> being blest with children, and being beautiful, mars (ῥυπαίνουσι) their
> blessedness; for the one who is utterly ugly in appearance or low-born or alone
> and childless is not at all likely to be εὐδαίμων, but still perhaps less if he has
> utterly evil children or friends, or if, though good, they have died. Therefore, just
> as we said, εὐδαιμονία seems to need this sort of prosperity as well; whence
> some people [believe that] good luck is likewise necessary for εὐδαιμονία, but
> others [believe this of] virtue.[59]

This last sentence indicates the two extreme intuitions that Aristotle is attempting to

negotiate: on the one hand are those who think that εὐδαιμονία requires the good fortune

of having all of the circumstances necessary to being εὐδαίμων, and at the opposite

extreme are those who believe that only virtue can be εὐδαιμονία precisely *because* it is

the one thing not affected by fortune. Aristotle clearly distinguishes two ways in which

not having the external goods prevents a virtuous person from achieving εὐδαιμονία:

first, the external goods are necessary as instruments to allow the virtuous person to be

virtuous, and second, lacking certain of the resources may, in some way, mar the

εὐδαιμονία or blessedness of the virtuous person.

The first role of external goods has remained relatively uncontroversial: it is

generally allowed that being magnificent or generous, for example, requires material

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[58]My translation. There is a slightly later passage (1100b 23-35) which parallels the distinction
made here in terms of fortune, and there it speaks of external goods in two modes as well: as adorning, and
as allowing for further virtuous activity. While I will occasionally use the language of adorning, I do not
discuss this passage in detail, largely because I believe that it adds little, though certainly it supports the
reading that I eventually offer by supporting the idea that there are two different types of goods involved.

[59]Literally, "whence some people place good luck in the same position to εὐδαιμονία, but others
virtue."

possessions, and being a μεγαλόψυχος clearly requires a great number of material possessions. Friends, wealth, and political power, the three examples that Aristotle lists as instrumental external goods, are thus instruments or organs (ὀργάνων) by which we are able to achieve further virtuous action. An ὀργάνων is any sort of tool or instrument by which something further is accomplished, something beyond the action itself, such as an organ of sense that produces a perception, or a musical instrument that produces music. Here we are using our friends or wealth or political power to produce further virtuous action that would not have been available to us without their assistance.

The second, however, has become the locus of a quite interesting contemporary debate. On one side is Cooper,[60] who has argued persuasively that the second role of external goods collapses into a version of the first, but one that is set apart by its focus on contexts of action as opposed to instruments for action: Aristotle opposes the two ideas, then, not because one use of goods is instrumental and the other not, but because one use is instrumental and characteristic of any virtuous action, while the latter is characteristic of a virtuous agent in superior circumstances. In other words, Cooper reads Aristotle as reinterpreting what it means to have external goods, just as he reinterprets the claim that happiness is pleasure. Yes, true virtue requires external goods, but not *as* external goods; rather, external goods just provide prerequisites for virtuous action. If Cooper's reading is correct, then Aristotle is not as committed to common opinion as I have made out, and εὐδαιμονία may not look much like what common people believe it looks like. After

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[60]On this 'side' of the debate, we could also perhaps add Richard Kraut, though he doesn't fit neatly into this debate as I have outlined it. He certainly denies that the external goods are in any way a part of happiness, as opposed to merely being necessary for it, but this is because he denies the 'inclusive' view entirely; that is, he denies that anything at all, including pleasure, honor and friends, are parts of happiness, instead arguing that happiness is only a life of active virtue in contemplation, which then orders the rest of life. External goods are, at best, necessary preconditions for happiness, but are not part of it. While coherent and intriguing, this fails to do justice to the common sense methodology of Aristotle. Richard Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989).

looking in more detail at Cooper's suggestion, I will turn next to the responses offered by Julia Annas and Terence Irwin.

External Goods as Instrumentally Valuable

Cooper, like most scholars, finds Aristotle's second claim to be quite opaque. What can it mean that "lacking some resources, such as noble birth, being blest with children, and being beautiful, mars their blessedness"? The word I translate as 'mars,' ῥυπαίνουσι, literally means to defile or disfigure, and so suggests that their blessedness or εὐδαιμονία is twisted or perverted in some manner by lacking certain resources. Aristotle continues, "for the one who is utterly ugly in appearance or low-born or alone and childless is not at all likely to be εὐδαίμων, but still perhaps less if he has utterly evil children or friends, or if, though good, they have died." It is interesting that he shifts from a discussion of certain goods, the lack of which will harm our εὐδαιμονία, to the extreme case in which we not only lack some good but have its opposing evil. If you think that someone without children is likely to lack εὐδαιμονία, Aristotle says, consider the person who either has evil children and friends or who had good ones but has now lost them to death. Clearly Aristotle believes that the lack of certain types of goods is on a continuum with the presence of certain types of evils.

Lacking some resources disfigures our blessedness, then, because it is almost as bad as having an actual evil in our life, such as utterly vicious children. Being unattractive may not be evil in itself, but it actively mars our εὐδαιμονία. All of this may seem painfully obvious: well of course someone is worse off if they are low-born than high-born or if they are alone and childless, at least *ceteris paribus*. Given the same virtues and the same character, would not a noble and virtuous peasant be better off as a

noble and virtuous lord? And being virtuous and wise, the person involved is aware of this fact, and so his εὐδαιμονία is disfigured, it is less and other than it would have been if he had been given all of the possible external goods that would have brought joy to his life.[61] Cooper concludes, "So one might conjecture that the disfigurement of one's blessedness in all these cases might be a matter of simply lacking or being deprived of something one very much prized and wanted to have, together perhaps with a consequent sense of frustration and disappointment."[62]

Though he admits the naturalness of such a reading, Cooper suggests that this is not in fact what Aristotle means. Cooper points to a later passage in Book VII that seems to him to repeat the same doctrine, but with a twist: instead of speaking of the external goods adorning one's virtue, Aristotle focuses on the way in which external goods are needed to enable one's active employment of natural capacities; in other words, all external goods are needed for the sole purpose of allowing one to act virtuously.[63] All external goods, then, including goods of the body and external goods proper, are necessary not because they actually make one's life better in themselves, but because they allow one to exercise one's virtue. This is clearly the case for the instrumental external goods, but Cooper must work a little harder to demonstrate that this is equally so for those the lack of which mars our εὐδαιμονία. He makes his case by considering the

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[61]I find Cooper's suggestion that the loss of a good child or friend is felt mostly as the loss of joy to oneself a little more difficult to accept than his parallel suggestion that not having children is felt as a loss of a good for oneself. Not having yet had a child, one may naturally think more of oneself and the advantage to oneself of having a child, but once one has had a child it seems more natural to speak of a mixed sadness, both for oneself, and for the child or friend that will not get to experience any future joys.

[62]Cooper, "Goods of Fortune," 180.

[63]*NE* 1153b 17-19: "That is why the happy person needs in addition the goods of the body and external goods or goods of fortune, so that these activities will not be impeded." (Cooper's translation, 181). He could also have cited a similar passage from the *Politics* 1295a 35-8, here Aristotle defines happiness as a life of activity that is unhindered.

broadened scope of contexts in which someone with all of the external goods will be able to practice his virtues. One rather humorous example he gives is of an ugly person who has less scope for practicing sexual temperance than a more attractive person.[64] Such a person may develop his virtues fully and practice them faithfully, but he has fewer contexts in which to practice his virtues, and so he is impeded in his virtuous activities and finds that his blessedness is disfigured.

Ῥυπαίνουσι, the word which I translate as 'mars,' is a present, active, indicative verb, which makes Cooper's translation odd, for he has it that "lacking certain things people find their blessedness disfigured," as if their happiness is passively *disfigured* but they actively *find out* that this is the case.[65] In adding the idea that such people find their blessedness already disfigured, Cooper makes more plausible his subsequent reading of this passage wherein it is not really the lack of goods which mars one's blessedness, but rather the subsequent impediment of virtuous activity that it results in.[66] But this ignores not only the specific grammar, but also the suggestion that such a lack of goods is on a continuum with positive evils in one's life: surely it is not the case that having utterly evil

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[64]Cooper, "Goods of Fortune," 182. I think that this is misguided for numerous reasons, not least because it seems to make temperance merely a matter of acting rather than of attitude and disposition: an ugly person could *perhaps* not have as much sex as an attractive one, but surely he or she could be just as sexually intemperate!

[65]Cooper, "Goods of Fortune," 179.

[66]There is another grammatical point to be made, but this one is weaker than the above. Aristotle delineates the two types with the common Greek construction "μέν…, δέ…" which I translate "On the one hand…, on the other hand…", and which generally indicates an opposition between two things. In Cooper's reading, however, there is no contrast or opposition, but merely a listing of two ways in which external goods are instrumental. The point is weak, though, precisely because this construction can be as weak as a "both…, and…" Also, the contrast is typically strongest between the words that appear before the postpositive "μέν" and "δέ", which in this case is "πολλὰ," referring to the *many* ways in which external goods can be instruments, and "ἐνίων," referring to *some* or certain other goods, the lack of which mars their blessedness. The case would be much stronger, if not conclusive, if ὀργάνων and ῥυπαίνουσι were the contrasted words instead, but since they would rarely occur in that position, that may be what the present construction is actually indicating. Cf. J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*, 369*ff.*

children or friends merely mars our εὐδαιμονία by impeding our ability to practice virtue; rather they harm us by causing us grief and perhaps making it less likely that we will continue in our own virtue.

There are more serious reasons to doubt Cooper's reading of Aristotle. Julia Annas presents two arguments against Cooper, both of which I think point to an interesting problem for his position, which she calls the Internal-use view.[67] According to Cooper, having external goods is not actually part of εὐδαιμονία, but merely provides opportunities for the unimpeded practice of virtues, which is εὐδαιμονία; such goods are either instruments for virtuous action or contexts in which we can be virtuous in a preferred manner. Given that, it is difficult to present a coherent picture of motivation for virtuous agents, for while they appear to be, e.g., getting food because they are hungry, they are actually seeking either instruments to allow them to continue being virtuous (because they are not dead presumably), or broadened contexts in which to practice their virtues more fully (perhaps because having a full stomach allows them to practice justice and liberality). The food itself, though, is not actually their goal. Of course, for Aristotle, every action is ultimately for εὐδαιμονία as noted above, but how can we sensibly speak of virtuous persons' actions if they do not also, above and beyond virtuous activity, have the goal of attaining external goods?

The question of external goods, though, is not only why lacking them mars one's εὐδαιμονία, but why losing them is even worse, and here Annas believes Cooper's argument has two unacceptably untoward consequences. First, it is not actually bad in itself to be tortured to death or to lose good friends; it is only bad because it deprives us of the ability to exercise further virtue. This follows from his general denial that external

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[67]Annas, *Morality*, 378-80.

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goods are intrinsically good: if they are not intrinsically good, then it is not intrinsically

bad to lose them, simply an impediment to our exercise of virtue. Second, this would

amount to an error theory of value when it comes to losing things, for certainly we all

think that there is good reason to prefer a painless death to a painful one, but we are

wrong on this count. Whether we die painlessly or painfully, we lose the same number of

contexts for exercising virtue (all of them).

These objections seem to me to be decisive, but we can add one further untoward

consequence as well. It is not clear, on Cooper's view, that we can make sense of

Aristotle's famous claim that we value our friends in themselves and for themselves.[68] I

love my child or my friend for herself, not as a context for me to exercise virtue, and I

choose friends based on the virtue that I perceive in *them*, not based on their ability to

offer me a preferred context for the exercise of my virtue. To be fair, the problem of

particularity and what it means to love another in herself is a particularly difficult one,[69]

but clearly it must at least include the recognition of intrinsic value in others, or else we

are merely loving them for ourselves. This recognition Cooper's view denies.

External Goods as Intrinsically Valuable

The other option, then, is to read the second comment concerning external goods

as referring to an entirely different reason why lacking some goods negatively affects

one's ability to be εὐδαίμων. It is, in other words, to read ῥυπαίνουσι as referring to a

manner in which one's blessedness is actively disfigured or defiled by being without

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[68]*NE* 1166a 4-5.

[69]For an excellent discussion of these difficulties, cf. Tim Chappell, "Absolutes and Particulars,"
in *Modern Moral Philosophy*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lecture Series, 2002-2003, ed. Anthony
O'Hear (Cambridge UP, 2004), 95-118.

certain goods, such as good friends and children, because these goods are, in fact, good in themselves, and we recognize that fact and desire them. The intuitive aspect of this view is a strong point in its favor, but Annas has some concerns about this reading of Aristotle as well.

Her first argument concerns the requirement that εὐδαιμονία must be complete and self-sufficient. The completeness requirement, Annas believes, presents this view, which she calls the External-use view, with a deep mystery: if some of these external goods are necessary for εὐδαιμονία, then having more of them must increase my εὐδαιμονία. Someone who is already εὐδαίμων should be able to increase her εὐδαιμονία by the addition of external goods, but then her εὐδαιμονία was never complete to begin with. Aristotle could hold instead that while external goods are required to make a virtuous person fully εὐδαίμων, their increase cannot actually increase her εὐδαιμονία. "But this is deeply mysterious."[70]

As with Cooper, so here: the situation is purportedly worse when we consider the loss of goods.[71] The External-use is able to make sense of the claim that losing goods is a genuine loss, but then, she urges, there must be a point where you have lost enough goods that you are simply not εὐδαίμων anymore. This, however, Aristotle famously denies in his consideration of whether we must wait until a life is over to declare it εὐδαίμων. In the midst of the worst calamities, Aristotle argues, the virtuous person will still not be truly miserable, for she remains virtuous:

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[70]Annas, *Morality*, 381. As I will point out below, I do not see why the view that having some goods is necessary but increasing them may not increase happiness is mysterious at all. Empirical studies have generally shown what common sense could perhaps already have made clear: past a certain rather minimal point, the addition of *more* wealth or external goods of any sort does not increase reported happiness, and in many cases decreases it.

[71]Ibid., 382-383.

> And if it is so, the εὐδαίμων would never become wretched, but even so he will not be blessed if he should encounter luck (τύχαις) like Priam's. Nor indeed is he unstable (ποικίλος) and changeable (εὐμετάβαλος); for he is not moved easily away from εὐδαιμονία, and not by chance mishaps but by great and many mishaps, and out of such as these he would not again become εὐδαίμων in a short time, but if at all, in some long and complete time, and having become in possession in himself of great and noble deeds.[72]

The picture here is of a person who, in good circumstances and poor, is not easily swept along by the winds of fortune, but recognizes and affectively responds to the true analysis of his situation. When minor misfortunes befall him, or even a large misfortune but surrounded by good fortune, he recognizes that he still has what matters most to him, his character and many of the external goods that helped make his life εὐδαίμων, and that he therefore remains blessed. But if many, deep, and grave misfortunes befall him, then he recognizes that truly he is no longer blessed and it would be inappropriate blithely to consider himself εὐδαίμων in the face of such calamities, and he will affectively have the appropriate response to the situation and to this recognition.[73] Nor will he be easily consoled with false or trite consolation, or consider himself to be εὐδαίμων again as soon as the smallest fortune comes his way, but will, throughout, realistically assess his situation.

Annas, however, charges that as Aristotle describes the virtuous person, he is quite unrealistic in one regard: he will never consider himself, nor will he ever be, truly miserable. If external goods are real, intrinsically-good goods, though, and their loss genuinely disfigures one's εὐδαιμονία, then the loss of sufficient goods, or at least of a

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[72]*NE* 1101a 6-13. My translation.

[73]This is not intended as a full analysis of the interconnections of intellectual recognition and affective response in Aristotle, nor do I believe that the situation is this simple. For example, the emotion response will typically *precede* the intellectual recognition, but it is itself intellectual as well, so the two cannot be so easily separated. Annas is characteristically clear and insightful on these points, and I have no major quibbles with her account so far as it is intended as exegesis of Aristotle (cf. 53-83).

sufficient number of sufficient types, *should* make one genuinely miserable, and if they do not, then they must not *really* have detracted from one's εὐδαιμονία to begin with.

What shall we say in response on Aristotle's behalf? Let us deal with the second charge first, the charge that this picture is incoherent when it comes to the loss of goods. First, the goods lost, to affect deeply the virtuous person's εὐδαιμονία at all, must be such things as good friends and children, or one's health, or, as in the case of Priam, one's entire civilization. We are not talking about the loss of money, or of material possessions, though if enough of these are lost the virtuous person may be less εὐδαίμων.[74] Such situations, then, are going to be relatively rare anyway, for virtuous people, being wise, are not lightly to be deprived of a great number of their most precious goods. Surely, though, as the case of Priam is meant to demonstrate, this does happen, and Aristotle denies that it would result in the virtuous person's complete misery, for, as he says earlier in the same section, "activities according to virtue are decisive for happiness, the opposite actions for the opposite of happiness."[75] Here, at least, appears to be the answer to Annas's concern: only vicious people can be truly miserable, as only virtuous people can be truly happy, because virtue is such a precious good that no one having it could ever honestly consider herself to be completely lost or unblessed, and the virtuous person always affectively responds to the reality of the situation.[76]

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[74]This is yet another point that can be made against Cooper's account, though it is along the same lines as other, more general arguments we have already looked at: if money is important as a context for virtue, then its loss will have a serious effect on our εὐδαιμονία, but this Aristotle denies. So it is difficult to see how Cooper's understanding does justice to the actual division of goods that Aristotle gives, a division more obviously in line with the extension of things that we value deeply as people, rather than the extension of things that provide broader contexts for virtuous action.

[75]*NE* 1100b 9-11. My translation.

[76]Irwin makes a similar response in his review of Annas's book: Irwin, "Happiness, Virtue, and Morality," *Ethics* 105, no. 1 (October, 1994): 175-177.

There is nothing incoherent about this position, and it is unclear why Annas believes that it is such a problem, but it does seem deeply at odds with common sense. Have we finally caught Aristotle out then? Here, at last, he is making a point because of a philosophical theory that doesn't match our common intuitions, for surely we do think that even virtuous people, facing enough calamities, are miserable by any meaningful definition of the term. Perhaps even here, however, we can ameliorate the seeming counter-intuitiveness of his position, and a good place to start is with Aristotle's comment that actions are what really matter in life.[77] Just as a good general, forced into battle, will always use what he has available to him rather than insist on having ideal circumstances in which to wage war, so the virtuous person, Aristotle implies, will always do the noblest deed possible given the circumstances, and so he does not act badly, and so he is not miserable. It is what we can control that should affect our own assessment of our lives, Aristotle suggests, and so we would be mistaken to assess our lives as miserable when we have acted virtuously throughout.

Let us return to the first charge then, which Annas presents as a dilemma: either Aristotle must hold that no one's εὐδαιμονία is ever complete, for one could always have more external goods, or that while external goods are required to make a virtuous person fully εὐδαίμων, their increase cannot increase one's εὐδαιμονία at all. The first horn is unacceptable as an interpretation of Aristotle, for clearly he does believe that some people succeed in being εὐδαίμων on earth, and equally clearly, their εὐδαιμονία is complete. The second horn, too, is daunting, for it is supposedly quite mysterious how a certain number of goods should be needed for εὐδαιμονία, and yet no increase of that

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[77]Meaning not just external actions, but any deliberatively chosen action, including thinking, forming opinions, etc.

amount of goods will increase the εὐδαιμονία of the virtuous person.[78] Annas concludes

that Aristotle is trying to do justice to the two aspects of common sense we noted above:

external goods are intrinsically valuable and so affect our εὐδαιμονία directly, and yet

εὐδαιμονία cannot be so susceptible to luck that loss of something we cannot control

affects our εὐδαιμονία. But there is no compromise available; this, she says, is the

source of instability in Aristotle's view that the Stoics solve by giving up the first belief.

Irwin considers this same problem in his earlier article, "Permanent Happiness:

Aristotle and Solon," and provides an ingenious way out of the problem based on the

distinction between determinates and determinables. Determinable types are broader;

they are the less distinct class of which a determinate is a particular type, and of which

any particular instance of that determinate type is a determinate token. The suggestion,

then, is that "Aristotle probably believes that the complete good is composed of a

sufficient number of tokens of some determinate types of each of the determinable types

of good… In saying that no good can be added Aristotle means that no determinable type

of good can be added to happiness to make a better good than happiness."[79]

Εὐδαιμονία, then, requires a certain number of tokens of the various determinate types

that fall under the appropriate determinable types of good. If exercise aimed at health is a

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[78]It is a little hard to see why this is supposed to be quite so mysterious as Annas claims. As we will see in the next chapter, psychological studies have generally found that a small amount of goods is necessary for happiness, but that increases in wealth and other goods beyond that point have only a small or even nonexistent correlation with happiness. In normal life this is a rather obvious (though often ignored) point: increased wealth and goods adds pressures to our life and few of the things that we think 'really matter,' like time with loved ones. Perhaps we should understand Annas as claiming that given Aristotle's general structure, if external goods are truly goods, then an increase of them should always be *good*, and hence lead to greater εὐδαιμονία. That this is not true does not show that external goods are not actually goods, but that their goodness can rather easily be outweighed by various negatives that they bring along.

[79]Irwin, "Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon," 99. Irwin here translates εὐδαιμονία as happiness, an issue we will turn to shortly.

determinable type of good, Irwin writes, then a determinate type of exercise might be golf, and a determinate token a particular game of golf that I play for exercise.

Annas simply responds that as brilliant as this is, "Aristotle shows no explicit interest in anything which lines up with our distinction between determinables and determinates."[80] I think that Annas is probably right about this, Aristotle never appears to be aware of the contemporary distinction between determinables and determinates, but that might just mean that Irwin should not have put the argument into contemporary analytic language if he was trying to convince Aristotle scholars of a bit of exegesis, for it seems to me that something like the general view here can be found in Aristotle. In Aristotelian terms, Irwin's argument is quite basic: the φρόνιμοι must practically determine for themselves what particular goods to have to fulfill their εὐδαιμονία, just as they must determine for themselves what acting courageously means for them in the particular circumstances in which they find themselves.

To put the point another way, it is perfectly consistent with Aristotle's approach to believe that different people who have εὐδαιμονία, especially in different circumstances, will look substantially different. One person may have three or four close, intimate, virtuous friends (though surely not more than that), but only one virtuous child, while another has a number of virtuous children, but only one close virtuous friend. One person might be truly beautiful, but less well-born, while another is less beautiful though not ugly, but quite well-born. As long as there are many different ways in which to be εὐδαίμων, Irwin's point holds: when Aristotle speaks of completeness, he means that εὐδαιμονία must include certain broad classes of goods, such as those of health, of beauty, of friendship, of honors, etc., and no more of these can be added to increase one's

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[80]Annas, *Morality*, 382.

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εὐδαιμονία, but when it comes to particular ways of fulfilling these broad classes, there are a variety of options open to the virtuous person at every stage of life.

Conclusion

We conclude, then, that Aristotle has a coherent and stable account of the human good, εὐδαιμονία, in which it is integrally connected to the human virtues. It is only when we have these integrated dispositions to think, act, and react intelligently and emotionally in such a way as to reach the good that we find our pleasures in what is truly pleasurable for human beings and find our good in what is humanly good. Neither animals nor the god, we must actively strive to fulfill the human good and so find true εὐδαιμονία, which, according to the common sense method that Aristotle has followed, is just an active life in accordance with the ordering rational principle that makes us uniquely human beings. Such a good, though, one of living well and acting well, sounds very much like what we would today want to call happiness, and indeed, εὐδαιμονία is most often translated as 'happiness.' Aristotle's argument, though, is meant to rely on our common intuitions concerning this concept; does Aristotle's use of εὐδαιμονία capture the common sense notion of happiness used today?

CHAPTER THREE

Happiness

The virtues are necessary for happiness, according to the thesis that we are exploring in this essay. We have discussed the virtues already; now we must turn to a discussion of happiness. We have worked to interpret Aristotle in the expectation that his approach to the necessity thesis can helpfully guide our own, but this is the case only if we are talking about the same thing. Aristotle, of course, believed not that virtue is necessary for happiness, but that ἀρετή is necessary for εὐδαιμονία; the question thus arises: should we translate εὐδαιμονία as 'happiness'? If 'happiness' is a different concept than εὐδαιμονία, we may end up discussing a very different thesis: that virtue is necessary for us to be in a certain psychological state. We may not want to accept this latter thesis, and we may doubt whether it has the same interest as the former or the same role to play in eudaimonistic virtue ethics.

We turn first, then, to a discussion of translation issues: should εὐδαιμονία be translated as 'happiness'? Translation questions will turn, naturally, on what 'happiness' means, which leads us into a discussion of contemporary discussions of happiness, a minefield with all-too-few markers. I will not attempt to argue, in this limited space, that every definition of happiness except Aristotle's is mistaken, but by clarifying the landscape of accounts of happiness and discussing some of the pitfalls of various theories I hope to carve out some space for claiming that what people *sometimes* mean when they speak of happiness is very similar to εὐδαιμονία. More importantly, they mean something like εὐδαιμονία by 'happiness' precisely when they are engaged in those

activities that are most important for the necessity thesis: when they are reflecting on their lives and the place of other activities in their lives, when they are planning how to live, and when they are dreaming and hoping what their futures, and their children's futures, will be like. 'Happiness,' as it is commonly used, does not always, or perhaps even usually, mean what Aristotle meant by εὐδαιμονία, but it does mean something very like it precisely when we are engaged in ethical thought and reflection.

This chapter, and this dissertation in general, is not intended to be either an in-depth historical interpretation of Aristotle's use of the necessity thesis, nor a defense of Aristotle. If an Aristotle scholar reads this work and cries out in triumph that I have ignored Aristotle's discussion of the human liver and happiness in *De Something or Another*, this is neither a refutation of my work, nor a proof of its incompleteness. I intend to offer, instead, a broadly Aristotelian account of happiness and its relation to virtue, one indebted not only to Aristotle, but to other Aristotelians, such as Aquinas, MacIntyre, Williams, and Hursthouse. The hope, as the introduction makes clear, is to understand more fully the role of the necessity thesis in virtue ethics, as well as the cost of accepting the necessity thesis, rather than to defend Aristotle. Aristotle has been pertinent far longer than the newish field of virtue ethics, and will probably long survive it, even in the fickle academy; he can stand up for himself, and I will allow him to do so.

Εὐδαιμονία *by Any Other Name*

In *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, John Cooper translates εὐδαιμονία as 'flourishing' because 'happiness,' he argues briefly in a footnote, does not currently mean what Aristotle meant by εὐδαιμονία. Although he does not identify his criteria, it is clear from his arguments that Cooper takes the best translation to be the current word that

is used in the same circumstances in which the ancient Greeks of Aristotle's day would have used their word; the terms should have the same basic extension. 'Happiness' fails this test, Cooper believes, because there are numerous instances where Aristotle uses εὐδαιμονία in ways that we would not use 'happiness,' and vice versa. Cooper offers as examples Aristotle's claim concerning the inability of animals or children ever to have εὐδαιμονία, as well as his claims that one single day does not make one εὐδαίμων, nor any brief time, but only a complete life, and that events which happen after our death may affect our εὐδαιμονία as well.[1] *We* are quite happy referring to children and animals as happy, Cooper claims, and tend to use the term to denote exceedingly ephemeral feelings and emotions, while we do *not* believe that a person's happiness can be affected by *anything* after he or she is dead. Aristotle is explicit that these facets of εὐδαιμονία are common opinion and hence part of what ancient Greeks meant by the term; it follows that εὐδαιμονία and 'happiness' have different extensions.

'Flourishing,' on the other hand, appears to Cooper to track these intuitions rather well, and so to have a similar extension to εὐδαιμονία. A child is not said to flourish in the same way that an adult flourishes, nor do we judge flourishing according to brief periods of time, but in light of one's entire life. He likewise argues that, given how much we value the good of our children and loved ones, it is reasonable to say that someone is not flourishing who dies knowing that his children are not flourishing, or who dies believing that they will flourish, but is deeply mistaken in this view.

To start with the easy point first, I see little reason to believe that 'flourishing' captures these intuitions more aptly than 'happiness.' It may be true that we judge

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[1]John Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, 89, fn.1. For Aristotle's claims, cf. respectively *EE* 1219b5-8 and *NE* 1100a1-4, *EE* 1219b5 and *NE* 1098a18-20, and *NE* 1101a22*ff*.

whether someone is flourishing using a longer span of time, but surely we speak of a

child flourishing just as sensibly as we speak of a child being happy. In neither case do

we believe that they flourish or are happy *just as* adults would flourish or be happy, but

we extend the terms to them equally.[2] What we mean in each case is that they are happy

or flourish *as* children. Likewise, if we think that the fate of people's children matters

after their death because of their deception, then surely it matters as much for their

happiness as for their flourishing (and by our present use of the terms it seems rather

doubtful for both). Richard Kraut presents a similar but opposite series of arguments to

those offered by Cooper for the conclusion that 'flourishing' (or 'well being') is a less apt

translation than 'happiness' because it too fails to be used in similar circumstances: (1) it

is not a common word, as was εὐδαιμονία, and so it makes the question of virtue and

εὐδαιμονία sound impractical (and, I might add, less interesting), whereas 'happiness'

does not; (2) 'flourishing' is paradigmatically asserted of non-human creatures and

plants, whereas εὐδαιμονία and 'happiness' both apply primarily (or exclusively) to

human beings; and (3) people are often said to 'flourish' in a certain role (e.g., as

pornographers in democracies), meaning that in this role they do well under these

conditions, whereas εὐδαιμονία is never context specific or role-dependent.[3] Cooper

and Kraut both overstate the case: 'happiness,' 'flourishing,' and 'well-being' all match

well with some aspects of 'εὐδαιμονία' and less well with others, meaning that they all

share some of its extension, but none has precisely the same extension. As far as the

translation criterion goes, the terms are probably about on a par.

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[2]Kraut, "Two Conceptions of Happiness," *The Philosophical Review* 88, no. 2 (April 1979), 169.

[3]Ibid.

For the purposes of exploring the applicability and truth of the necessity thesis, however, I will employ the most common translation of εὐδαιμονία, 'happiness,' for two central reasons. First, in discussing the ethical life and human virtues, it is important to use a word that obviously and primarily refers to human beings. Second, using either 'flourishing' or 'well-being' to translate εὐδαιμονία masks just how challenging the necessity thesis is to many of our contemporary accounts of happiness and ethics and gives the false impression that any apparent discrepancies between Aristotle and contemporary accounts of happiness are linguistic rather than substantial. Which, not coincidentally, is exactly what some philosophers of happiness believe.

Daniel Haybron, for example, argues quite persuasively that, in our contemporary meaning of the word, Aristotle has no theory of happiness, but rather a theory of well-being conflated with a theory of the good life.[4] He offers two related arguments for this conclusion: first, Aristotle could continue to hold to his entire ethical system, including his account of εὐδαιμονία, while assuming an account of happiness such as that offered by Haybron, so the disagreement over 'happiness' must be merely a verbal dispute; second, whereas the contemporary account of happiness takes it to be a psychological phenomenon, Aristotle's account of εὐδαιμονία assumes, as we have shown at length in chapter two, that certain external goods and conditions are needed as well. Answering Haybron's charges will require that we tackle what was an inevitable task anyway: we must figure out in what happiness consists.

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[4]Daniel Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), chap. 2. Quoted by permission of the author.

Specifying Happiness

Aristotle believes that happiness consists in rational activity continued over the course of a life, specifically the activity of being and living virtuously, without substantial or enduring interruption and with sufficient external goods, including friends and family members. Three aspects of Aristotle's definition of happiness have come under particular fire in modern discussions of happiness: its objectivity, its determination of happiness by the species 'human being' as opposed to features of the individual, and its reliance on features that are non-psychological. While the three are connected, they are separate complaints, and different accounts privilege one feature over others.[5]

Divisions

The first division among theories of happiness relates to whether happiness is an *objective* state, or a purely *subjective* one. We can define this divide in terms of transparency: subjectivists believe that happiness is fully transparent, while objectivists believe that it is at least sometimes or in some way opaque to the individual whether she is happy. Subjectivists class happiness with states like pain: if a person is feeling pain, then she is in pain. In the same way, if a person feels happy, then she *is* happy; that is all that we mean by the phrase. Subjectivists, in this case, are more extreme; subjectivists posit that happiness is a *purely* subjective state that one can *never* be wrong about. Anyone who disagrees with this, even very occasionally, is an objectivist. Objectivists come in all stripes, of course, and so believe that people can be wrong about whether they

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[5]While Haybron never offers precisely this threefold division, much of the following discussion owes a great deal to his various discussions and attempts to clarify theories of happiness in his articles and forthcoming book. See especially "Well-Being and Virtue," *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (August 2007): 1-27; "On Being Happy or Unhappy," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 71, no. 2 (September 2005): 287-317; and *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being*.

are happy for strikingly different reasons. Some, like Daniel Haybron and Daniel Gilbert, whom we will discuss further below, are objectivists about happiness because of their limited faith in human beings' ability to have reliable access to their own mental states. Aristotle, on the other hand, believes that those who are vicious will be mistaken in ascribing happiness to themselves because they fail to (are unable to) understand in what true happiness consists. Happiness is sometimes opaque because enjoying it requires that we be a certain kind of person that it is very difficult to become: a virtuous person.

The second division, between *existence internalists* and *externalists*, concerns the source of the requirements for making one happy.[6] What determines what makes a person happy? Existence externalists believe that the source of these requirements is external to the person whose happiness we are discussing, in that they derive from, to take G. E. Moore as an example, the nonnatural property of goodness. Existence internalists, on the other hand, believe that the source of the requirement is something about the human being whose happiness we are discussing. The intuitive problem with existence externalism lies in its 'alienating' a person from *her own* good, or happiness.[7] Peter Railton summarizes the appeal of existence internalism as follows:

> It does seem to me to capture an important feature of the concept of intrinsic value to say that what is intrinsically valuable for a person must have a connection with what he would find in some degree compelling or attractive, as least if he were rational and aware. It would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it might fail in any such way to engage him.[8]

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[6]The distinction, so far as I can tell, is derived from Stephen Darwall's *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 54-55. Darwall differentiates *existence* internalism from the more traditional *judgment* internalism that we will discuss in the next chapter. The name "internalism," applying as it does to more than one rather distinct moral position, is rather unfortunate. I will follow Darwall in using the clunky "existence internalism" for this lesser known position to avoid confusion.

[7]The discussion is complicated by the fact that much of the initial conversation concerns intrinsic goodness, as opposed to happiness. Happiness and what is intrinsically good for me may or may not be identical; that is part of what is up for debate.

Existence internalism, in other words, claims that what is good for a person must be such as motivates that person, or at least would were she rational and aware. For an ethical naturalist such as Aristotle, existence internalism should have an intuitive appeal.

In claiming that Aristotle is an existence *externalist*, then, Haybron and Connie Rosati must define existence internalism more narrowly, which they do.[9] Aristotle clearly believes that the good for human beings, happiness, depends very much on what human beings will (on the whole) find desirable. Εὐδαιμονία is that state which is most truly pleasurable, noble, and honorable. It requires that one have sufficient external goods, and is defined as living a good human life. In short, εὐδαιμονία is intended to be the most attractive state imaginable to a rational and aware human being. It is, however, defined in terms of human beings *on the whole* and *as a species*; *individual* existence internalism claims, to the contrary, that happiness must not be alienated from the individual—its requirements must derive solely from what the individual desires (or would desire if rational and aware). Individual existence *ex*ternalism, then, claims that happiness might be determined by some things not idiosyncratic to that individual.[10] In speaking of existence internalism/externalism, I should be understood to mean *individual*.

The final division among theories of happiness concerns the content of happiness: *mentalists* believe that happiness is a purely psychological state, while *non-mentalists* believe that happiness involves some states that are not purely psychological. Thus, Haybron, who is a mentalist, believes that happiness is *just* a certain mental state

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[8]Peter Railton, "Facts and Values," *Philosophical Topics* 14 (Fall 1986): 9.

[9]Connie S. Rosati, "Internalism and the Good for a Person," *Ethics* 106, no. 2 (January 1996): 300.

[10]Note that, as with subjectivism, existence internalism is the more radical claim: if *any* aspect of what is required for happiness is determined by something external to the particular cares of the individual, then this is existence externalism.

produced in the proper way, ultimately and ideally explorable by neurobiologists. Aristotle, on the other hand, believes (as we have seen) that happiness requires living a certain kind of life that involves not only certain physical states in the body, but even certain things outside of the self entirely, such as sufficient material goods, friends, and family. Haybron is probably right in saying that much, if not most, of the time when people say that they are 'happy' they intend this mentalist sort of happiness; they mean, that is, that they feel a certain way and are in a certain 'state of mind.' The division between the mentalists and the non-mentalists is the most fundamental of the three and underlies, to some extent, the other two divisions. If happiness is even partly a non-mental affair, then it is difficult to see how it could be *completely* subjective (since we can be wrong about things external to us), or *completely* internal to the individual (since the externals will be unlikely to be determined solely by the individual's preferences).

To say that Aristotle is a non-mentalist, of course, is not to say that he neglects discussion of our mental life. There is much that we need to know about a person's mental life to know whether she is εὐδαίμων: we must know when she feels pleasure and pain and the intentional objects of these states (what she feels pleasure and pain *in* or *at*) so that we know if she gets pleasure in acting virtuously and pain in acting viciously;[11] we must know what she thinks about and what sorts of things are considerations in her

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[11]Or, presumably, whether she gets pleasure and pain when observing virtuous and vicious actions or good or bad effects, etc. Given all of his discussions of pleasure and pain (cf. especially *NE* 1104b-1105a and 1152bff), it is unfortunate that Aristotle does not consider what sorts of states virtuous people find pleasurable. We can infer that virtuous people take pleasure in observing and experiencing the good (including others' virtuous actions) from a couple of passages, however. In his discussion of friendship in *NE* and of pleasure in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle makes it clear that like is attracted to like, including good to good (*NE* 1156b6ff; *Rhet*. 1371b12ff). Likewise, as concerns getting pain from observing or experiencing evil states of affairs, Aristotle states in the *Rhetoric* that good characters will be pained by the unmerited good fortune of others, an evil of sorts (*Rhet*. 1388b10). While this is all interesting as a matter of exegesis, the more important point is that such a view fits well with Aristotle's general concern with pleasures and pains and vice and virtue, even though he does too little to discuss the virtuous person's experience of the world.

actions and how she deliberates what to do, etc., for the virtuous person not only does the right action at the right time and in the right way but also *for* the right reason; finally, our very passions or emotions can sometimes be good or bad in themselves, for example envy is always the passion of a vicious character and cannot be felt in a good way.[12] Aristotle is a non-mentalist only because, in addition to these requirements for happiness, he also believes that the happy person must lead a good life, actively engaged in virtuous activity, and adequately furnished with external goods.

Criteria: Dominant and Philosophically Primary Accounts of Happiness

Clearly delineating these various divisions can assist us as we examine, and critique, contemporary accounts of happiness. Our goal is twofold. First, to the extent that the necessity thesis appears to be intimately connected to an Aristotelian account of happiness, we must determine whether Aristotle's account (or something sufficiently like it) is defensible. To do this we must, second, address Haybron's charge that Aristotle does not offer an account of happiness at all, but merely an account of the good life and of well-being, for if Aristotle *has* no conception of happiness, he clearly does not have a defensible conception of happiness. On both counts it will help to examine contemporary theories of happiness to determine two things: first, are these theories of the same phenomenon that Aristotle is discussing, or of a different phenomenon? (does Aristotle have a theory of happiness?); second, to the extent that these theories differ from Aristotle, do we have any reason to believe that *they* are missing something significant?

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[12]Cf. *NE* 1109a27-30. Cf. *NE* 1107a9-10; *Rhetoric* 1387b21*ff.* Crucially, in the *Rhetoric* (1378a20-23) Aristotle writes that the emotions alter or affect judgments, so that they clearly have a central place in ethical thought. See John Cooper, "An Aristotelian Theory of the Emotions," in *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), for further insight into Aristotle's writings on the emotions.

I am not arguing, and do not need to argue, that none of these theories captures the truth about some meaning of 'happiness,' perhaps (statistically speaking) even the dominant meaning of 'happiness.' My experience in teaching *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as in observing the general usage of happiness is that most people, when they say that someone else is happy, *do* mean nothing more than an ephemeral, weak, and entirely psychological and subjective (and existence internalist presumably) state. Even this is only a *most of the time* kind of claim, however. People do not consistently mean only one thing when they ascribe happiness to others or themselves. It is worth noting as well that none of the contemporary theories of happiness want to claim that *this* extreme subjectivist account of happiness is correct; every theory of happiness wants to make it a more significant state than this pale fleeting ghost of a feeling can allow. And they are right to do so; when we say that everyone wants to be happy, we do not mean this effervescent bubble of emotion, but some deeper and more lasting state.

Notice the standard for a successful account of happiness that I already implicitly assume: the best theory of happiness is one that can account for common, everyday concerns about happiness and usages of the word 'happiness.' To the extent that these split (as I suggest they do when we consider the extreme subjectivist account), I believe that the account of happiness that can best explain our *concerns* about happiness is more important than the account of happiness that best captures the dominant *usage* of happiness, at least in our consideration of the necessity thesis. The claim that virtue is necessary for happiness is an ethical claim, one addressed to people who are considering at the theoretical level how they should live their lives and why. Our attempt to define happiness in light of this consideration is not a conceptual enquiry into the meaning of

everyday language and happiness ascriptions, but an attempt to define the state that

people involved in this ethical enquiry are concerned to reach. It is, in other words, an

attempt to define that state that everyone wants, the one that they plan how to reach,

regret not arriving at, and *care* about most dearly. What is that concept that we are

considering and attempting to reach when we consider such important things as whom to

marry, or what career to pursue, or in ethical reflection?[13]

We are not primarily asking what people mean when they use the word

'happiness,' though that is not unimportant and will play its own role, nor are we

primarily asking what intuitions we have about 'happiness' and its applications, though

these will have a rather large role to play in what follows. Instead, we are trying to

determine what sort of thing people are concerned about when they consider their lives as

a whole and determine what role various activities should play in that life.

Parsing Accounts of Happiness

Let us begin with that hoary-headed account of happiness: hedonism.[14] Hedonism

equates happiness with pleasure, believing that the more pleasure we have the happier we

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[13]Interestingly, on this point Haybron and I are more or less agreed. Haybron too believes that the folk concept of happiness refers to different states at different times. "But we can still ask," he writes, "which of the states within the extension of the unreformed term are most *important*. What conception of happiness would best perform the work we use the notion to do? The question 'What is happiness?' becomes 'How is happiness best understood given our interests in the matter?'" (47). The best conception he then terms the *philosophically primary* definition of happiness, the definition that, while it does not perfectly match the folk concept of happiness, does what the folk concept *should* have done in the first place by filling all of the roles that the folk concept tries to fill and making the best sense of ordinary peoples' language about happiness while being one coherent concept. We disagree, of course, on the best candidate for being the philosophically primary definition, in part at least because of different projects.

[14]I owe much of the following list of theories, and discussion of some of the objections, to chapter two of Daniel Haybron's *Pursuit of Unhappiness*. See also Haybron's "Philosophy and the Science of Subjective Well-Being," in *The Science of Subjective Well-Being*, ed. Eid and Larsen, forthcoming. Haybron discusses all of these (and others) as theories of well-being, though he would agree that *some* are theories of happiness as well. Clearly these *intend* to be theories of happiness, and since I do not accept Haybron's particular division of well-being and happiness, I will discuss these as such.

will be.[15] Hedonists, interestingly, are objectivists about happiness, as is any monistic

account of the content of happiness; a person can be wrong about her happiness if she

says that she is happy while experiencing pain. Pleasure, of course, is a psychological

state and highly idiosyncratic, so hedonists are mentalists and existence internalists: the

fact of someone's being happy relies only on their having a certain state of mind

(pleasure), which is caused by different experiences and objects for different people

('there is no accounting for taste'). This does not deny, of course, that what people find

pleasurable also relies a great deal on their nature, a point we will need to return to later.

As we saw above, Aristotle dismisses the claim that pleasure might be the sole

content of happiness because of its passivity: the pleasure available to cattle is not fit to

be the chief good for such rational, active creatures as human beings. Just as our natures

are above that of cattle, so our pleasures should be above those of cattle, the pleasures of

acting virtuously and fulfilling our second nature.[16] A famous thought experiment first

suggested by Robert Nozick trades on a similar idea.[17] Suppose we imagine a virtual

reality 'experience machine' that so completely commands one's conscious attention that

one cannot even be aware of being on the machine. Suppose as well that this experience

machine offers nothing but unremitting pleasure to the user. While on such a machine,

no person would ever choose to be disconnected again, and there may be many people

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[15]I am not sure that all versions of hedonism must import this maximizing thesis, but I also do not see how they can avoid it. Even hedonistic theories such as Epicureanism, which has very clear instructions about limiting the amount of certain *types* of pleasure, do this in pursuit of maximizing pleasure *proper*, ἀταραξία. For versions of hedonism, cf. (historically) Bentham and Sidgwick, and (more recently) Brandt and Griffin among others, especially Richard Brandt's "Fairness to Happiness," in *Social Theory & Practice* 15 (1989): 33–58, and James Griffin's ''Is Unhappiness Morally More Important Than Happiness?'' *Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (1979): 47–55. Haybron offers a longer list in *Pursuit of Unhappiness*, fn. 4.

[16]On the pleasure of coming into a natural state, see *Rhetoric* 1370a1. Interestingly, Epicureans do not disagree with Aristotle, but they believe that the pleasure of ἀταράξια *is* fitting for human nature.

[17]Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

who *would* choose to be hooked up to the machine. The pleasures, again, can *seem* to the person involved to be some of the 'higher' human pleasures; the person may see herself receiving accolades for her noble and laborious work on cancer, or being the sort of person that others honor and enjoy being around. She is Walter Mitty in Thurber's famous short story, except that life never intrudes and she is never forced to face how other people see her.[18] But such people are there regardless, and they are the rest of us.

The problem is that the person on the machine is precisely none of these things she imagines herself to be. Either her pleasures (if of this imaginary kind) are based on lies, or (if more of a drug-induced sort) are disconnected from anything that makes her a human being. Both options seem to represent an existence ultimately unworthy of our nature. There is something *unnatural* about these pleasures, something that makes those outside the machine look askance at the value of any life devoted to their enjoyment. We may all be Walter Mitty at times, but none of us wants to admit it. The case is many times worse if we imagine someone who *never ceases* to be Walter Mitty.

The question, the hedonist might fairly insist, is not whether I or anyone else feel some sort of outraged indignation at the 'unnatural' life that such a person experiences on the machine, but whether or not someone who thus manages to maximize pleasure is *happy*, and on that score it might seem as if there can be no doubt. Surely anyone who has a life that they would never choose to give up, a life of unremitting pleasure, is happy if anyone is happy. And yet I trust that I am not alone in wondering whether that is actually the case. 'Happiness' is to pick out what ordinary people plan for in their lives,

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[18]James Thurber, "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," in *The Thurber Carnival* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945), 47-51. In the story, Walter Mitty is a rather ordinary, middle-aged chap with a hen-pecking wife and a predominantly boring life, but in his imagination (his secret life) he is a fighter pilot, or a famous surgeon who saves the day, or a brave man about to be shot, etc.

and an account of happiness where the experience machine represents the acme of its realization fails rather dramatically. This is not what we plan for our own lives, and even more tellingly, it is not what we plan for the lives of those we love. The utter delusion of this unnatural state can never satisfy our desires for our children to be happy.[19] Perhaps rather than focusing simply on pleasure, we should instead speak of fulfilling our desires.

Simple desire-fulfillment theories are preeminently experience internalist; *all* that matters for happiness is fulfilling the idiosyncratic desires of the individual, whatever they might be. Immediate problems arise for desire theories of happiness, including both thought-experiments like the experience machine (whose user would never choose to leave it), and basic problems of misinformed or ignorant desires: I desire to drink the glass of wine, unaware that it is poisoned. In such cases it is highly counterintuitive to say that my happiness consists in the disasters in store for me just because I happened to desire them under some description. The obvious move is to prescribe what sort of description I desire things under: my happiness does not consist in drinking this poison because I only choose it under the description of drinking the wine, not drinking the poison that is in the wine. The desires that matter for happiness, then, are not just any desires, but those desires that are properly informed, that are not misinformed or ignorant. The difficulty is in specifying a principled account of informed desires that avoids the problems of ignorance without ceasing to be meaningfully existence internalist.

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[19]This is not to deny that situations may arise in which delusion is preferable to the awful truth; we will look below at the relationship between our emotions and our environment in more detail. Roger Crisp offers a different argument against the idea that happiness can consist simply in maximizing pleasure, arguing that it seems to pick out the wrong people, and creatures, as maximally happy. A clam, for instance, might well gain more pleasure over its life than did Haydn simply because it lives for so very long, but *very* few of us are willing to say that the clam is happier than Haydn, clichéd metaphors to the contrary. Roger Crisp, *Mill on Utilitarianism* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

The problem is easily expanded to any version of existence internalism (all of which add such 'informed' constraints at some point as we saw in Railton above). If the desires (or pleasures, or view of one's life) are just the actual desires of the individual, then the desires will often be faulty, the pleasures unfitting, and the view malformed. If the desires (or pleasures, or view of one's life) are too rational and informed, then it is not clear that we are discussing this individual human being at all any more, but rather some ideal version of this individual. And why should anyone (who is concerned about internalism in the first place) care what some ideal person would want?

Life-satisfaction theories attempt to avoid experience machine worries while maintaining the existence internalism that is supposed to be attractive in hedonism and desire-fulfillment theories, but they too fall afoul of this basic informed perspective dilemma.[20] Life-satisfaction theories hold simply that a person is happy when she is satisfied with her life *as a whole*. Since the satisfaction involved is intended to be consciously that of the individual, life-satisfaction theories are existence internalist as well as subjective and mentalist. I may be quite satisfied with a horrible life if I am misinformed, irrational, or deluded, but this does not make such a life a *happy* one. How are we to apply this theory to irrational, woefully misinformed human beings who fail to appreciate the value of much in our lives? When and how is this reflection to occur?

The general problem is stated succinctly by Rosati, who defends internalism:

If internalism is to remain faithful to the intuition that inspires it, it must be formulated so as to avoid two extremes. On the one hand, it must not hold that something can be good for a person only if the actual, unaltered person can care about it, for this ties a person's good too closely to her present condition, however defective. On the other hand, although it must allow that, in some sense, anything

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[20]The primary life-satisfaction theorist is L. W. Sumner, who has several important books on happiness and well-being (which he connects). Cf. especially *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

she is capable of caring about might be good for her, it must not include as possible goods for her what she would care about only under alienated conditions. Internalism must treat a person's capacity to care counter-factually, while constraining counterfactual conditions so that they permit as possible goods for a person only what can recognizably fit or suit her.[21]

Rosati then formulates elaborate conditions under which someone's happiness is adequately removed from his everyday failings without being alienated from his actual concerns.[22] I find her account of the problem convincing, but her solution rather less so.

My argument is *not* that no existence internalist position can offer viable, coherent, and reasonable conditions for just how rational and informed someone must be for their concerns (desires, pleasures, view of life) to count in determining the constituents of happiness for that individual. Such an argument would require what I have not attempted to provide, either a deductive argument that such is impossible, or at the least an encyclopedic canvassing of all attempts with proofs that they fail, which might at least give a strong presumption against existence internalist accounts. I have attempted to show only that all individual existence internalist accounts face a particular dilemma, one that does not seem to have any easy or intuitive answer (and the attraction of internalism is supposed to lie largely in its intuitiveness). This may lead us to a further consideration: is the modern version of the intuition captured in this concern with the individual's idiosyncratic desires one that we should include in an account of happiness?

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[21]Rosati, 303.

[22]Specifically she offers two principles. "1. Were A under conditions C and contemplating the circum- stances of her actual self as someone about to assume her actual self's position, A would care about X for her actual self; 2. conditions C are such that the facts about what A would care about for her actual self while under C are something A would care about when under ordinary optimal conditions" (307). People can have differing intuitions about *ad hocciticity*; my intuition is that this is *ad hoc*. Under ordinary conditions, people do not consider happiness according to what they would otherwise care about in a very closely related circumstance where they are in ordinary (not overly, mind you) optimal conditions.

Compare the picture of heaven contained in Dante's *Paradiso* (and *Purgatorio*) with that in the 1998 Robin Williams movie *What Dreams May Come*. Robin Williams' character, Chris Neilson, dies and goes to heaven where he is met by a former friend who explains to him that in heaven, "'here' is big enough for everyone to have their own private universe."[23] More or less whatever Chris desires, he can have instantly and without effort. Heaven is nothing but the ultimate free shopping mall.[24] Dante's Paradise panders to none of the personal desires of its inhabitants, if by personal we mean the desires that they had while on earth. Most individuals there, in fact, first had to go through Purgatory so that they could have their sinful and wrong desires and character traits slowly removed. If, on the other hand, we mean by personal desires those desires that best fit their *true* natures and personhoods, then Paradise fulfills *all* of their personal desires. The further up the Mount of Purgatory they go, the more closely their loves are aligned with God's and the more correct are their desires. When Dante finally reaches the original Garden of Eden at the top of the Mount (having been at least metaphorically purged himself on the way), he is told by Virgil, his guide, "Now is your will upright, wholesome and free, and not to heed its pleasure would be wrong: I crown and miter you lord of yourself!"[25] The pleasures that matter for happiness are not primarily those that match our idiosyncratic actual desires, but those that best represent what we *would* desire if we were truly rational and informed, the desires and pleasures of our best nature. It is

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[23]Richard Matheson and Ronald Bass, *What Dreams May Come*, Directed by Vincent Ward, 1998.

[24]In the movie Chris cannot be happy because his wife is in 'hell,' which just means that she refuses to realize she can be happy, and so must go and fetch her back to heaven.

[25]Dante, *Purgatory*, trans. Mark Musa (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 294.

not incidental to a person's happiness that she is a human being any more than it is incidental to what she takes pleasure in that she requires food and companionship.

If the concern of individual existence internalism is that our happiness not be alienated from whatever moral, intellectual, and emotional shape we happen to be in, then this appears to be an entirely modern concern, and perhaps one that we would be ill-advised to build a theory of happiness around. If, on the other hand, the intuition is simply a concern that happiness not be one monolithic framework into which each individual must squeeze herself, all individuality gone, then Aristotle and an Aristotelian account of happiness can assuage this worry. Aristotle does not suggest that there is one perfect occupation or role in life for everyone who wishes to be happy, but merely that he must have an active life in accordance with virtue and with sufficient external goods. As we saw above, this definition allows for there being many different ways to be happy.[26]

A similar worry infects the subjectivism of even informed desire-fulfillment and life-satisfaction theories: the satisfaction or fulfillment appears to be too subjective, and hence too perspectival. The problem of subjectivism for desire-fulfillment theories exactly mirrors the problem with internalism; people can be extraordinarily *messed up* (in the technical sense) as to what they desire, even when informed. For life-satisfaction theories, this takes the form of concerns that happiness becomes perspectivally-dependent: when comparing my situation to starving children forced to be brainwashed soldiers, I feel quite satisfied with my life, but when I consider my classmate who is far

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[26]In our discussion of the determinate types in chapter one. Cf. *NE* 1109b1*ff.* Cf. Nussbaum, "Love and Vision: Iris Murdoch on Eros and the Individual," in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, ed. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 29-38. Nussbaum argues that Dante erases the particularity of those in heaven, a claim I find hard to accept given their conversations with Dante.

more accomplished than I am, I feel decidedly dissatisfied with my life. Happiness, it seems, becomes unaccountably fickle. Worse, many people claim to be satisfied with their lives who do not look to be likely candidates for happiness.[27]

It appears, then, that some of the critiques of Aristotelian theories of happiness turn out to identify potential strengths instead. While his individual existence externalism will no doubt continue to strike many as undesirably alienating human happiness from individuals, it is not clear that internalism offers a coherent and intuitive alternative that does not collapse or push in the direction of individual existence externalism. Likewise, subjective theories play to some of the same intuitions (if I do not know if I am happy, who could?), but in so doing make happiness entirely too malleable and fickle to be the sort of state that people plan their lives around.

Responding to Haybron

Haybron, to review, offered two reasons for believing that Aristotle does not have a theory of happiness in our contemporary sense of the term. First, any theory, such as life-satisfaction, is supposed to fit into a generally eudaimonistic framework without altering the eudaimonistic theory. If true, this should give us good reason to believe that the eudaimonistic theory of happiness and the contemporary theory are not discussing the same concept. Second, and the final complaint, Aristotle is a non-mentalist, whereas all contemporary theories are mentalist.

The first charge is true only if contemporary theories offer no more than a physicalist description of the state of mind someone is in when happy. Clearly Aristotle offers no corresponding and clashing account of the mind. The neurobiologist who

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[27]Daniel Haybron, "On Being Happy," 294. See also Nussbaum and Amartya Sen's *The Quality of Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), and L. W. Sumner's *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*.

described (if such were possible) the exact pattern of brain waves when someone is happy need not disagree with Aristotle on *when* that person is happy; indeed, they will need to assume some such theory as Aristotle's in order to do their empirical research to begin with. But contemporary theories of happiness *do not*, of course, just offer such descriptions; they describe something of how it feels to be happy, and of the situations in which people paradigmatically should be happy. Hedonists say that people are happy when they feel pleasure, desire theorists when they are fulfilling their (informed, rational) desires, life-satisfaction theorists when they are (rationally, reflectively, and authentically) satisfied with their overall life. Aristotle clearly believes that none of these capture the complete account of happiness: the happy person (as the hedonists insist) feels a great deal of pleasure, and most notably feels that noble pleasure that comes from doing virtuous actions; he fulfills many of his rational, informed desires, knowing that they are fitting in his circumstances; likewise, the happy person is *preeminently* that virtuous soul who, standing back and reflecting on his life as a whole, pronounces it to be good, aimed at the proper end and fitted with the requisite goods.

Just as he did with the theories of his own day, then, we can imagine Aristotle responding to each of these theories with a "yes, but…." Yes, happiness is desire-fulfillment; not of just any desires since these may be wrong, but of those desires which are most fitting for a human being. Yes, happiness is life-satisfaction, but not satisfaction with whatever life I happen to have, satisfaction with the life that I *need* to have, the life of a virtuous person. It seems obvious, then, that Haybron is mistaken: Aristotle's theory of happiness cannot fit with anyone else's, hence they are about the same topic.

The second charge is both easier and harder to respond to. It is easier in that we have already shown that each of these mentalist contemporary theories, all of which also insist on some form of individual existence internalism, are unstable, and perhaps inherently so. Adopting Aristotle's individual existence externalism, and his non-mentalism, may well be a good move philosophically. The easy response, in other words, is that so far as Haybron is right that all contemporary theories define happiness using mentalist strictures, so much the worse for them. Likewise, and more importantly, it appears that Aristotle's theory better captures what people are concerned about in planning their lives and deciding important questions: I am not concerned that I *think* my life is going well, I am concerned that my life *actually* be going well, where this includes my having sufficient external goods. Our concerns *ala* happiness extend much farther than our internal mental states, and so should our understanding of happiness.

It is more difficult because Haybron believes that he has a theory that fits these criteria even better, a theory that we must turn to before we can confidently assert the superiority of some version of a non-mentalist theory of happiness.

Happiness as (a Set of) Emotions

Haybron lists his paradigmatic cases of happiness as follows: "being in high spirits, ebullient, joyful, exhilarated, elated, carefree, contented, at peace, at ease, feeling confident and self-assured, feeling 'in the zone,' being in an expansive mood, delighted with one's life, or blessed with a sense of fulfillment or well-being."[28] Various states opposed to these would be the paradigmatic cases of unhappiness. If some of these paradigmatic states are not sufficient for being happy or unhappy, Haybron writes, they

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[28]Haybron, "On Being Happy," 290.

"are certainly *constitutive* of happiness or unhappiness: one's happiness or unhappiness is augmented or diminished by virtue of being in these states. A satisfactory theory of happiness should account for what is going on in these cases, or most of them."[29]

I think that Haybron is right that a satisfactory account of happiness should account for what is going on in these cases, but I am less convinced that all of these constitute happiness. Haybron's list can be split into at least three "dimensions of affect:" *joy-sadness*, *exuberance-depression*, and *tranquility-anxiety*.[30] In Haybron's theory, which he calls an "emotional state" view, what matters for happiness is that one be in a certain psychological condition. Specifically, one should rank high on some complex combination of these various dimensions in one's central affective states, which he defines as those states that are productive, persistent, pervasive, and profound, and one should exhibit a certain type of emotional resilience, or tendency to have these emotional states, which he calls (with misgivings) mood propensities.[31]

The problems with Haybron's theory come from both ends. It is unconvincing that happiness just consists in having certain emotions authentically produced, because often these emotions seem to arise in situations in which happiness should not arise, in situations where we are unwilling to say that someone is actually happy. It also seems clear that people can be happy without having many of the emotions that Haybron discusses. We conclude that happiness is not just a psychological state or emotional state, but is an objective state involving certain external features of our lives.

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[29]Haybron, "On Being Happy," 290. His emphasis.

[30]Ibid., 302-3.

[31]Ibid., 301.

The Insufficiency of Emotions

In "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," Ernest Hemingway presents a potent picture of purely emotional happiness. Macomber is one of "the great American boy-men," as Hemingway has the occasional first-person narrator, a British professional hunter named Robert Wilson, put it at one point.[32] Before the story begins, there has been an incident with a lion that they were hunting. Macomber had only managed to wound it, allowing it to get into the brush and lie in wait. As he and Wilson went into the brush with their gunbearers, the lion charged, and Macomber ran. Back at camp, the relationships get ugly as his wife, who we learn has cheated on him many times before, sleeps with Wilson and rubs Macomber's face in his cowardice. But she will never leave him, we are told. This is one of the few things that Macomber knows. He is the sort of useless wealthy man who knows about "motor cycles—that was earliest—about motor cars, about duck shooting, about fishing, trout, salmon and big-sea, about sex in books, many books, too many books, about all court games, about dogs, not much about horses, about hanging on to his money, about most of the other things his world dealt in, and about his wife not leaving him." He is not the sort of man to cheat, and she is no longer beautiful enough to "better" herself and get someone wealthier, and so they will always stay married. "Also, he had always had a great tolerance which seemed the nicest thing about him if it were not the most sinister."[33]

Macomber is not much of a 'man;' he has not been trained to know how to act in these situations, or how to have an authentic relationship with his wife, instead defining

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[32]Ernest Hemingway, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," in *Ernest Hemingway: The Short Stories* (New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1995), 33.

[33]Ibid., 21-2.

his manhood through fishing and motor vehicles and his sexuality through erotic fiction.

He is not a bad person—in one revealing scene, he insults Wilson by asking him never to

say anything about his cowardice, upsetting the professional hunter deeply, then endears

himself to Wilson again by apologizing and noting that he was never taught what it is

proper to say—he simply seems like a young boy out of his league, both with hunting big

game and with his wife. He is, above all, not a mature person. Wilson, whose opinion

we primarily have to judge Macomber by, repeatedly notes that he is "a strange one."

The next day they go out hunting buffalo, and again a wounded one manages to

get into the brush. This time, however, Macomber is excited, "a ruddy fire eater," who

cannot wait to prove his mettle. The speed of the chase, his anger, and the fact that he

had no time to think about what was going on have all helped him suddenly to discover a

new-found bravery. Wilson comments at length about this sudden change:

> He had seen men come of age before and it always moved him. It was not a
> matter of their twenty-first birthday. It had taken a strange chance of hunting, a
> sudden precipitation into action without opportunity for worrying beforehand, to
> bring this about with Macomber, but regardless of how it had happened it had
> most certainly happened… Beggar had probably been afraid all his life. Don't
> know what started it. But over now…Be a damn fire eater now. He'd seen it in
> the war work the same way. More of a change than any loss of virginity. Fear
> gone like an operation. Something else grew in its place. Main thing a man had.
> Made him into a man. Women knew it too. No bloody fear.

Macomber finds that he must talk about what has happened. He asks Wilson if he has a

feeling of happiness about what is going to happen next, "still exploring his newfound

wealth." As they go into the bush after the buffalo, it suddenly bolts at them; Macomber

stands his ground, shooting into its face as it bears down directly on him. As it is about

to gore him, his wife, in the jeep behind him, shoots him in the back of the head.[34]

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[34]Cf. Hemingway, 31-37.

The perspective for the entire ending of the story is solely Wilson's, and that continues now. We are led to believe that Macomber's wife shot him because she realized that he was no longer afraid and that he would now leave her, that she recognized a good chance to get rid of him and make it look like an accident, just as we are led to believe that this sudden rush of happiness and bravery are the genuine articles and that Macomber is now changed forever.

Clearly it is true that Macomber feels a sudden rush of something like exhilaration or exuberance, that he is shocked by the newness of these feelings that overwhelm him with the sense that he can do anything now, but is Macomber happy? That is, are these emotions of exuberance sufficient for happiness? According to Haybron's emotional-state view, I think that we have to say yes. He is filled with many good emotions and a psychological feeling of goodness, convinced of his own worthiness and courage and able to look Wilson, a man that he respects, directly in the face, and grin at him.[35] If you asked Macomber, he would clearly say that he is happy: happy about what he has done and about what he is going to do and just plain *happy*; he feels a great deal of pleasure because he feels that he has lived up to his own expectations and he has proven his wife wrong in giving up on him. If you asked Wilson, he too would say that Macomber is happy, and he would apparently say that this condition is likely to be a lasting condition. Macomber has just 'joined the club,' he has matured and changed in a permanent fashion. Finally, his wife, too, if we trust Wilson's interpretation of the situation, believes that the change is permanent, and this is why she kills him. As for Hemingway, it is not at all clear what he thinks about anything, and we do not hear the omniscient narrator again.

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[35]Cf. Hemingway, 35.

If Hemingway thinks that Macomber is happy and that he is courageous, then he is wrong.[36] Andre Dubus, a gifted short story writer and essayist in his own right, reflects briefly on Macomber in his essay, "Letter to a Writers' Workshop:" "I mention that story because I can read it in two absolutely different ways: if I take the title as ironic, I like the story, for it shows the foolishness of these folk; if I take the title seriously, I don't like the story." The title, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," takes Wilson's point of view seriously; it suggests that Macomber only begins to live once he shows bravery and does something beyond the inane activities of his class, when he lives something for real instead of through sports or erotic books, which is how he has taken all of life up until now. If this is ironic, on the other hand, then "Francis is a foolish boy in a man's body doing foolish things in Africa," and he did not have a genuine breakthrough at all. Dubus quotes a former female student of his who opined that Macomber has to die at the end of the story, because, "'when they got back to New York it was going to be the same old stuff again, she was going to cheat on him again, and he'd be a wimp again…'"[37]

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[36]For obvious reasons, I am only going to focus on whether Macomber is happy in this section, but it is not an unimportant point to say that he is not courageous either, or at least that this one action has not made him courageous. A person who is actually courageous does not depend so radically upon the circumstances (especially the circumstance of having to react without time to think, or of feeling an emotional high) as Macomber seems to do, even in the second circumstance when he faces down the charging buffalo. One action cannot make a person brave; it might, however, have been a legitimate turning point in Macomber's life. Perhaps Wilson is right that after this moment Macomber would never see danger quite the same way again and that he could face a lion with equanimity next time… but would he be truly courageous? Certainly not instantly, certainly not without a lot of work, but perhaps Macomber could become a truly courageous person if he trained himself to feel appropriately and react appropriately in future situations of danger, both physical and otherwise. On a related point, it is possible that Macomber could have become a truly happy person over time, but it was going to take life changes, and not just an instantaneous change of perspective, to accomplish that. Dubus' student (see the end of the paragraph) is probably right for the vast majority of people: removed to his old haunts and without the thrill of the hunt and surrounded by his former expectations, Macomber would probably have just gone back to being his old, simulacrum-of-a-real-life self.

[37]Andre Dubus, "Letter to a Writers' Workshop," in *Meditations from a Movable Chair* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1998), 14.

So what should we believe about this story? Is Macomber happy? Well, he certainly portrays a recognizable set of positive emotions and feelings in a recognizable situation that we would often call happiness, or at least happiness of a sort. His central affective states are productive (he stands up to both his wife and Wilson in an unprecedented manner), persistent (Haybron's example of a persistent emotion is that it lasts for a few moments; these emotions last several minutes while they wait for the buffalo to weaken and endure a great deal of introspection), pervasive (they change his entire outlook on life), and profound (they deal with Macomber's basic view of himself). Haybron could question whether this is a good example of someone who now has the reliable tendency to produce these sorts of emotions, but the fact that he immediately stands up to the buffalo seems to indicate that at least in the short term he does. There is, in short, nothing about Macomber's *psychological* states or emotions that tells us why he will not remain happy and hence why his immediate happiness here is likewise an illusion. Happiness will remain elusive for Macomber because of his own character, the habits that he has formed, and the situations that he is in because of the choices that he has made in the past. Not that the situation is hopeless: perhaps Macomber has made a key change in his life at this moment by altering how he views himself, and perhaps he will go home and leave his wife and begin to try to live up to his new code.

But, and here is the crux of the problem, *he still does not have the right code*. He has suddenly discovered an ability to be brave in certain circumstances, but he had always thought that he had that bravery. His exuberant feeling of happiness is so intense because he had discovered that he was not as brave as he thought, and then that he *is* brave after all. All that this moment does is allow him to add a new hobby to transcend

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the old ones, such as fishing and motorcars, just as those hobbies had transcended motor cycles in the past. If our narrator were not just a big game hunter himself, but a truly virtuous person, then perhaps instead of getting the good old boy's speech about how Macomber has suddenly become a man, we should instead have received a speech about how sadly predictable it is that this life-changing moment will simply become a new story to tell over whiskey and cigars. Looking at him with that future in mind, we would not call him happy, but deluded and a sad case.

Emotions are not sufficient for happiness because it is most properly not just a purely subjective psychological state, but a descriptive state that considers how one's life is *actually* going. Such a view is only rarely available to us, and so our emotions are often our best guide to how happy we actually are, but this does not change the fact that happiness is not just a reliable emotional state, but is a way of life. While happiness will involve many of the states that Haybron lists, it does not simply consist of having as many of these emotions as possible, but in having them at the right time and in the right way and for the right reasons, and this, as Aristotle reminds us, is not easy to do. Somewhat preliminarily, then, we will consider Haybron to be answered: Aristotle is talking about happiness, and something like an Aristotelian account of happiness that is non-mentalist, objective, and individual existence externalist looks like the best candidate for being that state that people are most concerned about in reflecting on their lives.

What has been largely lacking in our discussions of happiness so far are any sorts of studies or empirical data from the field of psychology. Especially if happiness *is*, as Haybron and many psychologists claim, solely a psychological affair, it is here that we

should expect to find insight into happiness. We turn to the recent bestselling books on happiness by two preeminent psychologists: Martin Seligman and Daniel Gilbert.

The Psychology of Happiness

In his recent best-selling work, *Authentic Happiness,* Seligman admits that Aristotle actually got a lot right in his account of happiness. Seligman argues that happiness is the sum of three factors: your "set range," the circumstances of your life, and factors under your voluntary control.[38] Seligman cites hundreds of studies that converge on the conclusion that roughly half of any personality trait is inherited. This does not mean that we have no ability to affect how happy we are, but that we are given a set range and we will live our lives within that range. The challenge, for Seligman, is how to live near the top of the range that you are given by your genes.[39] We will return to this point, but for now let us turn to the second factor: circumstances.

What we have been referring to as external goods, Seligman calls the circumstances of one's life. Using a series of surveys, psychologists have determined that beyond the minimal level necessary to avoid either physical want or constant worry, there is little correlation between increased wealth of any sort and reported happiness.[40]

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[38]Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 45*ff.* We will discuss below the possible problems raised by using psychological studies of *reported* happiness while promoting an *objective* form of happiness.

[39]Ibid., 47*ff.* Cf. Martin Seligman, *What You Can Change and What You Can't* (New York: Knopf, 1994), for his fuller discussion of this topic and for citations of particular studies.

[40]Ibid., 51-55. These are the studies referred to in chapter one above as a partial response to Annas's odd claim that it is mysterious why some external goods would be good, but increasing them would not. Not surprisingly, those who do not have enough to supply their physical needs or who must constantly worry that they will soon be in this situation are appreciably less happy. Their *life satisfaction*, however, does not appear to be much lower. This gives us, as Haybron points out, another reason to worry about life satisfaction theories, a worry that in the literature is called the happy slave problem. Intuitively,

That is, people comfortably in the middle class are not less happy than those with hundreds of times their wealth, nor are they happier; their respective amounts of wealth have no effect at all on their happiness. Unlike money, however, marriage and close friendships in general are strongly correlated with reported happiness.[41] Psychologists have also found weak correlations of happiness with age, health, education, climate, race, gender, and lack of negative affect, but a reasonably strong (though controversial) correlation with being religious.[42] All of which just shows that, as Aristotle notes, many of these things are necessary, at least at a minimal level, for happiness, but none is sufficient. Those things that have the strongest correlation with reported happiness, social networks (including marriage) and religion, are not simple factors. My having friendships of a certain close, intimate sort relies a great deal on what kind of person I am, what sorts of things I am committed to and my values, and, not to put too fine a point on it, my having certain virtues. The same goes for religion. The conclusion, then, is that external goods are not unimportant for (feeling) happiness, but as common sense could already have told us, they are not the whole story when it comes to our self-reports.[43]

Seligman, like Aristotle, focuses on the third factor that roughly correlates to the virtues, factors under voluntary control. There are, Seligman writes, a series of positive emotions related to how we view our past, a series related to how we view the present,

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prostitutes in Calcutta are not as happy as middle class Americans, and yet their reported life satisfaction is only a little bit lower. Cf. Haybron, "On Being Happy," 288.

[41]Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*, 55-56. Of course, Seligman notes that this is only a correlation, and not necessarily a causal relationship. While surely marriage can help us be happy, it may also be that happier people tend to get married and have closer friendships.

[42]Seligman, 56-61.

[43]As noted in fn. 52, we will discuss below the possible problems raised by using psychological studies of *personal* reports of happiness while promoting an *objective* form of happiness.

and a series related to how we view the future. Positive emotions about the past include

satisfaction, contentment, fulfillment, pride, and serenity. The future can, at best, bring

us optimism, hope, faith, and trust. Positive emotions about the present would include

joy, ecstasy, calm, zest, ebullience, pleasure, and 'flow.'[44] The hope is that, by

developing certain characteristic habits of thought and patterns of behavior, we can alter

our emotions about the past and the future, and alter our experience of the present, so that

we are consistently experiencing the more positive range of emotions.[45] Learning to

become a grateful and forgiving person can help us consistently to experience satisfaction

and contentment about our past, just as becoming more optimistic can help us be more

hopeful and trusting toward the future.[46]

It may appear that Seligman's research, regardless of his intent to support

Aristotle, provides succor instead to Haybron by focusing on these positive emotions.

Seligman goes on, however, to insist that while these positive emotions are all that most

people mean "when they casually—but much too narrowly—talk about 'happiness,'"[47]

true happiness does not consist simply in having a certain range of emotions, but in

having something deeper, something that he calls *gratifications*.

In discussing present emotions, Seligman distinguishes what he calls *pleasures*,

those raw, sensory feelings that can arise with hardly any thought (ecstasy, thrills,

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[44]Seligman, 62. The term 'flow' was first introduced in psychological literature by M. Csikszentmihalyi to describe the feeling of being so completely involved in a project that time ceases to exist and you simply 'flow.' It seems odd to call it an emotion, lacking as it does any intentionality, but that is typically how it is characterized by psychologists. Cf. Seligman, 114.

[45]I do not want to suggest that Seligman simplistically wants to improve positive affect at all times and at all costs. Negative emotions can be quite helpful when doing something analytical such as grading, and positive emotions may not always be helpful (39). His criterion, unfortunately, is a purely pragmatic one, and he typically presents the goal as maximizing positive emotions to the extent our range allows.

[46]Cf. Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*, chs. 5 and 6 respectively.

[47]Ibid., 62.

orgasms, comfort, etc.), from what he calls *gratifications*, activities that engage us and that we enjoy but that may not involve much of a feeling of anything. His examples of gratifications include great conversations, reading a good book, rock climbing, dancing, and making a slam dunk.[48] Gratifications, most notably, involve our particular strengths (virtues) matching up well with the particular challenges before us so that we achieve flow and disappear into the activity before us. People can be singularly lacking in pleasures, thereby feeling few positive affects or emotions, and yet have many gratifications in their life. Since gratifications last longer and connect with a deeper part of ourselves, these people might truly be happy even though they do not *feel* happy (or unhappy of course). There are, Seligman suggests, six central virtues that are ubiquitous throughout every culture and time, and which we should strive to act in accordance with to be truly happy: Wisdom and knowledge, courage, love and humanity, justice, temperance, and spirituality and transcendence.[49] The key to enduring happiness is to determine one's personal strengths and to attempt to engage in activities keyed to those strengths, as well as to develop other areas in which you are weaker.[50]

Positive psychology, the field that Seligman has helped to found, focuses upon increasing the pleasures and gratifications in our lives by teaching us to have the character traits that promote positive affects and make possible true gratification. The

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[48]Seligman, 102*ff.*

[49]Ibid., 131-3. He admits that these virtues mean different things in different cultures, but he believes that there is a significant enough overlap for them to remain useful as prescriptions for character strengths. It is interesting to compare his list with the traditional list of the seven virtues: love, hope, faith, wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance. While the four cardinal virtues remain essentially unchanged, faith and hope become 'spirituality and transcendence,' and love becomes equivalent to 'humanity.'

[50]Cf. Ibid., 134*ff.* Of course, you should also choose activities based on talents, which are not equivalent to strengths (being non-moral and harder to develop) (134-5). One of the admirable aspects of positive psychology is its focus on the institutions that can develop these strengths. This is largely the subject of Seligman's third part (165-260), which I will not discuss, but which deserves careful attention.

phenomena, Seligman and others claim, show that happiness requires not only the *pleasures*, which includes positive emotions, but also the *gratifications*, which require in turn certain virtues of character as well as the appropriate circumstances. Seligman and positive psychology generally are *non-mentalist* about happiness: happiness consists not only in certain psychological states, but also in our having a certain character and living a certain kind of life. Unfortunately, not everyone finds Seligman's interpretations of the data convincing, and we might well be concerned about his methodology.

Self-Report and Opacity: A Note on Methodology

The methodological concern is fairly basic: how can we use subjective reports of happiness to support a theory of objective happiness? If happiness is even occasionally opaque to the person experiencing happiness, then it looks as if asking people when they are happy is a questionable way of obtaining reliable data, and if happiness is *frequently* so opaque to people that they believe they are happy when they are not and vice versa, then it is quite the wrong way of going about it. The broadly Aristotelian theory of happiness that I defend holds that vicious people are perhaps quite often mistaken about their own happiness, *and* that there are lots of vicious people. At first glace the conclusion appears obvious: happiness is frequently opaque, and self-report is useless.

The picture is not quite so bleak as this, though due caution must be taken both in claiming support and in noting objections from empirical happiness studies. First, the positives: empirical studies of happiness do not *just* go around and ask people if they are happy. Those that do (most notably the Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire), are not asking about the sort of happiness that we are interested in anyway, but the sort that Haybron, for example, is interested in, that of positive emotions. Thus, on the questionnaire (which

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asks the subject to rate happiness on a scale of 10), "Extremely happy," a 10 on the scale,

is parenthetically defined as "feeling ecstatic, joyous, fantastic," and "Extremely

unhappy" is parenthetically defined as "utterly depressed, completely down."[51] Such

surveys can be informative about lots of things, but they are not going to help someone

interested in non-mentalist happiness to trace its occurrence or causes.[52] Other surveys,

while asking about happiness, try to do so in round-about ways and in reference to

particular considerations, thereby encouraging careful introspection.[53] The most

important studies for our considerations, however, do not ask about happiness at all, but

ask about symptoms and causes of happiness, trying to test whether people are happy by

seeing how they respond to more complex questions about their willingness and ability to

forgive, their optimism, and their relationships with others.[54] That *happiness* may be

opaque to people, then, can be somewhat circumvented by asking about related states and

capabilities and activities and attempting to interpret the data thus gathered.

There can always be difficult questions about whether any particular survey is

designed correctly or tests the right thing or whether there is the purported relationship

between happiness and a particular symptom or cause. It is right to be concerned about

these things. We can make three responses, however. First, the sheer number of tests

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[51]Seligman, 15.

[52]As any philosopher would have cause to complain many times in reading Seligman's provocative work, the author appears rather sadly unaware of many of these issues. It is not even clear from the text whether Seligman embraces a non-mentalist approach to happiness or merely offers a definition of happiness that seems to assume it. We will note below further problems with how "moral" or "value-laden" his definition of happiness is. The conclusion, as already noted in the text, is that a philosopher should use empirical studies lightly and at his own risk, no matter how wonderful it would be to garner significant support for our definition from the "real world."

[53]Cf. Seligman, 46, 63.

[54]Cf. Ibid., 71 for a gratitude survey, 78 for a transgression motivation survey concerning relationships, and 84 for an optimism survey.

done and of those tested should, statistically, help remove the error inherent in any small

number of these questionnaires (as well as dishonesty among those questioned, etc.).

Daniel Gilbert, who agrees with Seligman on little else, concurs in his use of self-

report.[55] What we must do is measure as well as possible (use the best surveys we can

get), and measure *a lot* and *often*.[56] The conclusion is that self-report ain't perfect, "but it

is the only game in town."[57] If, as Seligman claims (Gilbert demurs), the weight of self-

report suggests that happiness is an activity of virtue requiring external goods, then this

provides *some* measure, and the only measure empirical psychology can possibly offer, of

support to the broadly Aristotelian theory of happiness I am interested in defending.

There are also two different ways of taking the above concern. So, second, if the

concern is that *any* account of the purported relationship between happiness and some

symptom or cause is going to assume already a value-laden account of happiness—if, that

is, the worry is that this is not pure fact but is ethical 'from the ground up'—then wait for

the next two chapters where I agree with you. Third, and on the other hand, if the

concern relates to competing interpretations of the data, then the only response is to turn

to some of these interpretations to show that they fail to provide plausible descriptions of

our experience of life.

Before we do that, however, it is worth noting briefly that we are continuing to

follow a broadly Aristotelian method (and this is a good thing). We have looked at what

many people have said about happiness (the various contemporary theories above),

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[55]Daniel Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 71*ff.* While Gilbert promotes what he calls a subjective view of happiness (meaning that we cannot specify *for* someone what happiness is), he is an *objectivist* in my sense, believing that people are quite often mistaken about what makes them happy, and so faces the same worries as Seligman and I in his general use of self-report.

[56]Gilbert, 73*ff.*

[57]Ibid., 77.

demonstrated what was lacking in these theories, and showed the superiority of a broadly

Aristotelian theory in taking account of the insights inherent in these various theories.

We are now returning to the empirical data, to what we actually observe, to be sure that

our definition generally matches what people properly care about when they ethically

reflect on and plan their lives.

Accidental Happiness

In Gilbert's well-written and truly intriguing book, *Stumbling on Happiness*, he

argues in agreement with Haybron that while happiness is purely a matter of feeling a

certain way emotionally, we are often wrong about when we *have* felt that way and when

we *will* feel that way and even, sometimes, about when we *do* feel that way.[58]

Having summarily dismissed the philosophers' claim that happiness might be

virtue as "moral happiness" that confuses the cause with (one possible) consequence,[59]

Gilbert distinguishes two further meanings of happiness: "*emotional happiness*," that

indefinable subjective feeling that we all understand and toward which we direct every

action;[60] and "*judgmental happiness*," which we refer to when we say, for example, "I am

happy about the way things turned out," even though we do not feel happy at the

moment.[61] The telltale words here are happy *that* or happy *about* (as opposed to happy

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[58]Of course, he also appears to believe that we can be mistaken about pain, fear, and a host of other things, so happiness isn't special in this regard. Gilbert, 60*ff*.

[59]To which Aristotle could simply respond that virtue, as shown above, is not merely a (usually reliable) cause of happiness, but is actually a constituent of it. Of course, what lies behind Gilbert's claim is the view that happiness is a psychological experience, which virtue is not, and that I will address in the body of the paper.

[60]He cites, as proponents of this view, a host of eudaimonists including Aristotle, who of course believed nothing of the sort. Having just distinguished multiple uses of happiness, he immediately obfuscates the issue by conflating them all again. Ibid., 33-7.

[61]Ibid., 40-1.

because for "moral happiness"). To use his example, when my spouse tells me that she is going to Tahiti for six weeks for her job, I reply that I am not happy, but that I am happy *that* she is happy. This is a nice example of what he means, as it neatly divides my emotional state from my judgment, but it could give the illusion that these are actually different types of happiness. For Gilbert, however, judgment happiness reduces to emotional happiness: my judgment is "that something is a potential source of pleasurable feeling, or a past source of pleasurable feeling, or that we realize it ought to be a source of pleasurable feeling but that it sure doesn't feel that way at the moment."[62] In fact, if we were speaking more clearly than intelligently, we would tell our spouses that we are not happy at all but understand that they are and, if we imagine ourselves going with them, we would be happy too. This, he insightfully notes, would not lead to much in the way of human companionship, and so we say that we are happy *about* something even though we do not actually mean we are happy at all.

All happiness, then, is properly this indescribable pleasant feeling, and any instance that does not look like this is either dismissed as a confusion (moral language) or reduced to this pleasant feeling (judgmental happiness). But when I tell my wife that I am happy that she is happy, do I *really* just mean that in her shoes I would be happy, or that I should feel happy but do not? Am I not also saying that I recognize the situation itself as being a good for her (and somehow for me as her husband)? Suppose that a loved one has committed a crime and is subsequently caught and that I respond by saying that I am happy that he got caught. Am I actually saying that I recognize that the situation is one that should induce happiness in me (if so, I am quite incorrect), or that if I were someone else I would be happy (why then do I say that *I* am happy)? Am I not

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[62]Gilbert, 41.

actually saying that I recognize that it is a good, for him and for everyone involved, that he be caught and in prison? We cannot simply reduce this to pleasant feelings! Gilbert must either dismiss this as another confused use of the term, or he must admit that we do not always mean a psychological emotion when we use the term happy, but he cannot reduce these uses to judgments that I am in some way related to the psychological feeling that is actual happiness.

This is not merely a minor side issue in his work. As noted above, Gilbert believes that we are often, and in interestingly systematic ways, wrong about when we have been happy, when we are happy, and, most importantly, when we will be and what will make us happy, even in a purely psychological sense. Gilbert offers several explanations of these systematic errors, all based on evolutionary pressures, but the conclusion is that we are now often mistaken about happiness: we use the present too much to fill in the future when predicting what will make us happy;[63] we effectively lie to ourselves to rationalize our unhappiness so successfully that strongly negative events often make us happier in the long run; and we strive to explain everything when mysteries consistently make us happier.[64] There are other examples as well, but they all come down to our having an insufficient grasp of the complexities of our own minds, and hence an inability to predict accurately what will make our later self, as Gilbert insists on terming it, happy. Nor does knowing about all of this make us any better able to control it, for many of the errors are incorrigible (this is just how our brain operates), and others (such as our ability to rationalize), if corrected, would actually decrease our happiness. The conclusion is that we cannot predict accurately what will make us happy in the

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[63]Gilbert, 126-9, and chapter 7.

[64]Cf. Ibid., chapter 9. So much for the desire to understand.

future, and so we would do best to look at what makes other people feel happy in their current circumstances and attempt to echo those circumstances. The proposal (which he predicts that none of us will accept anyway) is that although we occasionally make errors even in judging our immediate happiness, this is the "gold standard" in happiness and the least liable to error. What we must do is ask others what is making them happy now, and then strive to achieve *that*, without concern for differences, or what we *think* will make us happy. "Every one of us is surrounded by a platoon of Dear Abbys who can recount their own experiences and in so doing tell us which futures are most worth wanting."[65]

All of this looks like rather bad news for *any* use of happiness in reflecting about our lives or planning our futures. If ethics relies, as Aristotle and specifically the necessity thesis suggest, on doing these things well, then ethics is hopelessly error-ridden, perhaps impossible. With no ability to predict what will make us happy, we cannot determine which character traits are means to that end or how we should live our lives in general and must, as Gilbert suggests, rely on what others experience (making happiness individual existence externalist to an extent that even Aristotle would not embrace). Perhaps, however, Gilbert's account is not so simple and obvious as he makes it appear.

Why do we actually do so badly at making decisions if others are such good transmitters? There are two reasons: first, because we mistakenly believe that we are unique and so do not take others' advice, and second, because we actually listen to others' advice too often in funny ways. The first is self-explanatory.[66] Surely he oversimplifies this, but human beings are generally quite similar, and so what makes other people happy is doubtless a good place to start in determining what will make us

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[65]Gilbert, 235.

[66]Ibid., 245-7.

equally happy. The second point is more subtle and more disturbing. We listen to others too much, in his view, because often they are perpetuating a believed necessary societal lie. For example, we continue to work hard to get more money long after we have reached the point where more money does not increase happiness. Why do we do this? "In short, the production of wealth does not necessarily make individuals happy, but it does serve the needs of an economy, which serves the needs of a stable society, which serves as a network for the propagation of delusional beliefs about happiness and wealth."[67] This sort of belief he calls a "super-replicator" because holding the belief causes us to act in such a way that we propagate the belief: I work hard to get wealthy from the mistaken view that this will make me happy, and when others see me acting this way they too strive for wealth, and the result is that neither of us is happy but the economy and the society thrives, and so the belief is passed on.

All of this is fine and well, though we might still wonder about some of the details of this belief transmission even in the case of money,[68] but he then moves on to a different example, one that implicitly relies on his reduction of judgmental happiness to emotional happiness, that I believe fails in an instructive fashion. Studies show that parents always report that their greatest source of joy is their children, that they will love having children, and that they were happy with their children, and yet other studies show that this is quite false. Couples report the greatest overall marital satisfaction when first married, and only regain that satisfaction after their last child leaves home. Likewise,

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[67]Gilbert, 241.

[68]Given that we all see wealthy people who are decidedly unhappy and (can at least) all have read some of the many recent psychological and many, many ancient and modern philosophical works that argue that increasing wealth does not increase happiness, do we really all believe that more wealth will make us happy?

mothers who reportedly love having children are less happy when taking care of their children than when eating, exercising, shopping, napping, or watching television, and only slightly happier than when they are doing housework.[69] "Thus the belief that children are a source of happiness becomes a part of our cultural wisdom simply because the opposite belief unravels the fabric of any society that holds it."[70]

This explanation ignores how beliefs are chosen and rejected in a way that genes are not, but Gilbert's evolutionary just-so story of belief transmission nicely explains why large numbers of people partake in activities that do not bring them emotional happiness while judging (falsely) that they are happy. This judgment is false, he believes, and collapses into the claim that they *should* be (emotionally) happy, which is also false: what they are doing is not something that should make them emotionally happy. Earning more money than you need and raising children is dirty work, but someone's got to do it, and if we did not have the mistaken belief that it will make us feel happy, we would not do it.

I want to grant to Gilbert that very often prospective parents believe that they will be unremittingly and emotionally happy with children, and I appreciate the intricateness of Gilbert's highly readable account as to why we tend to make so many errors, but I deny that parents who currently have children and parents who have had children are simply victims of a societally-induced delusion when they claim that they are and were happy. This is too simplistic, and a highly uncharitable interpretation of their comments. Why not posit instead that when they say that they are happy and that this was a happy time, they mean by 'happy' something more than just emotional happiness? My brother has a new son who has a knack for keeping them up all night, burping up on their nicest

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[69]Gilbert, 243-5.

[70]Ibid., 244.

and most recently dry cleaned clothing, and causing no end of frustrations, complications, and marital tensions, and yet both my brother and my sister-in-law believe that they are happier than they have ever been. Are they really just delusional on this point?

Gilbert and Seligman look at much of the same data, and both interpret it as supporting an objective and individual existence externalist understanding of happiness. But whereas Seligman takes seriously both the philosophical tradition of what allows for happiness and people's reflective ethical considerations about happiness, Gilbert, by making happiness purely mentalist and a matter of emotions, uncharitably privileges the present by discounting common considered beliefs about happiness in favor of psychological studies which place subjects 'in the heat of the moment.' It appears to me that Seligman comes off much the better of the two, and much closer to what happiness actually consists in. It is not incidental that he also suggests a theory of happiness much closer to the broadly Aristotelian definition I defend, but it is at least illustrative to contrast what one chooses to privilege given different understandings of happiness.

In a forthcoming book, Robert Roberts considers an emotionally-rich but environmentally-sensitive account of happiness that takes many of Haybron's and Gilbert's concerns into account without reducing happiness to a purely emotional or psychological state. Most importantly, he offers an account of happiness that makes sense of the claim that the happiest time in my brother's life is a time filled with few feelings of happiness or pleasure.

Roberts' Rules of Happiness

Emotions are valuable for a variety of reasons, and one of those reasons is their being constitutive parts of, and occasional causes of, happiness. Emotions, for Roberts,

are a way of seeing the world, a construal of a particular situation, that is connected to a particular concern of the individual.[71] Emotions are, in the primary case, valuable when they accurately perceive the world and are based upon a good or proper concern, but there may be cases in which it would be good to have an emotion that does not perfectly fit the world. One such case may be when one deliberately fosters a more charitable view of a situation than is warranted in the belief that one may thereby help to effect this more hopeful truth in the world.[72]

What if an emotion is inherently bad? Suppose for the moment that extreme depression is an inherent evil, that there is no good or proper way to feel extreme depression. Its effects on those who suffer from it, its effects on their ability to engage with others and take part in society, and its hopeless view of the world all make it so that it is never of positive value to feel extreme depression. Suppose, however, that our world is actually just so horrible and people are so inherently rotten that extreme depression is the proper emotion to have toward the world, and anyone who does not have this emotional reaction is misconstruing the situation. Some people who so misconstrue the situation may be choosing virtuously to take a more charitable view because it allows for more and better possibilities, but presumably many people (from this extremely pessimistic viewpoint) are simply burying their collective heads in the sand to avoid seeing how bad things really are. May they, even so, be justified in so burying their heads? Presumably it would be better if they had the more virtuous approach, realizing

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[71]In Roberts' primary formula, emotions are concern-based construals, but he is careful to note that this "basing" language can be a bit misleading since it suggests that the concern is always primary. Roberts, *Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 79.

[72]An example of this would be Iris Murdoch's M and D example from "The Idea of Perfection."

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the difficulty of the situation and yet hoping anyway, but if such hope is beyond them (as it perhaps is beyond anyone nonreligious) then it would seem to be better to bury their heads, or at least focus on more immediate pleasures, than to perceive how horrible things really are and so to suffer from an inherently bad and damaging emotion that only makes everything worse. In fact, we all may need to do this some of the time.

Such cases, however, are exceptions to the rule. Consistently misconstruing the situations in which one finds oneself in order to allow for other goods, including one's well-being, will plausibly result in a failure to achieve those other goods. Constantly lying to ourselves is not a recipe for long-term happiness. Happiness, Roberts concludes, may well require that we have some negative emotions, and this is precisely because "happiness is more than just feeling good. It is a matter of attunement to oneself and to the world one lives in; of acting well whether or not with pleasure; of good personal relationships even if they are sometimes painful and seem unsatisfying."[73]

According to Haybron, the central affective states are those core emotions that are productive, persistent, pervasive, and profound. Roberts offers an account according to which emotions differ from each other in depth, import, scope, and goodness. Depth means approximately what Haybron intends by profundity: a deep emotion is one that connects with concerns that help to constitute a person's core personality. The import of an emotion, on the other hand, has nothing to do with the person or her views, but deals with the weightiness or importance of what the emotion is *about*. Roberts' example is of a deeply vain person who becomes outraged over some small slight, such as someone failing to admire her properly. While this emotion is deep in that it connects with a core

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[73]Roberts, "Happiness," a projected chapter in *Emotions and Virtues: An Essay in Moral Psychology* (forthcoming), 2.

aspect of her personality, it is decidedly trivial in its import. Thus, one can miss having

happiness not only by failing to be disposed to have such deep emotions, the only

possibility that Haybron considers, but also by being disposed to have deep emotions

about trivial matters, or shallow emotions about deep matters.[74]

While Haybron is concerned only with authentic emotions and the individual

having that emotion, Roberts adds a stipulation that one's emotions must match the world

and that the world must match oneself. In other words, I must be attuned both to my

particular circumstances, so that I like where I am and the situation in which I find myself

(local attunement), and I must be attuned to the nature of reality as a whole (metaphysical

attunement). While attuned to one's own nature and to the nature of the universe, then,

one might be ill-attuned to one's local circumstances such that one has deep (negative)

emotions about important matters. Someone who has a proper concern for the spiritual

well-being of his children, to use Roberts' example, may be very well-attuned in a

metaphysical sense, but have deep negative emotions if his children are depraved pagans.

Emotions also differ according to their scope (roughly equivalent to their

pervasiveness for Haybron), and according to whether they are positive in affect. Unlike

Haybron, Roberts again does not claim that happiness just consists in having positive

emotions with maximal scope, but in having emotions whose scope is proportional to

their import. Having positive emotions with greater scope and negative emotions with

less scope will, *ceteris paribus*, contribute most to one's happiness; the goal, however, is

not to maximize positive affect, but to attune oneself to oneself and the world and to

one's local circumstances in such a way that it is proper to have nothing but positive

affect. The happy person is the virtuous person who lives in a situation where having a

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[74]Roberts, "Happiness," 11-14.

virtuous character does not detract from his happiness, but rather provides substantial opportunity for living a meaningful life through his virtues and with other people; he has nothing but positive, deep emotions of maximal scope about matters of importance.

Aristotle in the Rearview

Roberts provides a theory of happiness that neatly accounts for the phenomena brought to our attention by Seligman and Haybron. Things such as marriage and close personal friendships correlate well with happiness because they are of great import and engaging in them shows that one has deep emotions about a matter of great import, thus showing at least some amount of attunement to the world. Wealth, on the other hand, has only a slight correlation, because it is ultimately trivial. My brother is happy with his (often) annoying newborn because the annoyances are petty even if the negative emotions they foster are currently quite pervasive in his life, while the good emotions are extremely deep (they connect to his core personality because they connect to a core project in his life, that of rearing a child) and about something of great importance. They are also of great scope ultimately, for while his day-to-day life is filled with great frustrations, the depth of the other emotions causes him to judge that his life *as a whole* is going extremely well, and this is of the greatest possible scope.

It is fair to ask, however, whether we are still discussing a broadly Aristotelian definition of 'happiness.' Roberts and Seligman offer non-mentalist, individual existence externalist, objective theories of happiness, but they do not offer definitions identical to that of Aristotle, and the contrasts are instructive. According to Aristotle, happiness is an *activity* or way of life constituted by the virtues, requiring adequate external goods and accompanied by true pleasure, over the course of one's life. Clearly Roberts' view fits

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with this fairly well (it is an enduring state since it is dispositional, it is objective, it involves pleasure at the proper points, etc.). Enduring happiness is over one's life (or some large section of it), and is accompanied by pleasure and requires the appropriate circumstances for Seligman, as well. Still, we might have a series of concerns for both. First, only *gratifications* are activities in accordance with the virtues for Seligman, and Roberts discusses happiness as a disposition, not as an activity. Second, what do we make of Aristotle's claim that happiness is not a state that animals and children participate in? Third, what of Seligman's claim that happiness is half-determined by one's inherited traits? Fourth, it appears that *complete* happiness is impossible on earth for Roberts, since ideal circumstances and people are rare to the point of nonexistence, but for Aristotle, happiness is the attainable goal of human action.

Neither Roberts nor Seligman seem to discuss happiness as an activity; the disagreement can be mitigated, however, if we remember that activity (ἐνέργεια) for Aristotle is not equivalent to what we mean by action. He does not mean that happiness involves something like constant movement, but rather something like lifelong engagement. The happy person is not active while asleep, and yet is presumably still a happy person. My brother is involved in the project or activity of rearing a son; this does not mean that he is constantly doing something to rear him, but that he is constantly engaged in that project and living in that project, even when asleep. Aristotle does tend to see all of life as one unified and coherent activity, whereas we tend to see it as a series of projects or activities (or *hobbies* interestingly enough) contained within an often dis-integrated life. I am not sure that this disagreement is especially deep or troubling, but it cannot be explained away, and we will return to it in the next two chapters.

On the second objection, I find it reasonable to posit that neither Seligman nor Roberts believes that children can achieve *true* happiness, just as Aristotle did not believe so. Children have something like happiness when they achieve minor projects and experience positive emotions that fit with the world, but their projects are still too small and ephemeral and they are changing too rapidly for their happiness to be as deep or real as the adult version. This, however, brings up another interesting difference from Aristotle. Happiness, in Aristotle, appears to be an all-or-nothing sort of state.[75] The child is not happy in an attenuated state, but is simply called happy by analogy if he has a good chance to become happy later. Happiness for us, however, and certainly for Seligman and Roberts, decidedly does come in degrees, just as virtue does. On this I would tend to say that Aristotle is simply wrong, too attached to the idea of happiness as an achieved state and too confident in our ability to achieve it fully.

What of Seligman's claim that approximately half of the traits related to happiness are inherited? It is difficult to know exactly what Seligman means by this and exactly what Aristotle would say. If we inherit negative characteristics, then we will typically have less of the positive emotions and less positive affect in our life, and this will tend to make us less susceptible to happiness because it makes it less likely that we will have many pleasures. Seligman is careful to note that this is not a sentence to unhappiness: he claims that having many and important gratifications can make up for an insusceptibility to positive emotions, just as Aristotle claims that the virtues are central to

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[75] Aristotle certainly never says as much, but all of his questions are posed in terms of 'is such and such a person happy or not?' never in terms of 'how happy could such and such a person be?' For example, when discussing whether we must wait until someone is dead to pronounce them happy, Aristotle says that failure to do so will make the happy person a kind of chameleon, first "happy and then wretched." Happiness is not like this, but is "understood as something permanent" (*NE* 1100b). The implication seems to be that one is either happy or not (or virtuous or not); there are no half-way happy or virtuous states.

happiness, and not the pleasures or external goods that typically accompany it. Inherited traits, then, seem to have only a small effect on what gratifications are inherently open to us, though what particular talents we have and how we have been reared will affect what virtues we can have and what gratifications we can engage in. None of this, though, is foreign to Aristotle. Some people are naturally beautiful and manly and have a deep voice and commanding presence, inherited a great deal of money, and gained the proper habits when young and the proper intellectual training when older; for these lucky folk certain virtues are available that are not available for most people (here I have described the 'highest' social virtue, μεγαλοψυχία).[76]

Finally, what of Roberts' implicit commitment to the notion that happiness is not to be found completely in our present life? There is a long tradition in Christian eudaimonism of embracing Aristotle's framework, but of putting off true happiness until heaven and the beatific vision. Aquinas, for example, argues that our final and perfect happiness can only consist in the vision of God's essence, though on earth we may have an antecedent happiness that begins to approach it.[77] For Aristotle and for Aquinas, happiness, as we have seen, is an actualizing of our form, our true nature. For Aristotle, this can be unproblematically accomplished on earth, at least for some, because our nature does not refer to anything beyond the earth, but for Aquinas and other Christians, our nature is designed by God to enjoy God forever, and this can be done finally only in the full presence of God.

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[76]Cf. *NE* 1123b*ff.*

[77]Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), IIa.3. Cf. especially articles 3 and 8. For Aquinas there is the sort of gradation in happiness, antecedent to actual, that does not appear in Aristotle, perhaps due to the need for ethics to be both a fulfillment of an earthly form and a never temporally-completed path toward God.

The distinction can be put quite neatly by looking at the final article of the question on happiness: "Whether man's happiness consists in the vision of the divine essence?"[78] In the body of the article, Aquinas notes two points to make his case that human happiness does consist in such a vision: first, we are never finally happy until we cease to desire and seek things that we do not have, for happiness is the fulfillment of every desire; second, that the perfection of any power is determined by its object. The object of the intellect is an essence, and so the perfection of the intellect is to know the essence of things—we will never cease to desire to know more about God until we see his essence, which is impossible on earth. The first two points Aquinas takes directly from Aristotle, but Aristotle believes that we know the essence of things around us through scientific study of them, and so the wonder that drives us to philosophy finds its satisfaction in such rational study as our intellect is thereby perfected. Or at least this would be the case if we ignored book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which we cannot do.

There is a long-standing problem in interpreting Aristotle that I have thus far deliberately avoided. In book I especially, but also in books II-IX at various points, Aristotle seems to be committed to a specification of happiness that finds its highest fulfillment in the political and social realm of the Greek city-state.[79] In book X, having summarized the arguments rehearsed above from book I, Aristotle concludes similarly: happiness is the best activity of the best part in us, whether that be intellect or some other "element which is thought to be our natural ruler and guide and to take thought of things

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[78]ST IIa.3, article 8.

[79]Cf. Aristotle's discussion, already cited above, of the μεγαλοψυχός (*NE* 1123bff), who is the pinnacle of virtue, and who is decidedly a social creature (despite what we might consider some decidedly misanthropic tendencies).

noble and divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us,"
and it is activity of this part which is "complete" happiness.[80] In the function argument
of book I Aristotle establishes that this highest part is our rational part, and that activity in
accordance with it is activity in accordance with virtue. Throughout the *Nicomachean
Ethics*, however, he has maintained that if there is only one part that is highest, then it is
the virtue of that part which must be happiness, and he now specifies in book X that our
contemplative part is highest, either divine itself or the most divine element in us.

Complete happiness, then, would seem not to be a life lived in community, but a
life of contemplation, a life which is all but self-sufficient, able to be lived alone for those
with leisure. What, then, do we make of the earlier claims? Aristotle suggests that what
he is offering is a higher way of life, for while the life lived in accordance with political
virtues is happy in a "secondary degree," the life lived in accordance with contemplation
is the happiest.[81] How can we harmonize these positions? Lear offers an intriguing
solution that fits well with Aristotle's description of this divine happiness as "too high for
man," connecting solely to that which is divine in us, our intellect, which is most properly
our essence. When we know something, for Aristotle, our mind assumes the form of the
thing known. When we see a tree, it is not that the picture of a tree appears *before* our
mind, but the form of the tree *informs* our intellect, implanting the form of the tree. In
contemplating the god, then, our intellect, that which is most properly us, becomes
informed by the god and that most divine part of us *becomes* like the divine.[82]

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[80]*NE* 1177a11-18.

[81]Cf. *NE* 1177a10*ff* for these claims.

[82]Lear, *Aristotle*, 293-320.

The human form alone, of all of the forms, aims at something which is actually beyond the form. The fulfillment of our form is not only our composite nature, but actually transcends our nature. In some almost mystical way, then, it is in our nature to go beyond our nature. Even in Aristotle, however, this is not fully accomplishable on earth, for we always remain material/form composites. Contemplation is an activity, and we cannot always be active; in discussing the life of contemplation he notes that it includes "self-sufficiency, leisureliness, unweariedness (so far as this is possible for man), and all the other attributes ascribed to the blessed man."[83] No human being is truly capable of unending contemplation while yet embodied; the only question is whether Aristotle believes that our intellects ever have a life separate from our bodies in which to enjoy unending contemplation, and here he gives no response.

Aquinas is, in a sense, more Aristotelian than Aristotle in this respect, for it is not separate from our bodies that we enjoy the pleasures of God, but fully embodied as an eternal and perfected composite.[84] Because of the goodness of God, theistic eudaimonists have tended to believe that our final happiness is found only with him, but because of the power of God (and some promises in the Bible), they have tended to believe that this is accomplished *with* our body, and not only our mind. In this, they remain true to Aristotle's charge that we study human beings as they are, not animals or gods, in a way that Aristotle seems to have found untenable at times. There is, then, no significant disagreement between Aristotle and any theist on the question of whether final happiness is found on earth in our societies or is only found in an ultimate sense by transcending

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[83]*NE* 1175a and 1177b.

[84]Cf. Aquinas *ST* IIa.4.5. While we might have the essence of perfect happiness without a body, we cannot have the final perfection of our happiness without a body.

our present condition. The only disagreement regards when and where that

transcendence occurs, what it looks like, and who is responsible for it.[85]

Disagreements remain between the accounts of happiness given by Roberts and

Seligman and Aristotle (and, though I have largely ignored them here, between Seligman

and Roberts), but all are within a broadly Aristotelian tradition that defines happiness as

an enduring, non-mentalist, and objective state that requires something like the virtues.

Conclusion

While we often pursue the feeling of happiness, and consider it to be a good, it is

not an especially important good. What we care about most, especially when planning

our lives, determining what career to pursue or person to marry, or reflecting on our lives

as a whole, is not what we *think* will make us happy at the moment, but what will

actually give us an enduring sense of our own worth, a broad assortment of positive

emotions that accurately reflect our attunement with our circumstances, and the character

to appreciate what we have and perpetuate it through virtuous activity. In other words,

while there is no doubt that we often pursue certain feelings, especially the one loosely

defined as happiness, to the exclusion of all other concerns, we do not think that we *ought*

to do this, and this does not define our deepest concerns. Our deepest concerns are for

projects that are central to our character, such as working for peace or saving the whales

or serving God, and we judge ourselves to be happiest when we nobly strive toward these

goals and accomplish them, as when young parents say that they are happiest rearing

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[85]I thank David Corey for suggesting this approach and for pushing me on the question of what Christian Aristotelianism might look like. Seligman might suggest something along these lines as well in his final chapter, insisting that happiness includes being part of some project that is larger than ourselves. His own suggestion is a rather odd amalgam of neo-Hegelianism and New Age pop philosophy rather than anything that I could find meaningful, but it is interesting that he notes the need, even if he would fill it rather differently than those in the Christian tradition.

their children. That this time in life has little of the everyday pleasures, that it is often

exhausting, unrewarding, and painful, does not change the fact that it accomplishes a life-

affirming central project in their lives, and so they judge it to be a time of great happiness

for themselves. Often, even usually, accomplishing these projects will make us *feel* many

of the central emotions of happiness as well, but when they fail to do so, we do not

thereby fail to be happy. When we ask whether virtue is necessary for happiness, then,

we are not asking whether we have to be virtuous to feel a rush of euphoria, but whether

we must be virtuous to achieve that deep and abiding state of life described by Aristotle

and Seligman and Roberts, that state that we will now simply call 'happiness.'

One final objection remains, and it is ably put by Mike W. Martin in a recent

article critiquing Seligman. There are two ways of defining happiness, Martin claims, as

> moral-laden and morally-neutral. Moral-laden definitions build in moral values,
> as with Aristotle's definition of happiness centered on exercising virtue. Morally-
> neutral definitions do not build in moral values, as with psychologists' standard
> definitions of happiness as subjective well-being in the form of overall
> satisfaction with our lives or high average levels of enjoyment.[86]

Seligman, a psychologist, is supposed to offer morally-neutral definitions of happiness,

but he tends to slip into offering a moral-laden definition by insisting that happiness

requires the virtues. The critique appears to be fair, especially as applied to Seligman,

who often uses normative language to describe what he defines as a clinical concept.

The necessity thesis itself seems to invite the charge, however. The proponent of

the necessity thesis *defines* the virtues as just those dispositions needed for happiness, so

clearly happiness plays a normative role in any theory that accepts the necessity thesis.

The complaint seems apt: happiness is defined as a moral term, so it is somehow not

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[86]Mike W. Martin, "Happiness and Virtue in Positive Psychology," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 37, no. 1 (2007): 92.

surprising that the proponent of the necessity thesis determines that virtue is necessary for it, nor that it ends up looking rather different than what most people mean by happiness! The long answer to this charge must wait for a full defense of an approach to ethics that openly takes happiness as value-laden and builds upon it as a normative conception. The shorter answer is twofold: first, the necessity thesis does not derive its importance from a fully-factual empirical proof, but from its role within virtue ethics and an ethical life more broadly, and so the sarcasm of the charge is misplaced. The proponent of the necessity thesis *does not claim* to start from 'nothing but the facts' and pull values out of his hat; facts and values are not so easily divided in the realm of happiness, and the factual accounts of the psychologists are rarely so value-free as they imagine.

Second, as an Aristotelian account, while my definition of happiness does not claim to rely solely upon facts, it is clearly defeasible in the face of alternative experiences. My defense has openly relied upon the experiences of real people and claimed support from their supposed practice in ethical reflection, the area I am interested in, as well as attempted to point out how competing accounts of happiness do a poorer job in taking account of these same 'facts.' If it turns out that I am wrong and people do not experience, refer to, or take into account the quality of life that I have been calling 'happiness,' then this is not merely an inconvenience, but a disproof of much that I have said. The necessity thesis is not, as the complaint would have it seem, immune to disproof from lived experience, even if it does not claim to start solely from it. Many, however, have taken the necessity thesis, and specifically Aristotle, to begin (or claim to begin) solely from objective experience, and we turn to this possibility and misunderstanding in chapter four.

CHAPTER FOUR

No Coincidence: the Necessity of Virtue for Happiness in Bishop Butler

Aristotle defines happiness as activity in accordance with the virtues over a complete life and adorned with sufficient external goods. After careful consideration, we have accepted a broadly Aristotelian definition of happiness as an enduring, non-mentalist, and objective state that requires something like the virtues. After a mere two chapters it looks as if we have proven the thesis: the virtues are necessary for happiness.

In a sense, this is true. We have shown that the important sense of happiness that people employ when considering such things as their lives as a whole, or some significant part of those lives, is reasonably defined as requiring us to have a certain type of character, one traditionally defined by the virtues. Unfortunately, however, this leaves a number of questions unanswered.

We have defined happiness as a state of active being that requires me to be a certain type of person in certain types of situations and to experience (at least often or usually) a certain range of emotions. What type of person, then, do I have to be? Well, this argument would have it, a virtuous one. But what are the virtues? Is there only one set of virtues, or are there a number of different sets, some perhaps incompatible? If this is the case, then the idea that virtue is necessary for happiness is empty; while some set of things belonging to the vague class 'virtue' may be necessary for happiness, different and incompatible sets might fill that class, so the thesis is uninformative.

The larger question we will look at in this chapter concerns proof: of what sort of proof, or support, is the necessity thesis susceptible? What premises must we accept to

find the necessity thesis plausible? Does merely accepting a broadly Aristotelian definition of happiness, as the last chapter would suggest, *prove* the necessity thesis, or does Aristotle himself suggest a different proof for this claim? And what else must we accept to accept his proof? Is there any other way to make his proof more palatable?

It would be best (strongest logically) if we could offer an argument that does not rely upon contested premises but builds upon generally accepted principles available to everyone.[1] Such an argument would have a number of related advantages: it would be available to anyone, regardless of their point of view, and so might be used to wedge the immoralist into caring about morality; it would be a powerful argument from generally accepted principles, and so should be accepted by any person on the basis of rationality, thus placing our ethical life on a firm, rational basis; and it may be a theoretical account along the lines of our most successful sciences. Perhaps, for example, we could argue from human nature and build from accepted general facts about that nature to specific ethical conclusions. Alasdair MacIntyre, in *After Virtue*, and Bernard Williams, in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, take Aristotle to be giving just this sort of argument, especially in the function argument we mentioned above.

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[1]The distinction that I am making closely mirrors what John McDowell calls 'internal validation' and 'external validation' in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 35*ff*. Cf. also his *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 79ff, and "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics," in *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, ed. Robert Heinaman (San Francisco, CA: Westview Press, 1995), 208*ff*. An internally validated ethical theory is such that only those already invested in the theory have reason to accept it, while an externally validated ethical theory should be such that just anyone has reason to accept it. Kantian and Utilitarian theories are paradigmatically externally validated ethical theories. In this chapter I will allow the distinctions to remain vague, but in the next chapter I will need to clarify two related concepts connected to internal and external validation: accessibility and applicability.

Aristotle for Everyone

The limit of philosophy that is of most interest in Williams' impressive book is its inability to offer us the sort of generally applicable validation of the ethical life that he believes Aristotle is attempting to offer.[2] It is precisely Aristotle's attempt to ground ethics in something external to ethics, his attempt to prove that it is applicable to everyone, that is unacceptable to us about his account, Williams believes. He provides three very different reasons. First, Aristotle must rely upon a strong sense of 'real interests' for his account to work. That is, Aristotle must believe that it is *really* in the interests of anyone to be ethical, even though the individual or her closest friends or community may not realize that this is so. Such an account of 'real interests' is difficult to support, and Aristotle supports it, Williams believes, by an appeal to the τέλος of human beings and its place within a more general teleology: "Aristotle himself held a very strong theory of general teleology: each kind of thing had an ideal form of functioning, which fitted together with that of other things. He believed that all the excellences of character had to fit together into a harmonious self."[3] The first problem, then, is that we do not accept the general teleology that underlies this account of 'real interests.' By failing to give a convincing account of real interests, Aristotle is unable to deal with what we can see as the second problem, the challenge that there may be more than one type of life that is in the interest of any particular individual, or, even worse, that the moral life may not be in the interests of some individuals. In abandoning his family, Gauguin failed to live according to the standards of morality, but he may have succeeded

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[2]Williams sees clearly that Aristotle is only offering an ethical account *to* ethical people; his complaint is that Aristotle is still trying to offer an ethical account *for* everyone (*Ethics*, 39-40).

[3]Williams, *Ethics*, 43.

in following his own best interests by creating beautiful art.[4] The third problem is

related, for just as we no longer believe that Nature is a unified whole with a particular

role for any human being, we also no longer believe that our own desires and interests

can be usefully seen as cohering in one intelligible life.[5]

MacIntyre appears to raise the same issue in *After Virtue* when he claims that

Aristotle's ethical account is no longer available to us because his "teleology presupposes

his metaphysical biology."[6] While some recent authors sympathetic to Aristotle have

tried to save his project by giving some general account of human flourishing and well-

being, this ignores, MacIntyre charges, the extent to which there has been disagreement

over well-being throughout history. Aristotle cannot get the general teleology he needs

without appealing to a metaphysical biology in which every creature, including human

beings, has a given form through its function within a larger whole.[7] "Hence any

adequate teleological account must provide us with some clear and defensible account of

the *telos*; and any adequate generally Aristotelian account must supply a teleological

account which can replace Aristotle's metaphysical biology."[8]

The reference to human functioning points us to the locus of this reading of

Aristotle: the function argument. As noted above, the function argument works from the

idea of a uniquely human work or function, to the claim that it is by virtue of performing

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[4]Williams uses the Gauguin example to make a similar point in an argument against Kantians. Williams, "Moral Luck," in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 22*ff.*

[5] Williams, *Ethics*, 43-53.

[6]MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

[7]MacIntyre also raises the issue of individual integration around a single concept, and he uses this point to bring up something like Williams' Gauguin objection: there are, he famously claims in his section about tragedy, many goods that can be pursued, not just one (163).

[8]Ibid., 163.

this function well that a human being is good, to a specification of this unique function as

activity in accordance with reason, which, as Aristotle revisits this argument in the next

book, he calls virtue.[9] Marcus Hester breaks this argument down into three separate

claims: (1) every species has a unique essence, which is its function, (2) the good of each

species is doing its function well, and (3) the essence of man is activity in accordance

with reason.[10] Premise (1) offers us no particular problems; even given the truth of

something like Darwinian evolution, our specification of different natural kinds indicates

that each kind has unique, shared features, which we can refer to as the essence of that

species.[11] Premise (3), likewise, may prove problematic under some specifications, but if

we can find an account of a rationality shared by all human beings and by no other

animals, then it too remains a premise in good standing.[12]

Premise (2), on the other hand, does appear to be a troublemaker. As Hester puts

it, (2) appears to require a general teleology, "for the only compelling reason that I can

see for believing that what is unique to a species in terms of species essence is *the good*

of that species is that there is a tellic structure to nature and that living creatures will

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[9]*NE* 1106a21-23: "Therefore, if this is true in every case, the excellence [virtue] of man also will be the state which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well."

[10]Marcus Hester, "Aristotle on the Function of Man in Relation to Eudaimonia," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (January 1991): 5.

[11]For the claim that Aristotle is only speaking here about natural kinds, see Jennifer Whiting, "Aristotle's Function Argument: A Defense," *Ancient Philosophy* 8 (Spring 1988): 35-36. There is a great deal of literature evolution and essences. The general conclusion seems to be that it can at least allow for nomological essences, and that is all that this argument requires. Cf. Edouard Machery, "A Plea for Human Nature," *Philosophical Psychology* 21 (forthcoming): 321-30.

[12]Cf. Whiting 42-44 for a claim that if we are essentially rational beings, then acting in any way against my rationality is not acting for *myself* at all.

thrive performing their function in the cosmic scheme of things."[13] The general charge is

quite clear: Aristotle believes in a "metaphysical biology" according to which human

beings have a given form that designates their *telos*, which supports in turn a more

general teleology into which the human form fits like a puzzle piece into one grand,

unified Nature. Only when we take on that form, only when we achieve our 'second

nature' by becoming virtuous, can we fit properly into Nature as a whole, and so only

then can we be happy. Aristotle has proven his thesis: virtue is necessary for happiness

because it alone allows us to fit into 'the grand scheme of things,' which is necessary for

our personal fulfillment and happiness. But, the charge concludes, as neat a package as

this provides, it relies on a premise that we can no longer accept, a notion that human

beings have a form that is fitted into a general teleology of nature. Modern science has

very successfully excised Aristotle's metaphysical biology and general teleology, and

with them has fallen the necessity of virtue for happiness. If Aristotle's ethics, and in

particular his defense of the necessity of virtue for happiness, requires this sort of general

teleology, then it is no longer available in the age of modern science.

Not everyone is convinced by this picture, however. John McDowell calls it a

"historical monstrosity" to read Aristotle as believing in an external validation, a

validation of ethics based on non-ethical grounds.[14] Annas, too, questions the charge,

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[13]Hester, 6. His emphasis. Hester goes on to discuss what he sees as two further ways that Aristotle supports his definition of happiness (and hence the necessity thesis): (a) what he calls *endoxa* arguments, arguments from the general beliefs of the culture as a whole, and (b) Platonic rationality arguments, which work from the idea of the function of reason in the human soul to the necessity of being rational in a certain way. My account of Aristotle's methodology sees all three arguments as intimately connected, which is how Aristotle presents them. Hester then questions whether these arguments could stand alone without the function argument and its controversial thesis, and determines that they cannot for reasons that should now be quite familiar: they allow for relativity of virtues, and they do not specify just one human good.

[14]McDowell, *Mind and World*, 79.

arguing that Aristotle has no theory of general teleology, but only teleology within

natural kinds. Aristotle never asks what a species as a whole is *for*, or what its place is

within any larger system. "For Aristotle it is just as naive as it is for us to ask what the

point is of a human life. This is not a well-defined question; for there is no well-defined

larger system that a human being is part of."[15]

If all of this is true, then what do we make of the function argument, which, as

Hester notes, seems to require precisely this type of general teleology? Well, we could,

of course, just ignore it, for it is unique in Aristotle's ethical thought,[16] and put it down to

a lack of clarity on Aristotle's part. If necessary, this would not be devastating to the

McDowell/Annas position, but it should always be a last resort. The problem, as Hester

helpfully points out, is with the move from (1) to (2), from the idea that all natural kinds

have a unique essence to the claim that doing well at *this* essence is what makes a human

being good. How could we defend this move? One common way is to offer examples

from things such as good knives: the function of a knife is to cut, and a good knife is one

that cuts well. From these we draw the general conclusion that for any function F of a

kind, a good member of that kind is one that Fs well. A problem arises, however, when

we remember that saying it is a good member of that kind does not mean that it is good

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[15]*Morality*, 139. To speak more precisely, Aristotle never suggests any manner in which a species
is ethically *for* some further goal or part of some larger pattern or ecosystem. There are some places in
Aristotle's works where he seems to speak of biological patterns, such as in *Politics* 1256b15*ff*, and *Parts
of Animals* 696b2*ff*. On these passages, see Cooper, "Aristotle on Natural Teleology," in *Language and
Logos: Essays in Honour of G.E.L. Owen*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and M. Schofield, 197-222 (New York:
Cambridge University Press, 1982). For an attempt to read ethical conclusions into this and additional
passages in the *Physics*, see Sedley. D. Sedley, "Is Aristotle's Teleology Anthropomorphic?" *Phronesis* 36
(1991): 179-96. I agree with Annas (*Morality*, 139 fn.13) that Sedley puts too much emphasis on non-
ethical passages in attempting to force his argument. Such a well-defined system and general teleology *is*
part of the Stoic picture, however (cf. Annas, *Morality*, 159-79).

[16]Interestingly, the parallel passage in the *EE* seems to be about the function of the *soul* rather than
a function of a *human being*, which is far less problematic (cf. Kenny, *The Aristotelian Ethics*, 203). The
soul might have a function within a human being, as part of our life, but the human being supposedly must
have a function within some larger whole.

for something else, but that *it* is good, that to F well is *good for* that member. Is it really

good for a knife to cut well, or is it good for us that it cut well?   So just from the fact that

it is a human being's function to be virtuous, it may not follow that it is good for that

human being if she is virtuous. But this, surely, is precisely what the necessity thesis is

attempting to show, that to be virtuous is, if not inevitably good for, at least necessary for

the human being to have the goodness of happiness.

What Aristotle must provide is some means of moving from the essence of a thing

to what is beneficial for that thing, and he must do it without appealing to a general

teleology. But is it actually such a startling claim that what is true of my nature at least

partly specifies what is good for me? A cow does best—it has the sleekest hair, the

brightest eye, and the most energy—when it lives in a herd with other cows. Deprived of

bovine companionship for an extended period of time, it will observably worsen in its

condition. If we allow that cows, like human beings, are 'political animals' in this way,

then why is it troubling to claim that this fact tells me something about what it is good for

any cow to do? 'Good,' for Aristotle, is a broader category than what we might call

morally good.[17] It would be difficult to see how our essence could tell us something

about what is (uniquely) *morally* good for human beings. Hester states that the only

compelling reason he can see to believe that performing one's function well (in this case

being virtuous) is *the good* of the species is that there is a general teleology such that

"living creatures will thrive performing their function in the cosmic scheme of things."[18]

Perhaps his concern, then, is that unless this is the case, there is no way of knowing

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[17]Hester, 6.

[18]Ibid. It is no coincidence that this sounds like the sufficiency thesis rather than the necessity
thesis; once we accept general teleology, how could virtue ever fail to lead to happiness?

whether fulfilling our function is necessary for our good or not if, for instance, Descartes'

evil genius designed us so that fulfilling our function will lead to our ultimate suffering.

The only way to be sure that this is not the case is to provide an Archimedean point from

which we can show that our function is part of some broader, benevolent providence.

There is probably no unstrained reading of the function argument that does not

suggest that Aristotle is basing ethics on non-ethical grounds. This explains why so many

good philosophers have read Aristotle as holding such a view. If, however, we avoid

assuming that this is what he must say because of a drive to give him a well-grounded

ethical theory, we can take the function argument to have a slightly different thrust, as

suggested by our account of his method in chapter two. Having already presented a

number of phenomena, including the shared belief that happiness might be virtue and that

the final end must be complete and self-sufficient, Aristotle offers the function argument

as a further specification of what happiness might consist in. He then returns, as we

noted, to the relevant common opinions and justifies his response as an improvement of

the insight contained in each, *but he does not use the function argument to show that the*

common opinions are wrong. Aristotle uses the function argument as a rational way of

specifying further what was already contained in the common opinions and his critiques

of them, not as a means of rationally and independently proving what happiness must be

like. If Aristotle believed that his function argument was a stand-alone argument

dependent only on some external point, then he would presumably employ this argument

as a counter against the claim that happiness is pleasure, for example, by showing that

pleasure is not our function or part of our essence, but he does not do this, and relies

instead upon the notion of completeness. What this should tell us is that the function

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argument is not the climax of book one, the final argument that proves Aristotle's theory of happiness to be correct, but is rather one part of a long chain of arguments. The force of the function argument depends on its companion arguments. What does it argue for, then, and on what basis? It argues that happiness is an activity in accordance with reason on the basis that human beings have an essence and that this essence tells us something about what is good for them. Only if we try to further the argument to claim that this is good for them *because* their function now fits instrumentally into a broader cosmos do we run into problems.

In conclusion, if we read Aristotle as offering a non-ethical grounding for his ethics, then we run into at least three problems: (1) it requires a general teleology that we no longer accept, (2) it specifies only one good for all human beings, whereas we tend to believe that there is more than one way to be good (the notion that we have 'real interests' belongs here, as does relativity of virtues to different cultures and the Gauguin problem), and (3) it requires that lives be unified as well. If we read Aristotle instead as arguing from ethical grounds to an ethical theory, then the first problem disappears, but (2) and (3) remain. In the next chapter we will look at a version of this second sort of argument and will attempt to show that perhaps this is all that Aristotle ever intended to hold; in the course of that discussion, we will need to deal with (2) and (3) as well. In the present chapter we turn to the writings of Joseph Butler to assess whether a non-ethical grounding may still have hope if theistic assumptions are employed.

Reading Butler

Butler's distrust of systems of ethics has never stopped philosophers from finding systems in his ethics. The fact that he came before Kant and wrote innocent of the

brilliant German's moral distinctions has likewise been of small concern for historians of

ideas intent on seeing the history of modern ethics as a relentless march Kantward. The

result is that Butler becomes like e. e. cumming's sea: "for whatever we lose(like a you or

a me)/ it's always ourselves we find in the sea."[19]

These Kantian readings of Butler are understandable given some of his positions

and ways of expressing himself, but they are certainly not charitable to their material. As

Stephen Darwall, certainly one of the most Kantian of Butler's readers, freely admits, the

Kantian aspect of Butler's thought is only one of a complex set of elements, and "is,

moreover, in substantial tension with others: with his acceptance of Clarke's theory of

eternal fitnesses, his teleological argument for the authority of conscience, and his

theology, to name only a few examples."[20] In fact, the "autonomy line" in Butler's

thought is an entirely implicit argument, Darwall notes, whereas his teleology is the

explicit argument "on the surface of the text."[21] Given that Butler was an extremely

devout and pious bishop in the Anglican Church, we might safely assume that his

theology was also important to him, and it too is explicitly part of the text.[22] Indeed,

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[19]E. E. Cummings, "maggie and milly and molly and may," *Selected Poems*, ed. Richard S. Kennedy (New York: Liveright Publishing, 1994), 6.

[20]Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought': 1640-1740* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 248.

[21]Darwall, *Internal 'Ought,'* 247.

[22]On this point, many commentators, oddly, disagree. Penelhum, for instance, takes it that Butler is arguing only from premises that his presumed deistic opponents would accept, and so only assumes a general providence and not a full-blown theology in his sermons (23). While this thesis if plausible of the first three sermons taken in isolation, it is patently absurd as a general claim about the sermons that quote and interpret scripture and appeal to the nature of Christ as an exemplar. Perhaps Penelhum is referring only to the first three sermons, from which he generally works (along with the 11th sermon and the "Dissertation of Virtue"), though he states this as a general principle of interpretation. Terence Penelhum, *Butler* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

Darwall notes that Butler himself may have surrendered this aspect of his thought "were he to consider its interactions with other things he also wants to maintain."[23]

Darwall's exegesis of Butler aims to mine from the text an implicit and unacknowledged argument that is in tension with the most obvious and important of Butler's explicit beliefs and aims and which Butler, had he been aware of this subtext, might well have refuted. Specifically, Darwall is concerned to trace the genesis of the internal 'ought,' as his title has it, the key Kantian belief that there is a distinctively moral 'ought' that motivates by its rational recognition because it is a condition of our being rational, deliberative, autonomous agents that it do so. As a history of an idea, Darwall's book is interesting, and well-researched, but as an account of his various subjects, it is sometimes pretty odd. Most importantly to my account of Butler as an ethicist committed to the necessity of virtue for happiness, there is no textual obligation to read Butler as committed to a moral/prudential divide, as a distinctively moral 'ought' implies, and if we resist the urge to read him this way we can charitably read him as coherently holding to all of his explicit commitments and arguments.

I have claimed that the necessity thesis contrasts with a moral/prudential divide, but have done nothing to explain why this is the case. Kant famously holds that we must believe in an afterlife because it is unacceptable that people ultimately not receive the moral consequences of their actions. This, of course, is the thesis that goodness is sufficient for happiness, but it assumes necessity as well since no vicious people will end up in heaven. There is clearly nothing incoherent in claiming that a person must be moral

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[23]Darwall, 249. In a later footnote, Darwall admits that his particular reading requires "shoehorning," but notes defensively, "*any* interpretation of Butler does. I claim only to be describing one strand of his thought" (274). I will try to falsify this claim, but I do not claim complete success. Butler is not systematic; still, judged by a standard of charity, some efforts are better than others.

according to *any* particular system or understanding of morality to achieve happiness. There is, however, a tension between the specific defense of the necessity thesis to which I believe Butler is committed and a moral/prudential divide. Our question with Butler is whether a theist may coherently hold to an external validation of ethics by employing theistic assumptions to bolster his claims of general teleology. If Butler does not coherently hold to a general teleology but instead implicitly argues that our conscience judges actions to be right or wrong because our nature is constituted so that our ability to act requires it, then clearly he does not coherently hold to a general teleology based on theistic assumptions either. More strongly, we will see in greater detail below that the necessity thesis itself, to avoid egoism, may require that moral and prudential 'oughts' not be different in kind but only in degree.

Two immediate problems face any commentator on Butler's *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*: they are sermons, and it is not Butler's method to lay out premises and conclusions in clearly deductive arguments. In the preface Butler sarcastically writes, "Though 'tis scarce possible to avoid judging, in some way or other, of almost every thing which offers itself to one's thoughts; yet 'tis certain that many persons, from different causes, never exercise their judgment, upon what comes before them, in the way of determining whether it be conclusive and holds."[24] People are entertained or not, enjoy something that they read or not, but they never consider whether it is true and valid, he complains. Even those who read with a real curiosity often do not seem to care whether it is true. He continues, "I say, curiosity; because 'tis too obvious

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[24]Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*, in *The Works of Bishop Butler* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), Preface 1, 35. The number directly following the identification of the sermon or tract in question is the original paragraph number (not the adjusted paragraph numbers used by Gladston); the number following the comma is the page number in White. Of course, a third barrier in reading Butler is his archaic comma usage.

to be mentioned, how much that religious and sacred attention, which is due to truth, and to the important question, what is the rule of life, is lost out of the world."[25]

For readers such as these he has often wished that authors would only lay out their premises and leave the readers to draw the conclusions for themselves, for he has no doubt that they could succeed in doing so, and then they might actually care for the truth of what is written. Most books simply trot out entertaining arguments, and "By this means, time even in solitude is happily got rid of, without the pain of attention… thus people habituate themselves to let things pass through their minds, as one may speak, rather than to think of them."[26] Without stating explicitly that this is to be his own method, Butler goes on to consider the difficulty of clarity in morals, for it is hard to use one word the same way each time even in one author, let alone between authors. All of this, it then becomes clear, is to excuse any obscurity in the following sermons, for they deal with morals, and attempt to force the reader to the pain of attention.[27]

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[25]Butler, Preface 1, 35.

[26]Ibid., 3-4, 35-36.

[27]I cannot speak of Butler's method without also noting his famous differentiation between two ways in which the subject of morals may be treated: (1) by inquiring "into the abstract relations of things," a reference to the rationalistic philosophy of Samuel Clarke; (2) "from a matter of fact, namely, what the particular nature of man is, its several parts, their oeconomy or constitution; from whence it proceeds to determine what course of life it is, which is correspondent to this whole nature" (Preface 12, 37). Butler states that he intends to follow the latter course (in the first three sermons at least) and proceed from premises about the nature of human beings to a consideration of how they should live, though he never repudiates the former method. It is interesting to compare Butler's division and project here to the division that Hume famously makes between the anatomist and the painter, the first of which is concerned with the principles of human nature that undergird morality, and the latter of which attempts to make morality appealing so as to encourage people to its practice. Hume rejects Butler's first manner of morality, that of Clarke, and it appears that Butler's second method is an attempted combination of the anatomist and the painter, though the emphasis is certainly on the role of the painter because Butler believes that the work of the anatomist is quite obvious, a point on which he and Hume certainly would disagree. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 395.

And the charge of obscurity has certainly been laid at Butler's door more than once, though often, I think, through ignoring what we have just covered. Philosophers naturally read Butler as expounding theories, but Butler is not expounding theories, he is preaching sermons, and he is not concerned with people's beliefs nearly so much as with their characters and their souls. Good philosophies aim at capturing the entirety of truth and convincing their readers of that truth; good sermons aim at capturing the hearts of their readers through the truth and convincing them of the obligations of religion and ethics. Butler does not intend to tell his readers *what* to think, but to lay out premises which he thinks they should or will accept, and to teach them how to pay the proper attention to what follows from these premises. Butler is, in short, a pastor, concerned not with abstract morality, but with convincing others what morality requires and encouraging them to its practice. As such, he is not overly exercised about answering every possible objection or even the strongest objections, but just those objections to which he believes his listeners/readers are most susceptible, and as he tells us at the beginning of Sermon XI, "it may be spoken of as very much the distinction of the present to profess a contracted spirit, and greater regards to self-interest, than appears to have been done formerly."[28] In his sermons, therefore, Butler is concerned to convince people who are too taken with self-love that they ought still to be virtuous; he is concerned, in other words, to tell people why self-love itself insists that they be virtuous. His argument, unsurprisingly, assumes the necessity of virtue for happiness.[29]

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[28]Butler, Sermon XI 1, 110.

[29]J. B. Schneewind does not read Butler quite as I do, and so does not make exactly this point, but he clearly realizes the importance of Butler's genre: "it is not by chance that he wrote out his ethical views in the form of sermons. His aim in reflecting on the issues of moral philosophy was to lead those he addressed to improve their behavior. Whatever was not essential for that purpose could be ignored. The moral life, he thought, can be lived quite well without answers to most philosophical questions." J. B.

Butler is not, however, usually taken to be arguing for any such practical conclusion, but instead expounding a specific theory of ethics that can be gleaned by detail-oriented, artful readings of the pertinent parts of his writing (usually the preface, sermons I-III and XI, and the second dissertation appended to *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature*.)[30] Typically, then, commentators follow Butler in the early sermons in laying out his anthropology, then attempting to state what follows for morality from our nature. Given this broad methodological agreement, his anthropology is certainly a good place to start.

The Nature of Man in Butler

Butler notes in the preface that the purpose of his sermons is "to explain what is meant by the nature of man, when it is said that virtue consists in following, and vice in deviating from it; and by explaining to show that the assertion is true."[31] Since Penelhum takes this to exhaust Butler's purpose, he outlines his argument in three stages: the first stage lays out the nature of human beings, the second shows how virtue consists in following this nature, and the third explores possible conflicts between the various aspects of our nature.[32] In what follows, I will loosely follow Penelhum and Butler by briefly outlining the agreed upon aspects of Butler's ethics, then use this agreement as a spring board to explore some of the pertinent disagreements, especially as they concern his commitment to a system of morality.

Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 342.

[30]Terence Penelhum's *Butler*, about which I will have much good to say, is guilty of this fault.

[31]Butler, Preface 13, 37.

[32]Penelhum outlines this argument on pages 12 and 13, and then spends the remainder of part 1 (through page 85) discussing and defending it.

Human Nature

Human beings have a variety of internal principles, by which Butler means

sources of motivation,[33] which are clearly separable from each other: we have particular

passions, appetites, and affections,[34] a general principle of self-love, and a natural

principle of benevolence. Above all of these and naturally controlling them is the

principle of reflection, which he calls conscience. In outlining these various features of

our nature, Butler intends to offer only what common sense makes available to all of us

through introspection and the observation of our interactions with each other.[35]

The passions are particular because they take a specific object; I have a particular

passion for theater, or an appetite for pizza, or an affection for my wife.[36] These passions

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[33]More precisely, Penelhum notes that "the term 'principle' is his common general name for the motives he discusses… the term 'principle', then, appears to be used indifferently for any conscious inner source of human action" (26).

[34]Penelhum differentiates appetites, affections, and passions as well. While his description of them fits with Butler, he gives no source for his distinctions and I am not sure from where these particular descriptions are derived (29). These distinctions are unimportant to any of Butler's arguments.

[35]This comes out clearly in a long and famous footnote to his first sermon in which he addresses Hobbes's contention that benevolence can be reduced to an act of power. If an author were to try and show that this love of others that we all experience is only the love of power, his readers would surely assume that he had mistaken one word for another, and was accounting for a different set of human actions than those of benevolence. Cf. Penelhum, 40*ff* for explication of this and related arguments against Hobbes. Butler, Sermon 1, fn. 2, 52.

[36]The intentionality of particular passions is especially important in Butler's famous arguments against psychological egoism and hedonism. In brief, egoism and hedonism are inaccurate descriptions of human motivation because they mistake my selfishness or my passion for pleasure with a passion for something external to me. If I am constantly acting so as to get my own pleasure, I will fail to do so, because I only actually achieve pleasure when I act so as to get the particular objects that my passions are directed towards. This argument is more complex than this statement makes it appear, and it is the source of a great deal of scholarship, some supporting Butler's arguments, and some disputing them. For Butler's arguments, cf. especially sermon XI. For an analytic restatement and assessment, cf. Penelhum 45*ff*. For an interesting recent analytic restatement and critique, cf. Elliott Sober, "Hedonism and Butler's Stone," *Ethics* 103, no. 1 (October 1992): 97-103. Sober's argument focuses on the shift from *what* people want to *why* they want it. According to Sober, Butler argues that desires are for things, and that people desire those things, not pleasure, and so would be unhappy if we switched the items even if they still got the same pleasure. All of which, Sober says, is fine, just so long as the hedonist can still say that they desire those things *because* they will bring pleasure. The external desires are not, in other words, ultimate or final, they are means to an internal desire. This interpretation fails to capture the force of Butler's argument because Butler means to address *why* people desire things even as he discusses *what* they desire. Butler states that

are important, Butler says, because "reason alone, whatever anyone may wish, is not in reality a sufficient motive of virtue in such a creature as man; but this reason joined with those affections which God has impressed upon his heart, and when these are allowed scope to exercise themselves, but under strict government and direction of reason, then it is we act suitably to our nature, and to the circumstances God has placed us in."[37] Reason alone is not sufficient to motivate us to act virtuously, and so our affections must be properly trained and used by reason. One more point follows clearly from this discussion: all of our affections are naturally good, and it is only when they are intemperately strong or weak that they cause us to act against our nature.[38]

Before we go on to consider benevolence, self-love, and conscience, it is worth noting how *un*Kantian this formulation is in its consequences. Kant, at least according to a basic reading of the *Groundwork*, believes that we must be motivated to good action by our respect for duty alone, whereas Butler believes that reason alone could never motivate such imperfect beings as we actually are to be virtuous.[39] God is unmoved by passions, Butler notes, but he also, for example, has no need of the senses that we use to

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the pleasure exists only because of "that prior suitableness between the object and the passion," without which there could be no pleasure at all, and certainly not more from one object than from another. If our particular passions were not designed to fit with particular external objects, then we could as easily eat a stone as food to fill our bellies, but we are designed for food and so desire good food. We desire food *because* it will fulfill a function for us. Hence, Butler's argument goes through, though due to premises we might reject as well will see further below. Reginald Jackson comes close to giving this account in "Bishop Butler's Refutation of Psychological Hedonism," *Philosophy* 18, no. 70 (July 1943): 114-139. Jackson, however, states that Butler would have to argue for this premise (as he puts it, that we must have a desire for any object before we get pleasure from it), and not argue *from* it as he does (117, cf. 121).

[37]Butler, Sermon V 3, 73.

[38]This can be seen most clearly in Sermon VIII, "Upon Resentment." Butler shows that, regardless of the evil consequences that often follow from it because we control it too little, resentment in itself is necessary for our survival since it allows us "to prevent, and likewise (or perhaps chiefly) to resist and defeat, sudden force, violence, and opposition, considered merely [*sic*] as such, and without regard to the fault or demerit of him who is the author of them" (VIII 6, 91).

[39]Cf. Penelhum, 62.

navigate our world. None of this implies that the passions themselves are improper or evil.[40] Butler is set off from the Stoics (whom he in some ways closely resembles) by his insistence that the passions are naturally good and should be enjoyed, and set off from Kant by his insistence that these passions have a necessary role in motivating us to virtuous action. The particular passions are important to Butler precisely because they motivate us to action, and because we have as many of them pushing us to contribute to the good of others (love of family, compassion, etc.[41]) as pulling us toward the pursuit of our own interest.

Benevolence and self-love are not particular passions, but general passions that involve reflection. The relationship between these general reflective principles, however, remains a vexed issue, as does the details of their relationship to the particular passions.[42] Benevolence is sometimes treated as if it were simply a collection of some of the particular passions, those which are for the good of others,[43] and has no counterpart because we have no evil passions. This would lead us to believe that self-love is

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[40]"Both our senses and our passions are a supply to the imperfection of our nature; thus they show that we are such sort of creatures as to stand in need of those helps which higher orders of creatures do not. But it is not the supply, but the deficiency; as it is not a remedy, but a disease, which is the imperfection" (V 3, 73).

[41]Cf. Sermon V, "Upon Compassion," for a discussion of this affection, and for part of his argument that any person of "mere common understanding" would know that we have this affection.

[42]Penelhum accepts that they are both general, rational principles, but concedes because of his (mis)reading of sermon XII that self-love must ultimately be above benevolence (61). I find this ordering highly unlikely if only because it reverses the entire Christian tradition of reading Christ's commandment to love God and our neighbor as saying that we must love these most, and our self third. McPherson likewise elevates self-love above benevolence, though to a much greater extent; McPherson reads Butler as holding that 'self-love' and 'conscience' have a different sense, but the same referent ("The Development of Bishop Butler's Ethics, Part I," *Philosophy: The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy*, 23 (October 1948): 317-331). On the other side, Jackson does not elevate self-love, but he depresses benevolence to nothing but a particular affection (123). Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and J. B. Schneewind offer the more traditional view that I follow here according to which self-love and benevolence are equivalent second-tier principles. Rorty, "Butler on Benevolence and Conscience," *Philosophy* 53, no. 204 (April 1978): 175; Schneewind, 344.

[43]Sermon I.6, 12.

naturally above benevolence as a more reflective principle. Likewise, benevolence is occasionally placed in apparent subservience to self-love.[44] In Sermon V, however, Butler clearly discusses benevolence and self-love as equally reflective and general principles; neither self-love nor benevolence can motivate us to act. Just as self-love will tell me that I must eat and sleep but only the particular appetites and passions motivate me to do so, so benevolence tells me that I must see to the good of others, but only the particular affections of compassion and love can so motivate me.

There are passages where self-love and benevolence are spoken of as general affections—not particular passions with an object, but motivating and passionate nonetheless; in other passages self-love and benevolence are discussed as if they are purely reflective principles that inform us of how we should live, but do not motivate us in this life. Following Butler's habit when referring to this more reflective self-love, I will call these *more* reflective principles cool benevolence and cool self-love, and the *more* affective principles simply benevolence and self-love.[45] Butler probably overstates the case when he speaks as if self-love and benevolence could ever be affectless and

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[44]Sermon III.9, 64.

[45]Butler, Prologue 35, 43. Butler calls simple self-love "passionate or sensual selfishness" in this passage as opposed to "cool or settled selfishness," but he does not actually believe that either is properly-speaking selfishness, nor that the former is actually self-love at all, but particular passions toward external objects. Cf. Penelhum, 32-35, and T. A. Roberts, *The Concept of Benevolence* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 52. Roberts offers something very much like my suggestion here, that we can take self-love and benevolence in different ways in different passages, and that in some they are essentially equal parts of the character, but in others they are clearly not. Penelhum's only objection to this is that benevolence collapses into 'love of neighbor' for Butler, but it also must include such particular loves as parental love. If this whole continuum is just benevolence, then parental love is 'love of neighbor,' and "it is at least odd to treat parental affections as specifications of the love of neighbour, since it is odd to talk of my children as my neighbours" (34). I fail to see the oddity of this way of talking if we consider the Christian tradition in which neighbor has always denominated something general like another person whom I should respect and love; the fact that this general denomination can be particularized in someone to whom I have additional ties does not strike me as odd at all. My loved ones are my neighbors in Christ's sense, but they also happen to be much more than that. There is nothing in Butler's formulation that suggests that my children are *just* my neighbors.

utterly unmotivating; it is best to take him as speaking of these general principles as describing a certain capacity in our nature which can come in more and less reflective and affective moods. Butler writes, "Every man is to be considered in two capacities, the private and publick; as designed to pursue his own interest, and likewise to contribute to the good of others."[46] Anything that contributes to the former pursuit is loosely self-love, while anything that lends itself to contributing to the good of others is loosely benevolence. More properly speaking, self-love and benevolence are largely reflective, unmotivating principles that direct us to the good life. Even cool benevolence and cool self-love, however, must be controlled by some superior principle, or they too will become unnatural.[47] This superior principle is conscience.

The concept of conscience is seen by nearly all commentators as the keystone of any systematic statement of Butler's ethics. Conscience is "a capacity of reflecting upon actions and characters, and making them an object to our thoughts: and on doing this, we naturally and unavoidably approve some actions, under the peculiar view of their being virtuous and of good desert; and disapprove others, as vitious [*sic*] and of ill-desert."[48]

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[46]Butler, Sermon V 1, 72. He is even more explicit on this point in Sermon I.4-6, 48.

[47]The most famous passage in which Butler discusses the need for even a reflective benevolence to be controlled by conscience is in the "Dissertation on Virtue." God may be a utilitarian, Butler argues, but God knows what is actually for the good of others, while we necessarily do not. If God is a utilitarian, then he is (to borrow Williams' derisive description of Sidgwick's ethics) a "Government-House utilitarian:" while he operates from utilitarian principles, he knows that we would be apt to make far too many mistakes if we tried to always act from some sort of universal benevolence because we are limited creatures, and so we should simply follow conscience. Butler, "Dissertation," 309-314. In the *Analogy* proper, Butler makes it clear that God does not actually operate from benevolent principles, for then there would be no difference between justice, love, and truthfulness (I.II.3, 168). Butler, *The Analogy of Religion*, in *The Works of Bishop Butler* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006).

[48]Butler, "Dissertation," 309. Thomas H. McPherson argues that Butler's ethics develops substantially between the Sermons and "Dissertation," and specifically that his view of conscience alters from a faculty identical with cool self-love, to a specifically moral faculty. Butler, in other words, was an ethical egoist in the *Sermons* and a proto-Kantian by the "Dissertation." I argue that Butler is neither of these, so I reject McPherson's development thesis. McPherson, "The Development of Bishop Butler's Ethics, Part II," *Philosophy: The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy*, 24 (January 1949): 3-22.

Butler notes that he calls the conscience the "moral approving and disapproving faculty"[49] "upon a double account: because, upon a survey of actions, whether before or after they are done, it determines them to be good or evil: and also because it determines itself to be the guide of action and of life, in contradistinction from all other faculties, or natural principles of action."[50] The conscience judges actions and characters and approves or disapproves of them, and it "bears its own authority" as the guide of action and of life above all other principles.[51]

Difficulties arise on both fronts. First, what does it mean that conscience is the "moral approving and disapproving faculty?" Where does it get its judgments from, and how does it judge? Second, what does it mean that the conscience has authority, and how is following conscience the same as following nature? As regards the first question, Butler is unfortunately rather short on examples of the operation of conscience (giving us exactly none). It is a faculty that we are aware of exercising in ourselves and observe in others, even when reading fiction, and that appears in the shared language that we all employ in moral discourse and apply to characters and action. It appears also in our ability to distinguish between guilt and innocence in cases where the action itself is the same, for example, in our distinguishing between "injury and mere harm."[52] We know

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[49]He takes the phrase from Epictetus, who uses the terms δοκιμάστικη and ἀποδοκιμάστικη to refer to a faculty which naturally approves and disapproves as fit or not fit. The same terms apply to judging whether people are fit for a particular office, and refer to the process of assaying or examining as well as to the conclusion reached by this process. Liddell and Scott, 208.

[50]Butler, "Dissertation," 314.

[51]Butler, Sermon II.8, 58.

[52]"Dissertation," 309. Hume similarly writes in the *Treatise*, "It requires but very little knowledge of human affairs to perceive, that a sense of morals is a principle inherent in the soul, and one of the most powerful that enters into the composition" (394). For Hume, this 'sense of morals' arises from sympathy certainly, but also from reflection (at least upon how similar states are, etc.), and is therefore not very different from a proper reading of Butler. There does remain one substantial difference, of course: Butler's

that we have some such moral faculty because without it we could not make the sorts of

moral distinctions that we all habitually and *necessarily* make. The conscience does not

always wait for our attention, but intrudes into our deliberations and forces its

pronouncements upon us in a prefigurement of the Day of Judgment.[53]

The conscience derives its judgments, apparently, from something like an

intuitive grasp of moral truth. In the only passage where Butler comments on this, he

compares the conscience's ability to grasp whether a certain action or way of life is right

or wrong to our speculative reason, "which *directly* and naturally judges of speculative

truth and falsehood." In something like the way that speculative reason intuitively grasps

the truth of the law of non-contradiction, conscience intuitively grasps the fittingness or

naturalness of certain actions and dispositions, and it is presumably able to do so because

God designed it for just this purpose.[54]

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conscience is ingrained in us by God for the purpose of intuitively perceiving an objective right and wrong; Hume's moral sense is, to put it mildly, rather more complicated, since it arises from a natural principle (sympathy), but is not obviously meant to be a teleological moral principle that engages with objective truths. The comparison is complicated however, and Butler and Hume can be described so that they are quite close on all practical matters. For example, Butler (as we will note below) stresses the extent to which what is virtuous for human beings depends upon their given constitution and circumstances, so it isn't as though the conscience grasps eternal truths existent regardless of our particular nature, and in this way he is far more similar to Hume. On the other hand, Butler is an intellectualist, to use the medieval terminology, and so believes that there are moral truths that precede even God's will, so the moral truths of which our particular virtues are an application are eternal and objective in a sense that it is hard to see Hume accepting. On Butler's intellectualism, cf. *Analogy* II, chapter viii.11, 297.

[53]Cf. Sermon II.8, 58.

[54]When we speak of conscience grasping the *naturalness* of actions, we run into a potential landmine that has been outlined in an article by Nicholas Sturgeon ("Nature and Conscience in Butler's Ethics" *The Philosophical Review* 85, no. 3 (July 1976): 316-56). Sturgeon argues that Butler is committed to the Full Naturalistic Thesis: "conscience never favours or opposes any action, except on grounds which include its naturalness or unnaturalness" (322). In other words, conscience judges that actions are right or wrong *based on* whether that action is natural. The problem arises because *natural*, for Butler, means action in accordance with the highest principle in our nature. But if the conscience is judging *solely* by whether the action is natural, then it is not taking into account whether the action is according to conscience, since conscience is making the judgment and therefore is not yet judging it to be right or wrong, and so must be judging whether it is according to some other natural principle, whichever is of most authority *besides* conscience. Therefore, conscience judges actions to be right when they accord with some other principle, say self-love, and wrong when they do not. This is problematic for many reasons, not least

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How Virtue Consists in Following this Nature

We have two questions before us: what does it mean that the conscience has *authority*? and second, since virtue consists in following nature, and apparently also consists in following conscience, how do the two claims go together?

Simply outlining the various principles in our nature has not yet told us what it means to *follow* that nature. After all, if these principles are all that is within us, it is not as if we could ever act outside of these principles, and so it appears that we have no choice but to follow nature, which is quite uninformative as an indication of virtue. This, however, is not a nature at all, for a nature assumes a *system*, or a *constitution*; a nature is not simply a congeries of parts or principles, but the proper "relations and respects which those parts have to each other."[55] Butler's famous example is a watch: merely seeing the various springs and gears laid out tells you nothing of the nature of a watch unless you understand the relations among these parts *and* the end for which they are related, telling time. In the same manner, knowing the various parts of a human being tells you nothing

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because the central distinction between authority and strength that we are about to explore utterly collapses, and Butler becomes, at best, a somewhat confused ethical egoist. Sturgeon gives two reasons for believing that Butler is committed to the Full Naturalistic Thesis: first, Butler's first three sermons are dedicated to proving that virtue is acting according to nature, and conscience judges based on whether an action is virtuous or vicious, therefore conscience judges based on our nature; second, Butler has several passages that seem to suggest something like this (cf. the famous *reductio* at the end of Sermon II). As to the second, I have admitted and will have cause to admit again that Butler is not always as cautious as he should be in expressing himself, nor aware of some potential problems that he should try harder to avoid. Penelhum has some nice responses to Sturgeon's readings of these passages that are, I think, generally right (cf. Penelhum, 63*ff*). As I will show in greater detail below, I read Butler as arguing that virtue consists in following nature, where that nature *includes* the judgments of conscience. It is not the case, then, that conscience is *outside* of nature judging whether or not an action *follows* nature; rather, whether I follow conscience largely determines whether I have followed nature. Sturgeon's mistake comes because he assumes, with Darwall and Penelhum, that the formula of 'following nature' must describe how conscience comes to its judgments. This is false. Our nature is adapted to virtue by God, and the conscience is uniquely able to grasp what is virtuous or vicious and apply it to our total nature, which includes the conscience itself. Sturgeon's clever article gets the order of explanation backwards.

[55]Butler, Preface 14, 38.

unless you understand the proper relations among the parts, *and* the end for which these parts are related, living virtuously and being happy.[56]

Darwall sees two contrasting explanations of the authority of conscience: (1) conscience has authority because of our *constitution* in which conscience, by virtue of its position as ruler and by virtue of its intrinsic properties, naturally judges of right and wrong; (2) conscience judges of right and wrong and naturally has authority because it has this *function* within our nature as determined by our own function as moral beings. Butler cannot solely hold the latter, Darwall argues, because it fails to answer the question of *why* the conscience has authority.

To understand why Darwall rejects this teleological reading, we need to get a running start and return to the various judgments of conscience. Butler continues the analogy between speculative reason and conscience considered above by stating that just as speculative reason *directly* judges of speculative truth and falsehood, it *reflectively* judges that it has a natural right to judge of these matters. The idea seems to be that when speculative reason reflects on itself and its own powers in relation to all other powers in our mind, it is able to judge accurately that it belongs to it to judge directly of speculative truth and falsehood. In the same way, Butler says, the conscience *directly* judges of moral rightness and wrongness, and *reflectively* judges that it and it alone has a natural right to judge of these matters. Just the fact that conscience makes this judgment is insufficient to show that conscience *actually* has this authority, however. Butler begins his second sermon with an explicitly teleological framework: "If the real nature of any

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[56]At this point, Butler presents the end of human beings as being virtuous, but this is rather unsatisfactory since virtue just indicates that the parts *are* correctly ordered (cf. Sermon III, fn 1); in a later sermon he more informatively maintains that the end of human beings is happiness, which requires virtue (XI.5, 111; XI.9, 112).

creature leads him and is adapted to such and such purposes only, or more than to any other; this is a reason to believe the Author of that nature intended it for those purposes."[57] Darwall comments on this passage, "Here and immediately after, Butler appears to suppose that it would be a sufficient proof of conscience's authority that it have a controlling function in our actual design. This would make conscience's power to *obligate*, to provide conclusive reasons for acting, depend entirely on its functional role."[58] Perhaps, as Butler claims, conscience is intrinsically fitted for this role (it directly judges of right and wrong), but it obligates us to act not because of its constitutional power, but solely because of its function.

If this were so, Darwall concludes, then conscience would not have the authority that it requires, the authority that makes acting against it "unnatural" in the strict sense of acting against the constitutional authority of conscience. The type of authority in question is one which gives overriding reasons, "a faculty in kind and in nature supreme over all others, and which bears its own authority of being so."[59] In other words, it gives moral pronouncements *because it has "title to rule,"* because we have a constitution like a society and the conscience is king. Speaking of this form of unnaturalness, Darwall concludes, "It is difficult to see, however, how any facts about functional design can establish that, since no normative facts follow from them."[60] Just knowing that God designed us in such a way that conscience is *supposed* to rule does not make acting against it unnatural in a constitutional sense, for he could have designed us so that

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[57]Sermon II.1, 55.

[58]Darwall, 264.

[59]Sermon II.8, 58.

[60]Darwall, 267. Emphasis in the original.

conscience claimed the same authority, but was *not* supposed to rule. And, Darwall

argues via a strained reading of a related passage,[61] we cannot know what principles have

authority *unless* conscience is operating, so it cannot be the case that conscience claiming

authority tells us that it has authority. Butler is, Darwall concludes, mistaken in his

stressing of the teleological justification of the authority of conscience, but nicely

prefigures Kant in his constitutional reading.

The obvious response is that Butler has faith that *God* designed us, so if he

designed the conscience to claim its own authority, then that should be good enough for

us. "On this reading," Darwall protests, "that conscience is designed to superintend is not

what makes it authoritative; it is conclusive evidence that it has this authority. This

would leave it an open question how it is that conscience comes actually to *have*

authority—what its authority consists in."[62] The central problem for Butler, by Darwall's

lights, is coming up with an answer to this question: in what does conscience's authority

consist? Darwall pieces together an admirably Kantian response, arguing that Butler is

implicitly committed to the autonomy of the moral agent, which requires the authority of

conscience. The authority of conscience consists in its being a necessity of practical

rationality that we follow it, or we can have no reasons to act.

The problem with this, as a reading of Butler, is that Darwall's question is quite

obviously *not* Butler's question. Butler is concerned to show that virtue consists in

following nature, and by so doing, to help people see their obligations (by which he just

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[61]Butler argues, familiarly, that we naturally have many principles in us and that if any are inordinate, we act unnaturally, but that without the conscience, we cannot know how we were designed to act. From this Darwall concludes that conscience claiming its own authority is insufficient for knowing that conscience has authority. But Butler believes that we independently know that God is good and gives us only good principles (a fact he relies on in this very argument), and that conscience cannot therefore be designed to tell us it has authority if it does not. This will become clearer below.

[62]Darwall, 269.

means something like 'reasons') to the life of virtue and provide motivation to follow them. Darwall invents his own question by devising a division between two ways of taking 'nature:' a human being as a constitution, and a human being as a creature that fits into a general teleology. It is clear in Butler how these two ideas go describe one conception of nature: a watch has a certain relation of parts, which is its economy or constitution, its *way-of-being-put-together*, that allows it to fulfill its function. The constitution does not assume the authority of any one part (what part has authority in Darwall's sense within a watch?), it is simply the way-of-being-put-together that captures all of the correct relationships among its various parts. In the same way, a human being has a given constitution, a way-of-being-put-together, that is proper to it, and this is its true nature, speaking strictly and properly. This constitution is determined by the function to which any thing is adapted or designed (perhaps Butler's use of 'economy' better captures this idea). When a human being is put together in this fashion, he acts virtuously and is able to achieve his ultimate end, happiness.

Natural and unnatural do not, then, *contra* Darwall, mean following or not following conscience, but having or not having (manifesting or not manifesting), the proper economy. As Butler stresses continually, human beings are particularly designed for their own and society's good, not just morally but prudentially.[63] When we act naturally, we act morally, but this does not mean that acting naturally is what makes our action moral. Rather, God perceives what is virtuous for creatures in our circumstance

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[63]Alan Millar makes this claim in "Following Nature," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 38, no. 151 (April 1988): 165-185. Although I will make it clear below that Millar and I do not agree on all details, he is one of two major commentators who adequately understands what Butler means by following nature, and specifically that this is not at all a Kantian *moral* obligation. Butler stresses this claim in Sermons I and V where he discusses the public and private good, and insists (*contra* Hobbes and any other egoist), that we are designed for *both*. Of course, his concern is usually to insist that we are designed for benevolence because his own age gave so much weight to self-love, but certainly he is committed to both.

and designs us so that acting naturally will be acting virtuously as well.[64] Observing our nature is not, however, the primary way that we perceive morality; rather our conscience directly perceives what is right and wrong. Thus, the most important aspect of our constitution (morally speaking) is that the constitution rule supreme, and when it does so we are able to fulfill our function and reach our ultimate end.

What *does* it mean, then, that conscience has authority? Our clearest picture of what this authority amounts to comes from Butler's application of the same term to self-love. When self-love dictates that we need to stop eating, but our particular appetite for food goads us on to continue our gluttony, we recognize that self-love has authority and that *therefore* we should stop. Self-love, Butler says, gives us a reason of a different kind and nature than particular passions. If self-love gives reasons of a different kind and nature than particular passions, then there is nothing particularly enlightening about his equal claim that conscience gives reasons of a different nature and kind from all other principles.[65] Clearly, each type of principle gives reasons of a different nature and kind, so this does not establish a distinctive *moral* type of reason, except in the trivial sense that conscience is our moral faculty and gives distinctive types of reason, *along with every other principle*. Speculative reason, we may assume, also gives a distinctive type of reason for action, one that is not motivating by itself, but this does nothing to make Butler a rationalist. That self-love has authority and tells us to stop does not mean that

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[64]In the *Analogy*, Butler writes, "Our whole nature leads us to ascribe all moral perfection to God, and to deny all imperfection of him. And this will for ever be a practical proof of his moral character, to such as will consider what a practical proof is; because it is the voice of God speaking in us" (Introduction 10, 154).

[65]Cf. Butler, Sermon II.8, 58; II.11, 59.

we will stop, because authority is not the same as *strength*; the particular appetite might

be stronger, but self-love retains its authority even as it is overridden.

Self-love's authority consists, Penelhum says, in the fact that it is obviously

giving better reasons for action, reasons that relate to my overall well-being and not

merely to an ephemeral and self-destructive desire. In the same way, conscience has

authority because it gives us *better* reasons than self-love or any other principle, reasons

related to the moral rightness and wrongness of actions. Its authority does not derive

from what is required for me to have any reasons to act, but from its ability to judge a

higher set of reasons than even self-love, reasons related to the good and God.

Penelhum is close, but not quite right, for this reading, too, makes the authority of

conscience a matter of the sort of 'ought' that it gives us; the conscience gives us a moral

'ought,' while self-love (and other principles) can only give us a prudential or

deliberative 'ought.'[66] In insisting that we should follow the conscience because it gives

a different kind of reason, which is inherently better and can be seen to be so merely

because it is from conscience, Penelhum flirts with the constitutional view of Darwall.

This reading of the authority of conscience, according to which that authority consists in

the conscience offering us distinctive *moral* reasons for action, whether in the strong

autonomous sense suggested by Darwall or in the weaker sense offered by Penelhum, is

unsustainable. If this reading were correct, we would expect to see Butler opposing the

authority of conscience to a teleological view in which virtue is defined in reference to

our ultimate happiness, but as seen above and admitted by Darwall, this is precisely what

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[66]Alan Millar makes a related point. Cf. Millar 175, fn. 9, and 173-4. Others who have held to
this milder proto-Kantian reading of Butler include A. E. Duncan-Jones, *Butler's Moral Philosophy*
(Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1952), chapter 3; and C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (New
York: Routledge, 2000); in other words, Butler's major commentators.

he does not do.[67] Rather, Butler's question is why we ought to follow conscience when our self-love (or particular passions) conflict with it, and this 'ought' precisely cannot be a moral ought, since then the answer would be circular: why ought we (morally) to do what conscience commands? Because we morally ought to do so.

Penelhum, in fact, believes that this is exactly what Butler is doing, giving us a reminder that the conscience gives us indefeasible and overriding reasons to act morally, and that he does so through the appeal to nature. Whereas Darwall ends up asking the wrong question, Penelhum asks the right question. Butler's central question, as a reminder, is how to get people to do what they already know (through conscience) they should do. Moreover, Penelhum presents Butler's answer—he will get people to follow their consciences by showing them that this is what they ought to do to follow nature— but he misunderstands the nature of this ought. Penelhum presents Butler's question as a couple of puzzles: first, if the best reason we can give for an action is that it is right, then why is the central purpose of the *Sermons* explicitly to give people reasons related to following nature for why they should do what conscience has already clearly told them to do? Second, why should the knowledge that an action is natural give us any further motivation? Answering the first will answer the second as well.

Penelhum explains his position:

So the question 'Why should I do what I have already judged to be right?' is to be answered, 'You already know, not only that this action would be right, but that if an action is the right one, you ought to do it, whatever *else* is the case about it' – whether it causes you, or someone you care for, suffering or inconvenience, for example. The question, though it has been taken with full seriousness, is ultimately said to be improper and confused, since the analysis of human nature Butler has given shows that each of us is the sort of creature who is endowed with a recognition of the fact that the judgment of rightness or wrongness embodies an

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[67]Cf. Wendell O'Brien, "Butler and the Authority of Conscience," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (January 1991): 44.

overriding reason, and that we should disregard the resistance to obligation of which the question is a sophisticated expression.[68]

Penelhum provides a teleological reading of Butler, but attempts to derive from this reading the sort of inherent authority for conscience that will make its dictates distinctively moral in force, the sort that we recognize to be overriding reasons. In a footnote, Darwall states that Penelhum is attempting to answer how conscience can have authority, but gives the wrong sort of answer, for a functional account of how we are actually designed can never make the considerations of conscience conclusive reasons for action. Darwall's problem, as stated above, is that he is trying to put a concern for a certain type of reason where it does not belong. Butler is not concerned to give a reason for why conscience has the authority that it has any more than he is trying to give a reason for why the eye sees as it does, or at least he is not trying to give any reason beyond *because this is its function*. That this does not give the sort of normative outcome that Darwall is looking for is not an argument against Penelhum or anyone else, but an argument against looking for this sort of reason in Butler's account.

Penelhum does, however, try to give an answer of why we morally *ought* to do what conscience commands, and this leads him to read Butler as providing a circular answer. Penelhum is right to focus on the importance of self-deception in Butler and the need for a constant reminder that we ought to act as we know we ought to act, but he fails to see that the argument is not *just* a reminder, because in telling us that following nature is acting virtuously, he is giving us prudential obligations to act as we morally know we ought to act. The tenth sermon that Butler includes focuses upon our ability for self-deceit: "there is plainly, in the generality of mankind, an absence of doubt or distrust, in a

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[68]Penelhum, 71.

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very great measure, as to their moral character and behaviour; and likewise a disposition

to take for granted, that all is right and well with them in these respects. The former is

owing to their not reflecting, not exercising their judgment upon themselves; the latter, to

self-love."[69] Just as people do not judge of what they read but lazily allow it to wash

over them as entertainment, so they do not reflect on their own characters, but, out of a

simple partiality to themselves, assume that all is well. This partiality leads us to ignore

any negative thing that can be said against us, but to consider every accolade as true.[70]

Allowing ourselves to be blinded out of partiality does not excuse the fault, but worsens

it, for it shows that our character is corrupt.

As prevalent as this self-deceit is, the truly virtuous person knows when he is

being honest with himself, for "truth, and real good sense, and thorough integrity, carry

along with them a peculiar consciousness of their own genuineness: there is a feeling

belonging to them, which does not accompany their counterfeits… so far only as they are

consistent with that course of gratification which men happen to be set upon."[71] There is,

in other words, a peculiar feeling that accompanies being integrated correctly, and which

tells us that we are on the correct path to achieve that gratification which we happen to be

set upon. God has set us in a particular set of circumstances with a particular

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[69]Sermon X.3, 104. Béla Szabados offers an interesting account of self-deceit in the course of her argument that conscience is not naively assumed to be infallible in Butler. Béla Szabados, "Butler on Corrupt Conscience," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 14, no. 4 (October 1976): 462-9.

[70]Butler's psychology is as rich and suggestive here as ever, far more so than the account above. Our partiality has many effects, and this is only one. The brief suggestion above has two parts. My love for myself affects what I hear and how I construe the evidence that comes before me, and so I disregard any instruction or reproof because it does not seem to apply (X.3). I might also focus so completely upon my interests, meaning here both what affects myself and what interests me in a contemporary sense, that I simply never take the time or effort to judge (X.4, cf. X.6). In some this partiality is completely general, while in others there are particular blind spots, which can be the harder fault to heal because the person that is only blind in certain areas is likely to discount any reproof because he is aware of his introspection in other areas (X.5).

[71]Sermon X.11, 106-7.

constitution, and only when we fulfill that nature can we, in this set of circumstances, hope to achieve that happiness which we have been designed to enjoy.[72]

This passage points us toward the correct reading, one made clear by two recent writers, Alan Millar and Wendell O'Brien. O'Brien begins by noting that Butler argues from the tendency of a certain principle to its adaptation, and hence to its purpose in our design. Millar, likewise, argues from our being adapted to a certain way of life (virtue), to our being designed for that way of life. "To say that conscience is supreme, or has authority, in human nature," both argue, "is to say that it (directly) tends to govern, regulate, and judge all other principles; and no other principle has quite this tendency."[73] "Human beings in particular are designed," Millar further explains, "to lead the kind of life which is conducive both to the good of the society of which they form a part and to their own good."[74] From this evident authority of conscience, then, it is available to anyone to know that virtue consists in following nature.

But surely this is moving far too quickly, for Darwall would rightly protest that simply knowing that the conscience has authority naturally does not tell us whether or not we should follow this conscience or this nature. In other words, this reading assumes a general teleology that we no longer accept by arguing from what our nature *actually* is to how it is virtuous to be; it tries to leverage us into ethics 'from the outside.'[75] This is

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[72] On our particular circumstances and constitution, cf. esp. I.7, 49; III.7, 62; VIII.1, 90.

[73] O'Brien, 50.

[74] Millar, 170. Cf. Sermon I.9, 50.

[75] It is a little misleading to say that this is our nature as it *actually* is. Butler notes that every work of art is apt to be out of order, so that how things actually occur is little to the purpose (Preface 14, 38). Our nature as it is now is fallen, but even our fallen nature indicates accurately what our proper created design is, that design in which all of our principles are utterly coincident and in the proper relationships with each other. Cf. Penelhum, 21; O'Brien, 54; and Butler's footnote to Sermon III (64).

where Butler's theistic assumptions come in, Millar and O'Brien both point out, for God is both omnipotent and omni-benevolent, and so he is able to make us according to a nature fitted for virtue, and he *will* do so. Thus, in knowing that this is our nature, we know that we *ought* to follow it, not only morally, but all things considered, for as Millar pointed out above, we are designed for the good of our society and for our own good as a benevolent being would be motivated to make us.

This seems to lead to a new set of problems, however, for while the goodness of God may show that however we naturally are, we are good (every principle is good), it does not show that natural principles cannot be taken to an evil degree. In fact, Butler shows at some length in his discussion of resentment that this can happen.[76] So self-love may yet clash with conscience in such a way that, while we must naturally follow conscience, yet prudentially we ought to do otherwise. This, Millar says, is the basis of Butler's long discussion of the coincidence of conscience and self-love. His conclusion, Millar writes, is that God has simply made sure, in his omnipotence and benevolence, that our personal obligations and moral obligations always coincide and point the same direction. It is unsurprising that Millar concludes, "Butler's theology is in many respects naive at best. We can hardly avoid such a judgement on his optimistic view that, thanks to Providence, virtue and self-love, public and private good, coincide."[77]

Millar recognizes the right question and gives the right answer so far as he goes, but he finally misses the full force of what Butler means when he says that virtue consists

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[76]Resentment, like every principle in us, is naturally good, and we can see this if we carefully study our circumstances and nature, for sudden resentment (often called anger) helps to protect us from harm just as reflexively closing our eyes protects them from dust (VIII.4-5, 91).

[77]Millar, 181.

in following nature as the "ancients" intended it.[78] Recall again the account of Aristotle

as committed to a metaphysical teleology: the necessity of virtue for happiness follows

from a general teleology in which we define nature as good, define virtue as fulfilling that

nature, and define happiness as a life lived well in accordance with this nature. As we

have shown at length, Butler accepts the existence of a general teleology and inter-

defines following nature and virtue. If we can show, then, that he conceives of happiness

as a life of virtue, then we will have shown that for Butler self-love, defined as a concern

for our own happiness,[79] *requires* that we follow conscience, *according to its own*

concerns. Self-love, properly understood, does not grudgingly acquiesce to the rule of

conscience; it requires it by its own lights. We will then have the answer to Penelhum's

second puzzle that he was unable to offer: Butler believes that showing people how virtue

consists in following nature will motivate them to virtue because he is addressing an

audience already dedicated to and motivated by self-love, and self-love itself requires that

we follow our nature, and hence be virtuous.[80]

The prospects for showing that happiness consists in virtuous activity appear

rather low at first glance, for Butler's first definition of happiness presents it as an

internal state attained when we fulfill our particular desires.[81] In his final sermons,

however, Butler turns to a consideration of our love for God and argues that our final

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[78]Butler, Preface 24, 40.

[79]Cf. Sermon I.15, 52; Sermon XI.5, 111; Sermon XI.8, 112.

[80]This response is especially apt for Butler, since he perceived that his audience was uniquely motivated by self-love, but in a sense Penelhum's question is just odd and seems to demonstrate a basic lack of understanding on his part that following nature is for our good (though Butler seems quite clear on this point!): has any philosopher ever tried to convince people to do what leads to their own happiness?

[81]Cf. Sermon XI.9, 112. Clearly Butler offers this account of happiness because he is concerned in this sermon to argue that happiness does not consist in self-love, and so hedonism is wrong, not as an exhaustive account of happiness.

happiness can be found only in him, a point we will have cause to return to below. In the

course of making this argument, Butler makes it clear that happiness consists in the

fulfillment not merely of particular appetites and affections, but of *all* affections. Butler

begins by imagining a man sitting alone and at leisure, reflecting upon himself "and his

own condition of being." Such a man "would immediately feel that he was by no means

compleat [*sic*] of himself, but totally insufficient for his own happiness." Feeling this

deficiency, he would turn to external things to try to fill their need; these objects,

however, fail to satisfy our "capacities and desires," they are so far from "answering our

notions and desires of happiness, or good, that they are really no more than what they are

commonly called, somewhat to pass away the time."[82] The conclusion is that we have a

deeper capacity that cannot be filled by any earthly thing, but only by the final end, God,

in which our faculties and capacities will rest eternally.

Happiness, the good, consists ultimately in enjoying God. This is not a surprising

conclusion for a Bishop, and it suggests the deeper connection between Butler, Roberts,

and the reading of Aristotle offered above (not to mention Augustine and Aquinas)

according to which the virtues (some imbued) are both necessary and (for theists)

sufficient for gaining our Ultimate Happiness: God. This also suggests, however, that

Butler defines happiness as the fulfillment of our capacities generally. If, however, we

fulfill our appetite for a particular object, say milkshakes, to an inordinate degree, then

we cannot fulfill our affection of self-love, and likewise for all particular and general

affections and capacities. The conclusion, then, is that we can fulfill *all* capacities, even

in an earthly sense, only to the extent that our various capacities are coincident, which

occurs only when we follow our nature and respect the proper relationship between each

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[82]Butler, Sermon XIII.9, 136.

of these principles and capacities. While vulgar pleasures, Aristotle and Butler declare,

often contradict themselves, the virtuous person has true pleasure and true happiness.[83]

Butler accepts a general teleology, buttressed by his belief in a benevolent creator,

in which our nature is adapted to virtue so that we must be virtuous to be happy. From all

that we have said so far, however, it may seem that virtue should be sufficient for

happiness as well. Butler is too honest to insist upon complete coincidence of conscience

and self-love, however. In general, if we act according to enlightened self-interest, then

we will act virtuously, for acting virtuously brings real satisfaction of a sort that envy,

resentment, and injustice do not, both in themselves and because of the reputation that we

gain. Not only that, but even virtue, which is originally difficult, becomes easy with

practice, and then act by choice and delight, for "in all propriety of speech, natural

behaviour must be the most easy and unrestrained." Butler continues:

> It is manifest that, in the common course of life, there is seldom any inconsistency
> between our duty and what is called interest: it is much seldomer that there is any
> inconsistency between duty and what is really our present interest; meaning by
> interest, happiness and satisfaction. Self-love, then, though confined to the
> interest of the present world, does in general perfectly coincide with virtue; and
> leads us to one and the same course of life. But, whatever exceptions there are to
> this, which are much fewer than they are commonly thought, all shall be set right
> at the final distribution of things. It is a manifest absurdity to suppose evil
> prevailing finally over good, under the conduct and administration of a perfect
> mined [*sic*].[84]

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[83]Other passages from the sermons and *Analogy* back up this reading of Butler as committed to a
richer sense of happiness connected to virtue and to the claim that virtue is necessary for happiness. For
example, in sermon XV Butler explicitly states, "Virtue is demonstrably the happiness of man" (XV.16,
145). In the *Analogies*, he considers it clear that while we are on earth, many people make themselves
miserable, foreseeing that they will be miserable, and yet falling into it anyway by folly and rashness. We
cannot know why God does not simply choose to make everyone happy regardless of our actions, but
perhaps this is simply impossible because of the nature of things, or would lead to less happiness overall, or
perhaps God desires not only happiness but goodness as well, perhaps divine goodness is not "a bare single
disposition to produce happiness; but a disposition to make the good, the faithful, the honest man, happy….
Perhaps, I say, an infinitely perfect mind may be pleased with this moral piety of moral agents, in and for
itself, as well as upon account of its being essentially conducive to the happiness of his creation" (*Analogy*
I.II.3, 168).

[84] Butler, Sermon III.8, 63. cf. Sermon XI.15, 115, where he insists on the same.

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We see that virtue is not sufficient for happiness on earth, but is sufficient for that happiness that can be found only when our love of God rests "in its object as an end."[85]

Butler begins by laying out his premises, but he requires his audience to do the work of putting together the pieces into a coherent whole. This is not easy to do, but I have attempted to offer an interpretation of Butler that does justice to his major claims while making sense of his explicit commitments and arguments. That I have had to put together disparate parts to do so should not be troubling given that he informs us at the beginning that we will have to do so for ourselves. Butler explicitly tells us that his purpose (in at least some of the sermons) is to explain in what sense virtue consists in following nature, and by explaining, to show that this obligates us to virtue and should motivate us to virtue. By interpreting 'following nature' as we have done here, we can make perfect sense of these claims. Knowing what our nature consists in *obligates* us (in the sense of giving reasons) because it shows us that we are adapted to virtue in the same sense that a watch is adapted to tell time and for the same reason: we have been designed to be virtuous and our function lies in that virtue and the happiness for which it is necessary. Recognizing that this is our nature *motivates* us to be virtuous because self-love, the passion peculiar to his age (and our own?), when properly understood, itself requires that we be virtuous by its own lights.

Objections

We conclude, then, that a defense of ethics based on human nature and employing a general teleology is valid given certain theological assumptions. God gave us this constitution, and so as we choose to embody it we know that we are not only being

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[85] Butler, Preface 44, 45.

virtuous, but also giving ourselves the best chance to be happy, and that we cannot be happy without fulfilling this constitution because God has designed us with the function of being virtuous and thus happy. Millar is wrong to suggest that this construction requires a naïve theology according to which bad things happen to bad people and good to good without exception, but Butler's theistic assumptions are not free, either; there is a price to pay in terms of plausibility and general acceptance. The most obvious example is that one must believe in a creator God who is, at least, omni-benevolent, extremely wise, and extremely powerful. While these conditions did not rule out the deists, Butler's greatest opponents at the time, it certainly rules out many people today. Another example that became clear in the last section is that the necessity thesis goes through only if we accept that we know how we should be, an issue we will address shortly. Christians themselves might object to Butler's pandering to self-love as we will see with Kierkegaard. The first issue that we must face, however, is what any ethical person should think about Butler's pandering to self-love. Have we turned Butler into an egoist?

Egoism

Butler is concerned in the *Sermons*, I have argued, to demonstrate to a congregation overly concerned with self-love that morality is not opposed to self-love, but is coincident with it. They should, therefore, pursue virtue even from love of self. Pursuing virtue out of love of self makes Butler, at the least, an ethical egoist.[86]

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[86]An ethical egoist, as opposed to a hedonic or psychological egoist, believes that it is our moral duty to be egoistic, presumably because this ultimately assures the best for everyone (though it need not have this consequentialist assumption). Cf. Jesse Kalin, "In Defense of Egoism," in *Morality and Rational Self Interest*, ed. David P. Gauthier (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 64-87.

This objection is particularly troubling if, as Darwall would have it, the conscience gives moral reasons that are of an entirely different kind from prudential reasons, unique in their authority and moral capacity; for then Butler is attempting to convince people to be moral for prudential reasons. Darwall embraces this much of the problem: "The only evaluative judgment one can make from the perspective of self-interest, for example, is what would be best from the standpoint of one's own interests. But that is simply a *different question* from what one *should do*, even if a person should do what is in her interest."[87] I have tried to show that Butler need not hold to any such strong divide because, like the ancients, he believes that the authority of conscience derives from its function, and as Darwall insists repeatedly, "from facts about function and design no normative facts directly follow."[88] The conclusion that I draw is that Butler does not believe that the conscience provides us any such normative facts. If it did, yet Butler tried to motivate people to follow conscience from self-love, then Butler would be an ethical egoist. Given Butler's concerns not to be an egoist, this is a strong objection to Darwall's reading of Butler.

Darwall does not address the problem directly.[89] He is clear, however, that self-love can give us no reasons for action unless conscience exists, because all reasons for

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[87]Darwall, 280.

[88]Darwall, 279.

[89]He does note that the coincidence between morals and practical judgment would rely upon a *deus ex machina*, which he considers highly objectionable in a way that Butler clearly would not given his views of Providence, but since Darwall takes to using "practical judgement" and "autonomous practical judgement" to refer to the conscience at the end of the essay, it is not clear to me that he ever so much as addresses the coincidence of self-love and conscience proper (283). His concern here, rather, is with the question of whether morality relies upon simply perceiving what God issues as morality rather than autonomously decreeing rules for ourselves.

action require the concurrence of our autonomous practical reason, or conscience.[90] The

coincidence of conscience and self-love may collapse then, for Darwall, into the bland

assurance that since we cannot genuinely *act as agents* from self-love alone, any genuine

action must find a concurrence between self-love and conscience. How this is supposed

to motivate anyone to follow conscience from self-love is unclear.[91]

The reading that we have offered clearly does provide an independent motivation

to virtue, but perhaps that will be its downfall if we have turned Butler into an egoist.

Fortunately, there is no danger of this, for Butler never suggests that virtuous people act

only out of self-love, but that even if our only motive *were* self-love, a rational pursuit of

it would lead us to virtue. In his most infamous passage, he writes:

> Let it be allowed, though virtue or moral rectitude does indeed consist in affection
> to and pursuit of what is right and good, as such, yet, that when we sit down in a
> cool hour, we can neither justify to ourselves this or any other pursuit, till we are
> convinced that it will be for our happiness, or at least not contrary to it.[92]

This is, at the least, a deeply puzzling way of speaking, and problematic in various ways,

but it cannot make Butler an egoist of any variety, for virtue, he notes, consists only in

the pursuit of what is right and good, *as such*. Though self-love and conscience are

always coincident, they are not identical principles, and as Butler famously notes in a

related context, "Everything is what it is and not another thing."[93] Even from self-love

we should choose to act virtuously and have the correct nature, and from self-love we

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[90]Cf. Darwall, 274.

[91]As already noted above, Darwall changes Butler's question from how to motivate people to follow conscience to how conscience can have authority, a question that clearly never vexes Butler at all, so he simply never provides a response to this concern.

[92]Butler, Sermon XI.20, 117.

[93]Preface 39, 44; Rorty rightly notes of this phrase, "This gnomic remark is really only his version of the ancient motto: save the face of the phenomena" (174); which nicely points out the bedrock methodological similarities between our discussions of Aristotle and Butler.

would almost always *act* correctly, but we cannot actually be virtuous unless we shape ourselves to the correct nature. While this correct nature may sometimes involve acting from self-love (with the concurrence of conscience, expressed or not), it will also often involve acting from love of others or directly from conscience. Cool self-love will then urge us so to act if we should consult it, but if we are fully virtuous, we shall not so consult it, but will be motivated to act from the correct principles.[94] Butler is attempting to leverage self-lovers into an ethical frame of mind, but this does not suggest that they will remain inveterate self-lovers if they once begin to fulfill the function for which they have been designed.

Overdetermination

It may, perhaps, be felt that we have not yet explained the oddity of this infamous 'cool hour' passage, even if it does show that Butler is not committed to egoism. Can Butler really mean to say that we can convince ourselves in a cool hour to be virtuous only if we are convinced that such a life is in accordance with self-love? He clarifies by explaining that we will be virtuous sometimes anyway, since we have real affections and considerations toward others regardless of theory, "but, so far as the interests of virtue depend upon the theory of it being secured from open scorn, so far its very being in the world depends upon its appearing to have no contrariety to private interests and self-love."[95] Given the dedication of his age to self-love, the very existence of virtue in the

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[94]Cf. Penelhum, 22, where he does not draw these conclusions, but does state the general principles. Butler is not generally concerned with this aspect of virtue (he is not systematic!), but he is clear on this aspect of it in the footnote to sermon III (64), in which he notes that full virtue, "perfection," requires that all of our affections be entirely coincident with conscience, and in a few of his examples in which he has us loving children out of our natural affection for them, and only subsequently and when necessary affirming this love from conscience (III.8, 63).

[95]Sermon XI.21, 117.

world seems to depend upon its not being contrary to that principle, and this Butler

demonstrates through their coincidence.

That Butler is *not* arguing that no one will be virtuous unless conscience and self-

love are coincident is evident from the next paragraph; Butler notes that there is another

motivation to be virtuous peculiar to those who have received the revelation of Christ's

incarnation that they will shortly celebrate (it is an Advent sermon):

> Christianity lays us under new obligations to a good life, as by it the will of God
> is more clearly revealed, and as it affords additional motives to the practice of it,
> over and above those which arise out of the nature of virtue and vice, I might add,
> as our saviour has set us a perfect example of goodness in our own nature. Now
> love and charity is plainly the thing in which he hath placed his religion; in which,
> therefore, as we have any pretence to the name of Christians, we must place ours.
> He hath at once enjoined it upon us by way of command with peculiar force, and
> by his example, as having undertaken the work of our salvation out of pure love
> and goodwill to mankind.[96]

It is clear, then, that Christians should be good because of the example and command set

by God and Christ, and not purely out of a regard to self-love, no matter how cool or hot

the hour.[97] This passage raises a related worry, however, that is equally peculiar to

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[96]Sermon XI.22, 118.

[97]Having somewhat mitigated the negative readings that this passage opens Butler to, I will not attempt completely to explain its presence. This has been done already, and quite effectively, by others, who have convincingly argued that Butler is simply giving all possible due to self-love, as he earlier states that he will do, and is not making, in this unique passage, any universal claims as to his or anyone else's method in ethical thought. This is not to suggest, however, that everyone is agreed on *exactly* how to read the passage. The classic defense is in A. E. Taylor, "Some Features of Butler's Ethics," *Mind* 35, no. 139 (July 1916), 296-7, and C. D. Broad, 80, who argue that Butler is simply making concessions to an audience overly committed to self-love. The passage seems to indicate this quite clearly, and I have already committed myself to this general thesis. John Kleinig offers a more recent rereading of this passage in which he differentiates between justifying an action as right and justifying an action as motivating, and argues that the cool hour passage is only interested in the latter, and so demonstrates that conscience requires self-love for us to be motivated (making Butler an ethical egoist again). I believe that this reading overstates the case for reasons given above; Butler is quite clear that the conscience is supposed to give us obligations to action on its own, and suggests nowhere else that we might need self-love to motivate us to fulfill these obligations, so it is irresponsible to make him an egoist on such strained grounds. John Kleinig, "Butler in a Cool Hour," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 7, no. 4 (October 1969): 399-411.

Christians: is it right or virtuous to pay any regard to self-love *at all* when we have a clear command from God present in our conscience?

Kierkegaard appears to raise this worry in a wonderful little essay entitled "Of the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle." A genius is appreciated by aesthetes, Kierkegaard argues, for how well he writes and works, but the Apostle cannot be appreciated aesthetically, but must be accepted as a paradoxical divine authority. To appreciate the Apostle's teaching because it is rational, or beautifully penned, is already to have missed the primary point, which is that it is to be obeyed *regardless* of whether it is rational or beautifully penned. "I have not got to listen to St. Paul because he is clever, or even brilliantly clever; I am to bow before St. Paul because he has divine authority."[98] In fact, Kierkegaard continues, the divine authority behind the pronouncement is such that I should not even have the impertinence to question the Apostle's teaching, but must accept and *obey* whatever he has said. This is in clear contrast, of course, to the claim that I can justify the ethical life to myself only if I can see rationally that it is in keeping with my happiness, and appears to contrast even with Butler's actual claim that our peculiar obligation to virtue from the Christian revelation is *merely one* motivation among many others. Our conscience is the voice of God within which we must obey, but we do not always obey it merely *because* it is the voice of God in Butler's account. Often I do what I should out of love for my neighbor, and not because I perceive that I am commanded to love my neighbor and act appropriately.

There is a potential disagreement here, but we must be careful not to exaggerate it unduly. If Butler holds, as he seems to state, that we will do what conscience commands

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[98]Søren Kierkegaard, "Of the difference between a Genius and an Apostle," *The Present Age* trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 93.

only if we can convince ourselves that it will lead to our happiness, then Kierkegaard's protestation is apt: when God commands, we should not try to justify his commands at all, but should simply obey. If, however, as I have argued, Butler only holds to the weaker thesis that we do not do all virtuous actions because of conscience, but will often bolster the commands of conscience with self or particular loves, then it is not clear that there is any disagreement at all. Kierkegaard, after all, does not argue that God commands every particular action that is incumbent upon us, but simply that *when* God commands it is impertinence to do anything but obey. Butler can agree with this; the command of God is sufficient to ensure that a particular action becomes the right action, and any other action or attitude or character is wrong. Disagreement arises only if Kierkegaard holds, more strongly, that once I realize that God has commanded some action or attitude, which I do automatically through conscience, it is wrong to so much as recognize that doing this action (or whatnot) will also be for my ultimate happiness.

If Kierkegaard does hold to this stronger thesis (I do not see that he does in the cited essay), then it appears that he has gone too far. If I am obeying God because he happens to agree with me about what I should do, then this is not obedience at all, but appreciation for a good counselor who happens to have a privileged position in regards to my nature and how I should best act to flourish. This, however, is not why I obey God according to Butler. Rather, as Kierkegaard insists that I must, I obey God because he is God, because he first loved me and so I love him in return, and because, as Jesus himself notes, if I love him, I will follow his commands. Recall the end of the sermon above. God has saved me purely out of love and has thus made this central to religion; if I am a Christian at all, I too must love all, *in obedience to his strict command*. Christ's advent

shows us an exemplar, Butler concludes, of "humility, resignation, and obedience to the will of God," which can be of great advantage to us in being moral, and hence in every sense it is to our advantage, for it is in our interest to be moral.

The contrast is not, then, between following God's commands because he is God and following God's commands because they will make me happy. Rather, the contrast is between God instituting a new moral obligation, creating a new right and wrong, as it were, by his command, thus obligating me to perform a given action, and Butler's view (as I have outlined it), according to which God's commands through revelation and, even more primitively and universally available, through my conscience, give me overriding reasons to act. Butler believes that what is right and wrong depends upon the nature of God and of human beings and the circumstances in which God has placed us, and not solely upon God's will, whereas (at least some) Divine Command theorists would place the obligation to certain actions entirely within God's will. Regardless of who is correct in this debate, what is important for our present discussion is that Butler is as committed to the virtue of obedience to God as any Divine Command theorist could wish, but we obey him not because of his title or place, but because of his character and our love.[99]

Our affections, Butler believes in keeping with a long line of philosophers, are only at rest when they achieve their object. The highest affection we have is love of

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[99]Cf. Aquinas, ST II-II.104.2 and 3. Aquinas is an example of a virtue ethicist who likewise believes in the necessity of obeying God. In these articles he argues that obedience is in one sense the highest of the virtues, because it involves a sacrifice of the highest good, our will, but that generally speaking it is only one of many virtues and not the highest, because it is a mix of charity and justice: we obey because of love of God's justice. Obedience is an interesting virtue that deserves more attention. In keeping with Aquinas, Mother Teresa, who lived a life of extraordinary obedience, constantly speaks of the surrender of her will and the sacrifice that this requires, and adds to this the need for constantly smiling. Benedict's rule is similarly explicit. All of these examples, of course, exist within a proper structure of authority (the Catholic Church), where the authority ultimately resides in God. The virtue of obedience cannot exist without a proper structure of authority, but does this require that God institute obligations, or simply that he is God and so is in authority? On Mother Teresa, see *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, ed. Brian Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

goodness, and this affection can only finally rest in God. "As the whole attention of life should be to obey his commands, so the highest enjoyment of it must arise from the contemplation of his character, and our relation to it, from a consciousness of his favor and approbation, and from the exercise of those affections towards him, which could not but be raised from his presence."[100] Our only concern on earth should be to obey him. But why? "'Must we then, forgetting our own interest, as it were go out of ourselves, and love God for his own sake?' No more forget your own interest, no more go out of yourselves, than when you prefer one place, one prospect, the conversation of one man to that of another…. You may and ought, if you can, but it is a great mistake to think you can, love, or fear, or hate any thing, from consideration that such love, or fear, or hatred may be a means of obtaining good or avoiding evil."[101] In other words, we cannot *love* God out of self-interest, and we ought to obey him out of love, and so it is finally pointless to try to be virtuous just for what there is in it for us. Butler is not an ethical egoist, but he is not a religious egoist either; we do not do what is right because of self-love, but because of our love of God, a love which will finally be satisfied only in the eternal contemplation of him:

> The conclusion is, that in all lowliness of mind we set lightly by ourselves: that we form our temper to an implicit submission to the Divine Majesty; beget with ourselves an absolute resignation to all the methods of his providence, in his dealings with the children of men: that, in the deepest humility of our souls, we prostrate ourselves before, him and join in that celestial song, *Great and Marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints! Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?*[102]

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[100]Butler, Sermon XIII.10, 131. cf. Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 1960), 43: "Our heart is restless until it rests in you." Butler echoes Augustine as well in his description of the man who searches outside of himself for happiness, but only finds true rest when he turns within and so is able to ascend to God.

[101]Ibid., XIII.13, 132-3.

[102]Ibid., XV.16, 145.

Relativism

Butler was generally quite committed to the lowliness of mind that he here commends to us (his final sermons and a large part of the *Analogy* is taken up with a consideration of human ignorance and its causes), but in one sense he was not, and this saves him from a particular concern about relativism. We have shown that Butler believes in the necessity of virtue for happiness, but which virtues do we need? Butler provides no exhaustive list, and fails to define the virtues he mentions, but clearly without some idea of just *what* virtues are necessary for happiness, the necessity thesis remains an empty claim at best.

We can certainly excuse Butler his apparent sanguinity about the transparency of his appeal to virtue; it was generally assumed at the time that there was a universal human nature open to observation, that it was clear what virtues this nature required, and that any honest person could not doubt what the virtuous action in any situation might be. Likewise, Butler writes, "Yet let any plain honest man, before he engages in any course of action, ask himself, is this I am going about right, or is it wrong? Is it good, or is it evil? I do not in the least doubt that this question would be answered agreeably to truth and virtue, by almost any fair man in almost any circumstance. Neither do there appear any cases which look like exceptions to this, but those of superstition, and partiality to ourselves."[103] Superstition, he allows, may be something of an exception, since here we are fooled by something outside of ourselves, but partiality and any sort of self-deception, as we saw above, is simply lying to oneself, and any honest person knows that he is engaging in it.

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[103]Butler, Sermon III.4, 62.

Relativism raises no objection for Butler, then, because he believes that we all

have the proper list of virtues available to us at any time through our conscience; of

course, this answer becomes a problem in its own right. Why should we accept Butler's

remarkable claims about the conscience? The conscience is the voice of God within us,

but this does not mean that it is infallible since we can twist it through self-deception.[104]

Even this concession, however, is mild to say the least, for we *can* always be aware of

any self-deception. Butler, however, really does believe that we are all fallen creatures,

so no one is perfectly virtuous or perfectly able either to 'operate' or obey her conscience.

The conscience intuitively judges of right and wrong, just as our understanding naturally

judges of true and false, and both of these functions are gifts from God who wishes us to

learn the truth and to do the right. All in all, Butler (and Hutcheson and Shaftesbury to

different degrees) is positing a truly remarkable principle, and one of which few people

today are likely to confess any experience.

We can restate a Butler-style theistic argument for the necessity thesis without

recourse to any such mysterious faculty as Butler's conscience, but something else must

fill its place. Human beings have been created with a particular nature, which defines

certain virtues for them, as well as defining how they will flourish and be happy, by a

benevolent and powerful creator. This creator has *somehow* made it clear to all or some

of these creatures what virtues their nature requires. Therefore, human beings must have

these virtues in order to flourish and be happy. The key term that allows for a validation

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[104]On infallibility, see A. E. Taylor, "Some Features of Butler's Ethics," 290; and Béla Szabados, "Butler on Corrupt Conscience," 462-469. Szabados focuses on the aspects of self-deceit and moral responsibility for self-deceit outlined above from sermon X. On the charge that Butler simply ignores the fact that conscience can be grossly in error, see G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," in *Twentieth Century Ethical Theory*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1995), 352.

of ethics based on human nature is the existence of a benevolent creator that has designed our nature—thereby providing the interdependence of virtue and happiness—and shown us how to be virtuous.

What can this mean, however, for human beings as we actually exist? Most theists are happy to accept that a benevolent creator has designed us, and so are at least able validly to argue that virtue is necessary for happiness, but what story can we tell about which virtues are required? If we are unwilling to accept the existence of a transparent faculty of the sort described by Butler, then we must substitute some account of revelation that guarantees that *we* have just that list of virtues which is suitable to our nature, that we have an accurate account of what is in our 'real interest.'[105] I assert without argument that few theists today will be willing to posit their possession of that perfect list.

Conclusion

We began by noting three objections posed by Williams for the validation of ethics that he takes Aristotle to be offering. First, that Aristotle must justify an account of 'real interests' according to which ethics are *for* everyone; for any person, vicious or not, it is in his or her real interest to be virtuous. The only way for Aristotle to justify such an account, Williams believes, is through his objectionable general teleology. We have seen that Butler has a general teleology based in the providential care of a benevolent creator, and so offers an account of real interests in which it is in our real interests, even on earth, to be virtuous. If, as Butler certainly believes that we should, we consider the afterlife as well, then it is decidedly and eternally in our best interest to be virtuous, for only in this

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[105]Butler, of course, had no problem speaking of our real interests; indeed, his account of benevolence depends upon such a notion, as Rorty nicely points out (179).

way will we receive that rest in the divine that is our natural end and only true, final happiness.

Second, Aristotle is unable to deal with the particular challenge that people who engage in other ways of life, such as artistic achievement, may succeed in flourishing and being happy without living a virtuous life because he can offer no external validation of a person's real interests. Again, Butler can escape this problem by insisting *a priori* and on the basis of his functional account of real interests that this claim must be false. We are designed for the good of ourselves and the good of society, so any life that fails to live according to our design will fail to be *really* good for its possessor as well as for the society of which it is part. On the other hand, Butler gives us no hint how to deal with the apparent counterexamples, and indeed often seems to consider that there are no counterexamples, that only the virtuous ever look happy.

Finally, Williams protests that we no longer can usefully see all of our desires as cohering in one intelligible and integrated life. His objection, which he does not develop, can only be that phenomenologically we no longer experience any such complete integration, perhaps because of the *dis*integration of public and private lives in a complex and modern world such as we find in large cities, at least in the West. I think Williams rather overstates the case, especially for smaller villages and towns like those described by Wendell Berry, but regardless his objection is utterly foreign to Butler's understanding of human life. Butler begins his exploration of human nature by focusing on the sense in which we are systems designed for a given end that is outside of ourselves, and which can be properly understood only when the proper relations between the various principles are maintained. A perfect human life is one in which every particular affection is

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perfectly coincident with the general affections and with conscience, so that the human being not only is virtuous, but desires to be virtuous, and desires to desire to be virtuous. Butler's response is both clear and powerful: we are fallen creatures, and to the extent that we are disintegrated and ruled by orders of power rather than authority, we will become more fallen and vicious; so if 'we' are no longer able to experience this integration, then this demonstrates how far we are from virtue, it does not demonstrate the impossibility of the concept.

Butler provides a valid theistic response that can answer all objections, but which requires either a questionable faculty or a naïve reliance on revelation. This cannot be our defense of the necessity thesis. Likewise, if Aristotle offers a parallel externalist account based upon some point, such as human nature, external to ethics, then his account fails and we must offer some other account of why we should accept that the virtues are necessary for happiness. We turn now to just such an account, and to considerations that may suggest that this is what Aristotle was really saying all along.

CHAPTER FIVE

An Aristotelian Account of the Necessity Thesis

Bishop Butler provides one interesting way to maintain the necessity thesis, but at the cost of plausibility for most contemporary philosophers. Our central question in this chapter is whether there is another way of maintaining a strong necessity thesis, and if so, what hidden costs may be associated with it. We begin with the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, first in *After Virtue*, and then in *Dependent Rational Animals*, and develop a defense of the necessity thesis that avoids relying on non-ethical grounds, then turn back to Aristotle to see if we were perhaps too hasty in surrendering his teleology to the charge of untoward metaphysicalism in the first place. Finally, we turn to Williams' most serious objection—the charge that any version of Aristotelianism must assume an unacceptable account of 'real interests'—and determine that to the extent that the charge is true, the account is not unacceptable, but necessary in any lived ethics.

Ethical Grounding Revisited

Before we consider MacIntyre's account in *After Virtue*, it will be helpful to make a couple of distinctions concerning the grounding of ethics. Williams differentiates helpfully between an ethics being *to* everyone, and an ethics being *for* everyone. Aristotle, he argues, offers an ethical account for everyone, but not to everyone, because only ethical people will be able to understand the value of the ethical life.[1] For clarity, I will call a theory that is to everyone, universally accessible, an *open* account of ethics, and one that is accessible only to insiders a *closed* account of ethics. An account that is

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[1] Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 39-40.

for everyone, on the other hand, I will call *universally applicable*, or just *universal*, while the opposite, one that is intended only for some prescribed group, I will call *particular*. Finally, when an account attempts to ground itself on an Archimedean point outside of ethics, I will follow John McDowell in calling it *externally validated*, while those which eschew external validation and ground the account solely on points internal to the practice of ethics I will call *internally validated*.[2]

MacIntyre in After Virtue*: Before Dependence*

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre's central question, given the failure of all previous systems of ethics demonstrated so powerfully by Nietzsche, is "can Aristotle's ethics, or something very like it, after all be vindicated?"[3] The prospects seem rather dim, for this "classical morality" relies upon presuppositions that are no longer available to us, including most centrally the assumption of "a cosmic order which dictates the place of each virtue in a total harmonious scheme of human life" – classical morality, in other words, is externally validated. Specifically, as noted above, MacIntyre charges Aristotle with a metaphysical biology that attempts to move from "some very general account of what human flourishing and well-being consists in" to an account of the virtues and vices, and which ignores the extent to which broad ethical disagreement has centered on precisely the question of what it is to flourish. "Hence," MacIntyre concludes, "any adequate teleological account must provide us with some clear and defensible account of

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[2]Cf. John McDowell in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 35*ff.*

[3]MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 118.

the *telos*; and any adequate generally Aristotelian account must supply a teleological account which can replace Aristotle's metaphysical biology."[4]

MacIntyre's teleological account in *After Virtue* exploits the necessity of living our lives according to defined narratives and as part of extended practices on one side, and the relationship between narrative genres and particular views of the virtues on the other.[5] We engage in practices as part of community life, and they necessarily structure our lives because there is no life divorced from community.[6] Practices differ from other activities in having goods that are internal to them, goods that can be appreciated and achieved only by those who engage in the practice in certain ways and that are not zero-sum goods. Virtues, in this account, help us to achieve these internal goods.[7]

Another necessity imposed on us through the necessity of community is that of a narrative structure to individual lives. Narratives are necessary communally for the description of actions and rendering of reasons: we cannot explain why we should do or have done any action without describing that action narratively. Williams charges that we no longer see our lives as unified wholes, and so Aristotle's dependence on the existence of one central end for any human life fails not only because it attempts to give one end for anyone, a problem we will look at later in this chapter, but at the even earlier point that it assumes a unified life at all. MacIntyre need not deny that modern lives *are*

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[4]MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 142 and 162-3.

[5]Cf. Ibid., 174 for a generalization of the second thesis. MacIntyre explains his teleological account as proceeding through three stages: first, there is an account of practices, second, an account of the narrative order of a single life, and third, a moral tradition (187). The first two I describe as part of how we structure our lives, and the third I describe as the connection of virtues to these descriptions, but this does not alter his account appreciably.

[6]Cf. Ibid., 127, 173.

[7]On practices, cf. Ibid., 187-91. Practices may also unify a life in the same way that narratives provide coherence: by giving a limited hierarchy of ends that make sense of particular actions.

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often disintegrated between different spheres and focused around different ends (pragmatic money-making in business, perhaps, but the goods of friendship and fun at the bowling club); his contention, rather, is that in being disintegrated they sacrifice some of the virtues and the constancy of character needed for virtue, as well as the goods of some practices.[8]

Narratives are necessary for MacIntyre's teleology because they provide that unity or integrity of an individual life without which there can be no full account of the virtues.[9] Virtues are characteristics of people by which they achieve the goods internal to practices, but they are also characteristics that make a human being herself good, and this requires that they be part of a unified life or we revert to individuals freely choosing which goods, and hence which practices, they want at any given moment. Having rejected this view of human freedom as arbitrary choice in the first half of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre avoids resurrecting it here by describing human lives as unified by narratives that we do not choose, but which we naturally fill, and narratives of particular genres.[10]

Particular sets of virtues then connect to these narrative structures: the heroic narrative emphasizes a position within a traditional social structure, susceptibility to fate, and the ultimate importance of *living* to the complete erasure of an independent self, and the virtues are thus defined as the excellences that allow this *structure* to continue,

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[8]MacIntyre, of course, is not at all innocent of the political implications of these considerations, proposing at the end of *After Virtue*, for example, that we must find another way of being in communities that allow for goods to be shared, so that my good is the good of my community (to a large extent). As we will note below concerning *Dependent Rational Animals*, this is an enduring focus for MacIntyre.

[9]It may be possible for us to have some virtues without being integrated; MacIntyre does not commit himself either way on this thesis, only insisting that *some* virtues, at least, require a unified life, and that a narrative provides the best account of why we must and how we can have such a unified life. Cf. *After Virtue*, 202.

[10]MacIntyre makes the arbitrariness argument on 201 and 202. For his account of the narrative structure of a life, cf. chapter 15.

including courage, prosperity, and loyalty;[11] the Medieval narrative, by contrast, portrays all individual and social entities alike as partaking in an epic quest or journey from sin to redemption, and the virtues correspondingly shift from the excellences that perpetuate a cultural structure to the virtues that allow for the success of this journey, including courage (of a related but importantly different sort), but also faith, charity, and hope.[12] There are many other narratives as well, and each of these narratives defines a set of virtues by defining what *goods* a person can achieve (life and fame, or salvation), and what *harms* may beset our lives (death, defeat, and slavery, or sin and separation from God). Virtues, then, not only allow us to seek goods internal to practices, but also enable us to recognize these goods more fully and to continue to seek these goods even when we are beset by various harms.[13]

No individual can do this alone. A collection of individual narratives in one way of life constitutes one of these grand narratives, that of a heroic society or of the Middle Ages, and these MacIntyre calls moral traditions, the communities in which we seek for goods. But what limits the practices that can be allowed, and hence the goods that we can seek? Is just any moral tradition possible? MacIntyre borrows Aristotle's conception of the *telos* of life as a continuous activity and, by means of a shotgun wedding, marries it to an emasculated Medieval notion of life as a journey, concluding that human flourishing consists in seeking what human flourishing consists in. It would appear, then, that any tradition that allows for this search and for the flourishing of some range of practices with internal goods is adequate for human flourishing.

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[11]Cf. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 10.

[12]Cf. Ibid., chap. 13.

[13]Ibid., 219*ff.*

MacIntyre perhaps succeeds in offering a teleological account divorced from Aristotle's metaphysical biology, but it appears that his account suffers from other maladies. It is clearly a closed account in the same way that Aristotle's account is closed—because the goods we seek are internal to practices, only those who are already virtuous will be interested in pursuing those goods (although we might wonder whether even the virtuous person is interested in achieving the life of pursuing the good life). It is closed, but is it universally applicable? This is a difficult question to answer. MacIntyre clearly believes that he is saying something about human nature in making his claims about our need for narrative unity and community, but he does not argue from human nature but from particular examples in the western tradition. Likewise, in taking seriously the diversity of specifications of human flourishing, MacIntyre does not attempt to argue for any one offering on the buffet, but instead offers, as an apparently universal *telos* for human beings, human flourishing as permanently working our way through the buffet line. So it certainly *seems* as if he is offering an account of human flourishing which is to apply to everyone: "the good life for man is the life spent seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is."[14]

In fact, it looks as if MacIntyre is offering a version of the necessity thesis, for the virtues are just those traits that allow for the achievement of this search. Of course, MacIntyre does not claim that this search is the entirety of the good life, but rather leaves it open what else the good life consists in, and this *what else* looks as if it must be determined by each individual from within his or her tradition. MacIntyre's account in *After Virtue* is universally applicable only because it never descends past the broadest

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[14]MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 219.

level of generality: the good life is searching for and further specifying the good life according to one's tradition and the interlocking narratives that one shares with others, and the virtues are just those traits that allow for the achievement of this good life. So the virtues are necessary for happiness, but what the virtues are, what happiness consists in, and how we achieve any of this is left undetermined and indeterminable, dependent upon historical accident and moral luck.

MacIntyre's account suffers from a broad cultural relativity that robs it of all but suggestive power, and perhaps most damagingly of all, it fails to offer any account of rational disagreement.[15] Having criticized Aristotle's metaphysical biology and offered a very different teleology in its stead, MacIntyre is unable to replace one central aspect of Aristotle's account: the ability of practical reason to define the virtues by any good that equally applies to all human beings rather than to one narrative tradition.

Normative Biology: MacIntyre's Dependent Rational Animals

This lacuna was broadly noted after the publication of *After Virtue*, and MacIntyre did not hesitate to supply the needed account of practical rationality in a number of essays and in *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. It is with his publication of *Dependent Rational Animals*, subtitled *Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, that MacIntyre returns to the necessity of virtue for human flourishing and attempts to offer a stronger account of both by returning to biology,

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[15]Cf. Robert Wachbroit, *Yale Law Journal* 92, no. 3 (January 1983): 564-6. MacIntyre replies to Wachbroit in the postscript to the second edition of *After Virtue* and notes, first, that he is right in one central contention: MacIntyre's account is "compatible with acknowledging the existence of distinct, incompatible and rival traditions of the virtues" (276). By most accounts, this is sufficient already to ascribe cultural relativism to MacIntyre, though we will explore this further below. MacIntyre does give some account of rational disagreement between rival accounts in the discussion that follows, and of the development of a moral tradition, an account important in his later work, especially *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1989).

offering what I take to be an Aristotelian account of the necessity thesis that is based on the nature of human beings and yet does not claim to be an open ethical account. Intuitively, an account based on biology should be both universally applicable (because based on a shared nature) and open (because our biology seems to be the sort of fact that is available to anyone who will look). MacIntyre (in *After Virtue*) took Aristotle to be offering just such an account, one based on our biology and our ability to function within a broader teleological system, and thus available to anyone who would look (with the proper training, perhaps) and for anyone who is a human being. We have noted the problems both with Aristotle's apparent reliance on metaphysical biology (it is unacceptable given modern science), and more generally with any account that claims that the biological proof of an account of ethics is available to everyone (widespread disagreement on just these disputed facts about nature and flourishing is too obvious to ignore); MacIntyre provides us a way around these problems by offering an account based on biology but closed because dependent on normative concepts.

In the preface, MacIntyre writes of his earlier rejection of metaphysical biology in Aristotle: "Although there is indeed good reason to repudiate important elements in Aristotle's biology, I now judge that I was in error in supposing an ethics independent of biology to be possible."[16] It seems obvious, he writes, that human beings are animals, and yet far too many philosophers have ignored this by focusing on what separates us from animals rather than what connects us with them. The first of MacIntyre's three central theses in *Dependent Rational Animals* concerns our commonalities with, and resemblance to, some higher order mammal species, a thesis that MacIntyre vigorously prosecutes through the first six chapters of the book. Having described in some detail the

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[16]Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), x.

observed social life and apparently purposeful group behavior, such as hunting and playing, of dolphins, as well as their ability to perceive, recognize, categorize, and remember a wide range of sounds and sights and respond appropriately, MacIntyre concludes that dolphins act intelligently, for an end, through the use of beliefs and concepts.[17]

In chapter seven MacIntyre moves on to consider the notions of flourishing and goods in service to his second thesis, that the vulnerabilities and dependencies of other animals are the vulnerabilities and dependencies of human beings as well, and therefore that a consideration of the good life for human beings must account for how we overcome—and flourish given—our dependence on others. We can see MacIntyre's account of flourishing and of good as two interlocking but independent arguments, one based loosely (and implicitly) on Aristotelian assumptions of method, and the second based on an Aristotelian grammar of goodness. Considering the novelty of his return to biology, MacIntyre is remarkably succinct and even blasé in these arguments, but his suggestions remain the most compelling contemporary account of a necessity thesis.

MacIntyre begins the argument based on Aristotelian methods with the assertion that flourishing is used univocally of human beings and other animals, presumably supporting this assertion with the work in chapters one through six demonstrating the remarkable range of features that we share with other animals.[18] In fact, as MacIntyre

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[17]Cf. chapter 3, especially 26-28. MacIntyre also considers the prelinguistic abilities of animals and infants in some detail, arguing that without this ability the transition from infancy to adulthood would be incomprehensible. That animals lack language, then, does not show that they act for reasons.

[18]Ibid., 64: "When we speak of dolphins flourishing or failing to flourish *qua* dolphins or of gorillas flourishing or failing to flourish *qua* gorillas or of humans flourishing or failing to flourish *qua* humans, we use the various parts of the verb 'to flourish' in one and the same sense. These are examples not of analogical, but of univocal predication. What it is to flourish is not of course the same for dolphins

will point out occasionally in brief, unsystematic comparisons, the conditions of flourishing for human beings and other animals are remarkably similar as well: dolphins, for example, direct themselves as infants towards the satisfaction of immediate desires, and as they grow they must learn through guided practice to direct themselves towards more social goods, the goods of the community embodied in hunting and playing for example.[19] Just as dolphins flourish when they have these goods, so human beings in just the same sense flourish when they have the goods that they must learn to direct themselves toward through guided practice and education.

The conditions under which we flourish define what human beings need *qua* human beings—we need just those things that allow us to flourish—and the question of whether or not we are flourishing is, MacIntyre insists, a factual question. The various sciences, especially biology and ecology, provide answers here, as well as requiring some account of when and why particular populations are flourishing and in what environments they do so. We may wonder whether the scientific notion of flourishing is the ethical one; more generally we may ask, 'whence the notion of flourishing?' How do we begin to define what it is to flourish? MacIntyre responds, "the question of what it is to flourish has to be answered in part through evaluative and conceptual enquiry," thereby defending why he is no longer offering an open account while doing little here to explain how we are supposed to go about offering such an account of flourishing.[20]

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as it is for gorillas or for humans but it is one and the same concept of flourishing that finds application to members of different animal—and plant—species."

[19]Cf. MacIntyre, *DRA*, 68.

[20]Ibid., 64. This point comes up below as we look at the details of the account MacIntyre gives.

When the sciences succeed in answering *why* a particular population or individual flourishes, they do so by giving an account of those characteristics it "needs in order to flourish in this or that particular environment, at this or that particular stage of development."[21] This is not to say that having these characteristics just *is* flourishing, but that these characteristics are necessary for flourishing. These characteristics, of course, are just those traits of the individuals and populations of any species, plant or animal, that make it or them excellent examples of that species—in other words, the virtues. The move thus far parallels *After Virtue* with the addition of a consideration of biology and a comparison of human beings with other animals: virtue is necessary for flourishing (and hence for happiness) because the virtues are defined as those traits that are necessary for flourishing, but flourishing itself is left largely undetermined, and the virtues remain completely undefined (at this point). As in *After Virtue* too, this account is clearly not open, because the determination of flourishing relies not only upon science, but also upon "evaluative and conceptual enquiry," normative concepts of what it is good to be as a human being that remain controversial.

'Good,' MacIntyre asserts in the interconnected grammar of goodness argument, the second argument referenced above, has three different uses.[22] First, something can be good as a means to something further, which always leaves the question of whether the further end is itself good. A good lawnmower is good as a means to cutting grass, and there is always the further question of whether cutting grass is good. Second, a human being can be good in a role as embodied in a practice with intrinsic goods, and this is a

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[21]MacIntyre, *DRA*, 65.

[22]I call this a grammar of goodness argument because it assumes that good is always attributive, never predicative, as defined by Peter Geach in "Good and Evil," *Analysis* 17 (1956): 32-42. For MacIntyre's argument, cf. 65-8.

way of being good in oneself, and not simply as a means to something further. In *After Virtue* this was the central notion of good by which the first notion was defined. In *Dependent Rational Animals*, however, MacIntyre recognizes the residue of relativity that remains when this is the focal use of good, because this always leaves open the further question of whether these goods should have a certain place in a life or in a society more generally. These are genuine goods, but while they offer no means of adjudicating amongst themselves as to which goods should play what role in a life or society, they are often exclusive. We are left with the possibility that multiple goods might make a demand on us between which we have no principled means of choosing. Gauguin could not excel both at painting and at being a father and a good citizen, though he recognized all of these as genuine goods in this second sense, and so he simply chose the good that he (apparently) considered higher, the good of painting.

In *After Virtue* we are left with this choice as the endpoint of any ethical discourse. While much of our life will be necessarily defined by the traditions and narratives that we are born into and inherit, when we are faced with incommensurable or even just exclusive goods, we may have to simply *choose* which we will embrace and so help to write our own narrative. In *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre recognizes the poverty of this account and adds a third and central use of good that controls the other uses: good unconditionally, not only as an agent in a role, but as a member of a species. There are goods internal to play for dolphins, and there are goods internal to hunting, but any dolphin that decides it will pursue play to the exclusion of hunting is not flourishing as a dolphin, even if it manages to survive by freeloading off of the other dolphins in its pod. Why? Because it is part of the nature of dolphins to hunt and contribute to the good

of the pod as a whole; it is part of what it is to flourish as a dolphin that it pursue this further good. The first and second ascriptions of good are controlled by the focal usage: things are good as means only if the end for which they aim is part of the good of the species, and roles are good only if and to the extent that their place *in* a life and *of* practice in a society contribute to the flourishing of that individual and the individuals of that society.

We can succinctly summarize MacIntyre's argument as involving three premises: first, if human beings flourish, they do so by living in a way that is good for them as human beings; second, flourishing is not defined by a value-free observation of our nature, but by an evaluative assessment of our nature; third, this flourishing requires that we have certain characteristics, which we can define as the virtues. I have said that flourishing remains largely undetermined; this is true, but MacIntyre does give some account of flourishing, and I take it that he considers this account to be relatively uncontroversial, accepting as it does many of the central premises of the Western tradition and even modernity (in startling contrast to some of his earlier work), at least as regards the individual. For an individual to flourish, he must become an independent practical reasoner, meaning that he is able to exercise in the relevant way his rationality to produce the effects that he desires and he must be able to do this without depending too much on others. "So if we want to understand how it is good for humans to live, we need to know what it is to be excellent as an independent practical reasoner, that is, what the virtues of independent practical reasoning are."[23]

To get to this point, however, he must be *de*pendent, for none of us begins as an independent practical reasoner, and here we see the thrust of MacIntyre's second thesis:

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[23]MacIntyre, *DRA*, 77.

we are all, for much of our lives, dependent and vulnerable creatures, and it is only

insofar as we are treated properly by our community in these times that we can hope to

become independent practical reasoners. As children we must be educated properly,[24]

and as old, infirm, ill, or mentally disabled persons, we must be appropriately cared for.

The good of a community does not depend solely upon the good of its flourishing

members, but the good of each individual requires that the community flourish so that it

can properly provide for her when she is herself in need; the conclusion is that we must

also have the virtues of dependency, for "acknowledgment of dependence is the key to

independence."[25] The proper relationships between independent practical reasoners and

dependent animals are properly captured in a pattern of giving and receiving where it is

understood that receiving puts us permanently in debt to our community so that we may

well have to give to a very different set of people (e.g. our children) than those from

whom we received (e.g. our parents), and that the level of our giving cannot be

predetermined. Our communities must be so formed that all can flourish; they must be so

shaped that the proper pattern of giving and receiving occurs. The shape of such

communities is the thrust of MacIntyre's third, political, thesis.[26]

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[24]MacIntyre's discussion of education is admirable, if only because it is so rare. This discussion occurs largely in chapter 8, where MacIntyre argues that to develop into Independent Practical Reasoners we must be trained in and develop three abilities, failure in any of which constitutes a harm to our eventual flourishing: (1) in our ability to evaluate our own judgments, (2) in our ability to imagine alternative futures, and (3) in our ability to stand back from and assess and direct our desires (83).

[25]MacIntyre, *DRA*, 85.

[26]The shape of a community that can allow for integrated virtuous lives amid patterns of giving and receiving is always an important thrust of MacIntyre's work, but it is not without its difficulties. Joseph Dunne, for example, questions what this community actually looks like or what size it will be, and whether mere moral training is enough to get people to join them (as opposed to faith) (352*ff*). Joseph Dunne, "Ethics Revised: Flourishing as Vulnerable and Dependent," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 10, no. 3 (August 2002): 339-63.

The good for human beings *qua* human beings is to become independent practical

reasoners, MacIntyre argues, meaning that human beings can only flourish by gaining the

virtues of independent practical reasoners as well as dependent animals, and in

appropriate communities built on patterns of giving and receiving aid and assistance.[27]

What are the virtues of independent practical reasoners and dependent animals? "They

are the intellectual and moral virtues,"[28] those traits that allow us to make the transition

from infant to independent reasoner, to teach others to be independent reasoners, and to

protect ourselves and others from harm.[29]

Joseph Dunne, in a broad-sweeping and generally positive critical notice of

Dependent Rational Animals, wonders whether MacIntyre needs the account of human

beings as dependent rational animals to motivate his account of independent reasoners

and the communities in which they flourish; or to put the question another way, he

wonders whether there is a connection between the first and the second and third theses;

or again, he wonders whether MacIntyre actually employs biology in his ethics, or just

waves his hand at it before he begins doing ethics in earnest in chapter seven.[30]

At first blush, the answer seems to be obvious: MacIntyre needs the account of

our connection to other animals to show that we are "redirected and remade animals and

not something else,"[31] dependent and vulnerable at birth and for much of our lives to

many of the same ills that befall every other animal, including predators, disease, and

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[27]On communities of giving and receiving, cf. 81*ff.*

[28]MacIntyre, *DRA*, 87.

[29]Ibid., also 96-98. The notion that the virtues allow us to protect ourselves from harm is, I believe, underappreciated in the literature, but MacIntyre has consistently insisted on it.

[30]Dunne, 347.

[31]MacIntyre, *DRA*, 49.

neglect. In other words, flourishing is a univocal concept for human beings and all other animals. Dunne, of course, recognizes this response and recognizes the centrality of dependence to MacIntyre's ethical account, but he questions whether there is any real sense in which flourishing is univocal, and even if it is, whether it plays any significant role in what follows. Having described MacIntyre's arguments for our animality, Dunne begins, "On all of this… it seems to me that MacIntyre is right. What I do not see so clearly, however, is how the position he takes here is consequential for, or carries weight in, the following part of the book where he moves on to normative analysis, from biology to ethics."[32] Dunne notes that MacIntyre, of course, uses the concept of flourishing and the concomitant naturalistic sense of 'good' quite centrally, but he is unsure *what role* the biology is supposed to play in the following ethics.

I think that Dunne's question is a good one, and it points to an issue at the heart of MacIntyre's account. We can answer this question in three parts: (1) MacIntyre does not move from 'mere' biology to ethics, but from normative nature or biology to normative analysis, and so he does not try to describe how our nature, as accepted by anyone, carries weight for ethics; (2) MacIntyre gives us examples of what role our normative nature can play in a normative analysis, and these we will need to look at more closely; and (3) flourishing is univocal for MacIntyre because he does not accept this final attempt by Dunne to divide human beings from all other animals. We will begin by further specifying the problem in (3), and then move on to (2) to answer both.

MacIntyre requires that human beings flourish in the same way as other animals and plants, meaning not that a human being needs precisely those traits and conditions that allow other animals to flourish, but that it must "develop the distinctive powers that it

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[32]Dunne, 347.

possesses *qua* member of that species."[33] Dunne protests that the distinctive powers of

human beings that allow us to flourish *qua* human beings are precisely the ability to

move beyond our animal nature in a way that dolphins, for example, never do. For

dolphins, it is simply part of their natural development that their desires move from

immediate pleasures to the goods of hunting and playing, "they do not have to go through

a stage in which they separate themselves from their desires, as humans do," and thereby

learn to evaluate their desires and redirect them.[34] How is flourishing univocal when for

dolphins it requires that the dolphin merely develop naturally, but for human beings it

requires that we separate ourselves from what is natural and judge it?

The first part of an answer is to admit that MacIntyre should not have used

'natural' in this sense, to designate a development that happens on its own and without

deliberate effort, for it certainly is not his usual sense and does rather confuse the issue.

Certainly, though, MacIntyre's basic point remains unscathed: dolphins must develop so

that they display a matured (second) nature to flourish fully, they do this through training

and living in community and developing specific traits, and they can (and do sometimes)

fail to achieve their second nature due to individual and communal failings and

environmental pressures (they do not *automatically* achieve their second nature);

likewise, human beings must develop so that they display a matured (second) nature to

flourish fully, and they do this in the same way, admitting that for human beings that

developed nature also and in some ways primarily involves a development of a rational

and linguistic ability that is unavailable to dolphins. Dunne generally relies too strongly

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[33]MacIntyre, *DRA*, 64.

[34]Ibid., 68.

upon the assumption embodied in (1), that ethics is a separate and non-natural discipline that specifies what we must normatively do without reference to *what* we are.[35]

We get an insight into how exactly flourishing is supposed to be a helpful concept in ethics, and why it depends on our normative nature, from two different passages in *Dependent Rational Animals*. The first occurs as MacIntyre notes that a specification of how a child transitions into a state of flourishing can be helpful in defining the virtues which help her to make this transition: "Just because our degree of success or failure in first acquiring and then practicing the virtues determines in significant measure what it is that we find agreeable and useful, the characterization of the virtues, in Humean terms, as qualities that are agreeable and useful is misleading," because it leads us to believe that we might find these agreeable and useful first and only then denominate them virtues, whereas we must first have the virtues to find them agreeable and useful.[36] In a sense, MacIntyre is just noting the difference between an Aristotelian and a Humean account of the virtues. While an Aristotelian account need not begin from a value-free sense of nature, it certainly does begin from our nature to define our virtues, and so it cannot be the case that we first value something, then develop it in others as a virtue. Likewise, only those who have the virtues will find them always agreeable and useful, so it is

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[35]For example, he writes that "what is distinctive of humans, creating the very possibility of their ethical life, is precisely their ability to *move beyond the merely animal state*," but MacIntyre would never agree to this, for it is that very animal life, including its rationality, that defines what it is for us to have an ethical life (Dunne, 347). Dunne likewise notes, in support of his contention that the biology is unnecessary, that one can imagine MacIntyre's book beginning in chapter seven and leaving off entirely the biological material that precedes it, especially given his account of the dependencies inherent in childhood and his explication of a child's development. I suspect that Dunne is basically right, but this is precisely because the dependencies of an infant are similar to the dependencies of other animals.

[36]MacIntyre, *DRA*, 87-8.

misleading to suggest that we first find them agreeable and useful, and then acquire them.[37]

A more telling example arises in chapter nine as MacIntyre attempts to establish that there is a general 'rule' for giving and receiving in relationships that differs greatly from a simple rule of power.[38] To make his point, MacIntyre considers a particular case of parents raising a child according to the best standards available to them, but then describes their shift toward a rule of power as they attempt to force their child to take on a certain career for the parents' personal reasons, thereby contravening their child's independence and the proper rule of giving and receiving. This is wrong, MacIntyre writes, for two related reasons: first, the bad parent requires the child to give what the child does not owe, and is thereby *unjust*, and second, in presenting the claim as just, the parent is either deceived or deceiving.[39] However, "to justify these judgments we need to be able to justify the norms by appeal to which the bad parent is condemned, that is, the rules of giving and receiving, more fully than I have hitherto done." This he proceeds to do by arguing that "the exercise of independent practical reasoning is one essential constituent to full human flourishing,"[40] meaning not that one cannot flourish at all without independent reason, but that one cannot flourish fully. Independence requires that we be *able* to give a cogent practically rational account that connects our actions to

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[37]Though this might happen in one sense that Hume notes: we might sympathetically acquire the desire to have a virtue that others admire, and so hate ourselves for not having it. Whether we actually succeed in acquiring the virtue will depend on whether our motivations alter. Cf. Hume, *Treatise*, 308.

[38]Cf. MacIntyre, *DRA*, 101-3.

[39]We will note in chapter five a certain drift toward collapsing all of ethics into justice; MacIntyre is not usually a very egregious offender, but here I at least wonder whether this is best described in terms of justice and injustice rather than a failure of love (they are not caring for their child in the best possible way) and generosity (the parents do not give the child the space needed to grow into an authentic individual) through the vice of pride.

[40]MacIntyre, *DRA*, 105.

our ultimate end, the good for human beings. This "presupposed justificatory reasoning" is important for two reasons: first, it makes plain how rational disagreement requires a deeper agreement on the end (and we need such debate because we need help to get things right), and second, because our good is part of a communal good.[41]

This account of the role of flourishing in independent practical reasoning is complex and made up of at least two distinct parts. First, flourishing is important for MacIntyre's account as a presupposed justificatory ground for being good and acting well. If an action or a role is good, either as a means or as an end, it must be justifiable in terms of what is good for human beings *qua* human beings; this is the naturalistic and focal use of good, and this defines what it is to flourish. Second, because flourishing plays this role in justification of the goodness of means and roles, it is essential for informed, rigorous, and rational discussion and debate about goodness in our own lives based on the furthest end, and this discussion and debate are essential for the community which we require to flourish. Flourishing requires that we rationally appeal to and discuss what it means to flourish, for rational debate about ethics is always part of ethics. MacIntyre's first thesis, his discussion of biology, is essential to the remainder of the book because it defines what the virtues are and how to achieve them, and it is not at odds with it because MacIntyre begins from normative nature.[42]

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[41]MacIntyre, *DRA*, 107*ff.*

[42]MacIntyre recognizes that he begins from Aristotelian points and proceeds by Aristotelian methods to Aristotelian conclusions and accepts that this leaves some people out, but he denies that there is any 'Archimedean point' outside of ethics from which to begin, thus echoing his earlier claims in *After Virtue* and signaling alert critics that he is not simply returning to what he formerly denied the validity of, metaphysical biology, but simply to biology, and one that already assumes an Aristotelian notion of flourishing (77-79). Of course, metaphysical biology is biology tainted with assumptions too, but the assumptions are untenable, as opposed to a simple assumption of flourishing such as our best sciences are still stuck with as well. There is a deep question here as to how tied our notion of ethics is to a very particular idea of what it is to flourish; can alternative philosophical positions find any common ground for

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre argues that our lives must be told as narratives, in part, because only the providing of a narrative can give an adequate reason when we are questioned as to why we do any given action. Another way of seeing the difference between *After Virtue* and *Dependent Rational Animals* is to focus on the role of flourishing in just this giving of reasons, not without a narrative, but reliant upon a deeper foundation than a chosen practice or tradition. And yet we might well wonder, if biology is normative because it relies upon a shared understanding of certain concepts, then is MacIntyre just pushing back the relativism one step further by appealing to flourishing? We return to this below after another look at Aristotle's ethics.

Aristotle as an Internalist?

Aristotle, like most ancient ethicists, approaches ethics as an attempt to make sense of an entire life by unifying it around one central good. We reflect on ethics only as adults who have discovered that our lives do not form a coherent whole, and we engage in ethics as an attempt to integrate ourselves. All desires, then, must be explained by, though not consciously aimed at, one final end, the good. The question that divides Aristotle from MacIntyre (of *After Virtue* at least) concerns how we are to define this good: do human beings fulfill a function defined by their role in a broader teleology, or do human beings fashion a *telos* through the traditions and narratives that they inherit and help form? The former, MacIntyre judges in *After Virtue*, is impossible, and so the latter must be true. In *Dependent Rational Animals*, however, MacIntyre demonstrates that this dilemma itself is false: we need accept neither an argument from neutral nature, nor a

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discussion at this deepest level? Can this provide the longed for basis for rational disagreement and discussion? MacIntyre, as seen above, does not hold out much hope for this; in an echo of his disquieting suggestion in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre suggests that only with agreement on a final end is there any room for rational disagreement. As we will see below, however, he has more optimistic moods as well.

purely narrative ethics, but can begin from normative nature. The question I wish to address briefly here is whether Aristotle is engaging in this very project. Aristotle, I argue, begins from a strongly *normative* nature that is neither simple nor easily open to observation, but available only to the trained and *virtuous* observer who not only observes but evaluates this nature, and reflectively argues for, defines, and justifies particular virtues by reference to this nature.[43]

To rehearse what was demonstrated in chapter one, Aristotle begins from the commonly accepted ethical opinions, from what is said and believed by the many and the wise, then demonstrates that some of these opinions contradict themselves or some more solid principle and so must be revised. Next, he states his own conclusion, and finally, he reconciles this conclusion with the true meaning of the various phenomena. Already in this method we can see the role of evaluation, for Aristotle does not begin with the plain 'facts,' but from the opinions of those who have experience and wisdom, either in the aggregate or in the individual. From these value-ridden phenomena, Aristotle, as the virtuous judge, determines which are most central and employs these as his interpretive keys in rejecting and revising the other proffered opinions. Finally, he evaluates the phenomena and reinterprets them in light of his own ethical conclusions. We saw this above with his definition of happiness, in which he refined the claim that happiness is pleasure by redefining pleasure as achievable only by the virtuous, and we see it illustrated in his discussion of particular virtues as well, such as courage.

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[43]Cf. Annas, *Morality*, 137: "In defending virtue by showing it to be natural we are not pointing from value to fact, or from evaluative to non-evaluative facts. Thus ancient theories are not open to the objection that they over-simplify or trivialize ethics by treating ethical issues as soluble by a quick examination of 'the facts'. For ancient ethics, the facts in question are neither simple nor obtainable by a quick glance; they are facts which take some finding and the discovery of which involves making evaluative distinctions."

Having defined the virtues as means between two vices, and as states that "tend by their own nature to the doing of the acts by which they are produced, and that they are in our power and voluntary, and act as right reason prescribes," Aristotle goes on to discuss the particular virtues, and he begins with courage.[44] Courage is clearly a mean with regard to fear and confidence; it is, in other words, acting properly in conditions that inspire fear and confidence, such as war. We all, he says in an appeal to nature, fear evils, but rather than conclude that courage has to do with all evils, he immediately counters that "the brave man is not thought to be concerned with all; for to fear some things is even right and noble, and it is base not to fear them—e.g. disgrace; he who fears this is good and modest, and he who does not is shameless." Of course, he admits, *some* people call such a person brave, then explains away this phenomenon by noting that they do so only by extension, for the shameless person too is lacking in fear, but he is not lacking in fear *properly*. Likewise, we cannot properly show courage in disease, because we cannot demonstrate any prowess, nor is it noble to die in this way, and so, although the brave man will still be fearless and noble in disease, he is not properly showing courage. After examining several phenomena and evaluating and explaining their weight, Aristotle concludes that "the man, then, who faces and who fears the right things and with the right aim, in the right way and at the right time, and who feels confidence under the corresponding conditions, is brave; for the brave man feels and acts according to the merits of the case and in whatever way reason directs." The aim, of course, is at a noble end, since courage is a virtue, and the right way and time and place and feeling must be determined through the use of *phronesis*.

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[44]Aristotle's discussion of courage occurs at *NE* 1114b26*ff.*

Aristotle, we may safely conclude, is innocent of the general teleology charged to him by Williams and MacIntyre among others, for he does not set his fulcrum upon a point outside of ethics and so seek to leverage his interlocutors into a virtuous life, but plants his feet ever so firmly upon basically evaluative judgments and arguments and seeks to convince his listeners to share them.[45] It is, perhaps, misleading to suggest that there are a few evaluative judgments, and that acceptance of these will inevitably lead to an acceptance of all that follows. Rather, what is accepted is a general outlook on life, a general narrative that defines what is valuable and what is not, or, to put it another way, what goods are worth striving for and what harms are worth fearing. This does not return us to the cultural relativism of *After Virtue*, however. For Aristotle, the good of note for courage is nobility, recognized or not (but preferably recognized and rewarded); pleasure too is a good, but courage may well deprive us of pleasure, for noble deeds in war often lead to the most terrible harm, death, beyond which there is no pain or pleasure. And yet for the sake of the noble, the brave man will give up even his virtuous life, which is a great good, and so we see that the *greatest* harm cannot really be death, but must instead be cowardice and vice in general. It is in our real interest, Aristotle concludes, to be brave, for this is how we achieve the greatest good for human beings, happiness, even though it may deprive us of it in particular situations.

Aquinas, as always, takes Aristotle's word seriously, insisting with "the Philosopher" that courage is indeed chiefly about death in battle, but it is more than a little interesting to see how he parses 'battle.' First, Aquinas differentiates between a general battle, as in a war, which is a pursuit of the common good of peace, and private

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[45]This may be misleading when it comes to Aristotle, given his infamous pessimism about the opportunities for reformation; it may be more apt to say that he sets his feet upon evaluative judgments and arguments and invites those lucky enough to share the same (correct) footholds to climb up with him.

combat, under which he includes the action of any judge or private individual who acts as she should even though death might result. In his reply to the first objection, he makes it clear that martyrs are the preeminent exemplars of courage, because they face the threat of death with fortitude for the highest possible good, that of the glory of God.[46] In keeping with MacIntyre's narrative structure, we see that the Medieval Thomas considers death only the greatest *bodily* harm, and so maintains that there are goods to be sought which far excel the harm of death, while the ancient Aristotle sees death as an unmitigated harm, and only allows that becoming vicious is even worse. For all of the apparent similarity, then, courage has clearly become a different virtue. Aristotle may or may not admire the martyrs, but he cannot allow that theirs is the highest fortitude precisely because he does not recognize the good that they pursue. This raises again the issue solved (rather problematically) by Butler's positing of an inspired and all-but-infallible conscience: *what virtues* are necessary for happiness, and what decides? If there is more than one list, and there clearly is with differences far greater than that between Aristotle and his distant disciple, Aquinas, then which list is necessary?

The problem becomes more particular when we consider that Aristotle is presenting the real interests of any single person, so even if his account is not intended to be open, it is clearly universally applicable, and Williams' general objections on that score remain: this requires that there be only one good for all human beings, whereas we believe that there are many ways to be good and that these may well be relative to individuals, circumstances, and cultures. It is time, at last, to turn to the concept of *real interests*, first to individual real interests, and then to the dueling lists of virtues created by the specification of real interests within different traditions and relative to cultures.

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[46]Aquinas, *ST* II-II.123.5, cf. *ST* II-II.124.2

Getting What I Want: Individual Real Interests

We have shown that an externalist such as Butler can hold to a strong version of the necessity thesis, but only by accepting theism and, more problematically, some account according to which it is clear to everyone what it is virtuous to do and not to do. In this chapter we have outlined an account of ethics that works, in a sense, backwards: assuming a notion of flourishing, it demonstrates that there are particular characteristics (the virtues) necessary for flourishing, and then supports its assertions by noting its own internal coherence and plausibility rather than external proofs. Such an internalism need not assume that everyone knows what is right and wrong naturally, and indeed should hold, with MacIntyre and Aristotle, that knowing what is virtuous requires a strenuous, difficult, and frighteningly fragile and tenuous proper upbringing.

Different objections, however, arise. First, we have the problems associated with the assumption that we have real interests as defined by the notion of flourishing, which we will address in this and the following sections, first addressing the idea that individuals do not have real interests at all, and then addressing the more plausible idea that real interests may be culturally defined. Second, we have yet to look at what can and should be said concerning the apparent counterexamples after which this dissertation is named: what should we say about the apparent happiness and flourishing (like the green bay tree) of the wicked? We will turn to this objection in the final chapter. The answer, of course, relies somewhat upon the definitions of happiness and virtue already given, which brings us to a final criticism: if the necessity thesis is simply an analytic truth based on certain deniable assumptions, then why spend so much time pointing this out? I will answer this final objection by looking at the roles that the necessity thesis can play

and showing that a stronger necessity thesis is more productive in defending and defining particular virtues, such as justice.

Interestingly, we have shown that Aristotle does not accept the sort of general teleology or metaphysical biology derisively imputed to him by Williams and MacIntyre, but we have retained Williams' general understanding of Aristotle's ethics as closed but universal. How can Aristotle's ethics be universal if he did not believe that human beings have "an ideal form of functioning, which fitted together with that of other things"?[47] The key feature in Williams' understanding is not that the *telos* of human beings fits into a general teleology, though Williams presents the problem this way, but simply that *there is* a way that human beings flourish, and that this flourishing cannot be independently discovered but relies upon the evaluations that we make of the data at hand. As long as Aristotle holds that human beings *all* flourish one way and under certain conditions, he holds that human beings have a real interest, irrespective of what they might desire, and this should be (and perhaps is) Williams' primary concern.

Does Aristotle believe that all human beings flourish one way? For Aristotle, ethics is part of politics and cannot be divorced from that discipline,[48] but in the *Politics*, Aristotle proves quite willing to allow for diversity in the quasi-virtue justice given different environments and political realities.[49] Aristotle is a particularist, but he still presents a universal ethics. Aristotle does not believe that we can specify rules for behavior; the practically wise person cannot simply apply a virtue like a function and

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[47]Williams, *Ethics*, 43.

[48]Cf. MacIntyre, "Rival Aristotles: Aristotle against some Renaissance Aristotelians," in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays, Volume 2* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), especially 5-7.

[49]Cf. Aristotle, *NE* 1134b, and the *Politics* in whole, especially books 6-8, which explore the best (including most just) political arrangement in different circumstances.

read off the correct action or emotion, but must be trained in the virtues and able to decide, given a difficult situation, how it is best to act *here*. The particulars of the situation affect the decision or reaction of the virtuous person, but there is still an ideally virtuous person, one who perfects his form and thus reaches his *telos*. Aristotle does not leave much doubt that he believes he is outlining *the* way to be virtuous; that this outline has the distinct flavor of a *polis*, and of Athens in his own age, is a distinct problem that we will look at further in the next section.

Williams addresses the problem of real interests as a difficulty of specification, first of what is being said about someone who lacks the virtues, and then of how to give an independent account of real interests. On the first problem he writes:

> What exactly is being said about the bad man? We are not simply saying that we find him a dangerous nuisance (if we do), or that he is statistically unusual (if he is). We are saying that he lacks certain qualities characteristic of human beings which are necessary for creatures to live a life typical of human beings. But we have to say more, if we are to make the point essential to Aristotle's philosophy and to any like it, that it is *this man's* well-being and interests that are in question. We have to say that this man misconceives his interests and, indeed, that his doing so is a main symptom of what is wrong with him.[50]

In claiming that it is in people's real interest to be good, we are not simply claiming that to be complete human beings people must be good, but that they themselves have an interest in being good, whatever they may happen to be like. The virtuous person's real interests are served only by continuing to be virtuous, which the virtuous person is uniquely able to see, but no less are the vicious person's real interests served only by becoming virtuous, and this is a much harder claim to make. The problems are twofold. First, there is the problem of specifying any independent account of real interests. Second, and connected, is the problem of motivation: the vicious person, unlike the

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[50]Williams, *Ethics*, 40.

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virtuous person, has no current desires that encourage her to become virtuous, for her current desires and motivations are (let us briefly suppose) entirely vicious.

The suspicion directed at the idea that people may have interests different from those they think they have derives largely, Williams points out, from the political uses of the idea, especially in Hegel and Marx. It is an ethical question whether, when, and how a person should be persuaded, coerced, or forced to follow her 'real interests' when she does not perceive these to be her interests, but these problems need not detain us here. The question will, undoubtedly, be a thorny one, and the Aristotelian will likely have little to say about the matter in generalities, though some law must be formed at the level of governments. MacIntyre's solution, that we once again become parts of communities in which individuals are trained to perceive that their individual goods (and interests) are tied up with and in the communal goods (and interests) deserves serious consideration, but it is not obviously a practical immediate solution and does little to moderate the relationship between the smaller communities and the nation as a whole, which must still regulate behavior according to some notion of interests.

What notion of interest can we give? The problem, of course, is that we obviously do have some notion of real interest and believe that we can apply it to others (leaving to the side political and ethical questions of enforcement).[51] Williams briefly considers and discards the idea that a person's real interest can be specified by considering what she *would* accept if she underwent a proposed alteration. Having been brainwashed, a new inductee may well believe that she now understands 'the truth' and

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[51]Williams, *Ethics*: "A real problem remains, merely because there are some restrictions on what we can decently count as a certain person's being better off as the result of a change, as opposed to things in general being better, or our being better off ourselves. 'He would be better off dead' can be said for many dubious reasons: the most dubious is that we would be better off if he were dead" (42).

sees 'reality' and so that her real interests are served by continuing as she is, but we certainly do not want to say that it is in her real interest to be brainwashed.[52]

Williams provides his own response to the problem of specificity that attempts to exclude these "self-validating changes:"

> If an agent does not now acknowledge that a certain change would be in his interest and if, as a result of the change, he comes to acknowledge that it was in his interest, this will show that the change was really in his interest only on condition that the alteration in his outlook is explained in terms of some *general incapacity* from which he suffered in his original state, and which has been removed or alleviated by the change.[53]

In saying that the agent suffered from a general incapacity, we are importing two notions. First, that the inability was *general*, it had sweeping consequences and hence was not jerry-rigged *ad hoc* to explain a supposed enlightening, as in the brainwashing case. Any explanation of the incapacity should have general implications and applications for how the person and people in general should live. I suspect that Williams is right about this generality, but I am not sure that it goes as far as he believes to exclude cult-like practices, simply because the beliefs of a cult can be as broad and sweeping as more legitimate beliefs. Second, and more importantly, that it be an *incapacity*, a lack of a capability that should be expected from human beings in these cultural conditions as part of their "effective functioning." This "normative conception of human functioning" specifies how human beings properly flourish. Thus, Williams' answer, no less than MacIntyre's, is that the only way to specify a real interest is to have recourse to flourishing, even if to an ineliminably normative conception. What a person needs to

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[52]In large part, of course, because she cannot then be the sort of independent reasoner that MacIntyre posits she must become, but this is more the subject of 4.2b.

[53]Williams, *Ethics*, 42-3.

function well, Williams writes, "are the capacities, including the basic patterns of motivation, to pursue some of the things that are in his interests."[54]

When all that is lacking is information, the notion of a real interest is relatively unproblematic. If (in Williams' example) I am misinformed about the toxicity of a drug that I am taking, believing it to be something helpful when it is in fact cyanide, then I am decidedly not acting according to my real interests, but all that must be done to correct the problem is to inform me of the true facts of the case. The difficult cases arise "when what is wrong with the agent goes beyond lack of information or mere rationality (whatever the boundaries of that may be) and affects the desires and motivations from which he deliberates; or again, when what is wrong with the agent is that he will not believe something that he rationally should believe."[55] Williams presents as a paradigm case an adolescent who attempts to commit suicide and fails; the adolescent does not have, among her present motivations, a desire to live, and our belief that she will desire to live sometime in the future has no relation to her present desires: "she does not care—she does not want to be there for things to be better in three months' time."[56] In the terms Williams introduces in his essay "Internal and External Reasons," the adolescent has no internal reasons for desiring to live, and external reasons are not reasons for *her* to act or not to act at all.[57]

Of course, the motivational set that defines our internal reasons is not statically given, so what was an external reason may become an internal reason over time, but this

[54]Williams, *Ethics*, 43.

[55]Ibid., 41.

[56]Ibid., 42.

[57]Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 102-5.

does little to alleviate the problem for real interests: how are they supposed to move us and in what sense do *I*, a vicious person, have any reason to become virtuous? The two questions are related, but distinct. The first question is practical, and moreover, even if answered in the negative (we cannot motivate the vicious to become virtuous), it does not disprove Aristotle's ethics, but rather points out one serious implication: once lost, always lost.[58] Indeed, Aristotle himself may have believed that this was the case. Unless we have been trained up properly in the virtues and become mature, we cannot even begin to think about the virtues and so continue the process of becoming virtuous; if we have the ill 'moral luck' of being reared in the vices we are unlikely ever to see the point of being virtuous. While MacIntyre does not address the issue, the list of harms that can befall one being trained in virtue may lead us to conclude that he too has little hope for such unlucky folk.

The second question, on the other hand, is not (Butler's) practical question of how to convince people to be virtuous, but is rather a question of *reasons*: does the vicious person have a reason to become virtuous? According to Williams' account, it appears that the answer must be no, "and it seems that this is because," MacIntyre writes, "for Williams to assert about some agent that it would be good and best for her or him to do such and such is one thing, while to assert about that same agent that she or he has reason to do such and such is quite another."[59] Williams posits a basic divorce between real interests, if such even exist, and the reasons that people can have for action. MacIntyre's complaint is that Williams' account "obscures from view the way in which agents have to

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[58]Or at least, there is no reliable way to convince someone who is vicious to become or to try to become virtuous; perhaps lost people may change gradually on their own or through conversion.

[59]MacIntyre, *DRA*, 86-7.

learn at various stages how to transcend what have been up till this or that point the limitations of their motivational set and will fail badly in their moral development, if they remain within those limitations."[60]

Unfortunately, it is not clear exactly what MacIntyre's complaint amounts to. He illustrates his claim by observing that a child who is becoming an independent practical reasoner must learn to include external real interests as internal interests, so that having originally desired some item just because he wants it, the child comes to desire the item "qua good" and "just because and insofar" as it is good and "best for me to desire."[61] The desires for real interests must become a part of the child's internal reasons, and this will happen, if it happens, as the child is trained up in the intellectual and moral virtues in the proper environment. What Williams presumably obscures, then, is the way that this learning is supposed to take place. The child does not originally have any internal reasons to desire to be good, but the child does have a real reason to be good, because it is in the child's real interest, and the education consists in helping the child to understand this fact. In Williams' language employed above, it consists in helping the child to come to function well by understanding that this is functioning *well*, that it is in the child's real interest to be good.

The problem is exacerbated when we state that virtue is necessary for happiness rather than for flourishing, for happiness *is* clearly a part of anyone's subjective motivational set, though perhaps not an overriding part, and the necessity thesis further defines it as *also* in anyone's real interest. This does not mean that the necessity thesis commits us to denying the division of external and internal interests of course, but merely

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[60]MacIntyre, *DRA*, 87.

[61]Ibid.

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that everyone's ultimate external interest and a major element of everyone's internal interest are ultimately identical, though many people may mistakenly believe that they are not. The arguments of, especially, chapter three above, but likewise of Aristotle and Butler, are then meant to convince people that they are mistaken about the nature of happiness, or of virtue, and so have failed to understand that their real interests ought to be a part of their subjective motivational set.

The elephant in the room as we attempted to specify better what our real interest consists in and as we attempted to give an account of how our real interests might or should motivate us is that neither answer gives *independent* reasons, but only reasons relying upon the theory. This is because there are no independent reasons, no reasons to be given that start from outside of ethics and specifically from outside of our particular ethical commitments. In large part, this is the conclusion of *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, and it plays no small role in *Dependent Rational Animals*. MacIntyre addresses two different aspects of this problem. The first concerns theoretical justification: having begun from Aristotelian premises, it is not surprising, he admits, that he comes to Aristotelian conclusions, but this just begs the question by assuming that Aristotelianism is superior to other modes of ethical enquiry. MacIntyre concedes the charge, but insists on two points: first, that "every starting point for philosophical enquiry is initially question-begging in just this way," and second, that what justifies the conclusions are the accurate descriptions of the subject in the preceding discussions.[62]

The second worry is that by assuming and working from within his own ethical account, MacIntyre makes impossible that kind of radical enquiry embodied in Richard

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[62]Of course, he admits, this is just to add an Aristotelian conception of how an enquiry should proceed, but again, there is no way around this (77-8).

Rorty's concept of irony. MacIntyre allows for criticism, but it is a criticism and rational enquiry *based on* a given conception of the virtues as necessary for flourishing and a shared notion of flourishing: it is not something that *I* undertake by stepping outside of my beliefs, "it is something that *we* undertake from within *our* shared mode of practice by asking, when we have good reason to do so, what the strongest and soundest objections are to this or that particular belief or concept that we have up to this point taken for granted."[63] The model of the more radical critique is not Rorty, but Nietzsche, the lone individual living a courageous life of rational enquiry. But precisely because he has deliberately cut himself off from all community and moral commitments, Nietzsche has likewise cut himself off from all debate.[64] There is no rational conversation without shared moral commitments, and so there is no rational critique from outside of moral commitment, but only from within.

This raises again a question that we have put off till now: if the concept of flourishing is itself normative, what evaluations and enquiries control our conception of flourishing? This is clearly determined, at least in part, by the traditions that we find ourselves in. If this is MacIntyre's complete answer, then we are left again not with the closed but universal account that I have argued for thus far, but with the particular applicability of *After Virtue*; MacIntyre's account is not for everyone, because it too is tradition-bound and relative to the culture that fostered this particular understanding of flourishing as involving a practice of independent practical reason. We set out to determine how we could possibly define real interests, and our answer has turned out to be that we define it by a reference to flourishing that is itself inherently relative.

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[63]MacIntyre, *DRA*, 157.

[64]Ibid., 162*ff.*

Traditions: Communal Real Interests

Relativism is not inherently inimical to the necessity thesis, but it necessarily weakens it. It will be helpful to recapitulate quickly why relativism has this effect. The necessity thesis, in its strongest form, holds that some known and understood list of virtues is necessary for human happiness, so that no person can be happy without all of the virtues. We have examined various ways to weaken this thesis while still maintaining it in outline, including weakening happiness to include only the happiness of an afterlife or the sort of happiness that most people do not care about. Relativism weakens the other half of the statement by maintaining that what counts as a virtue depends upon some aspect of the circumstances. In the above section, we explored a relativism of individuals in which we cannot say whether any given change is in someone's real interest because it depends upon what that person wants. Williams and MacIntyre, in different ways, are both willing to dismiss this concern: it is clear that we do believe that we can offer an account of someone's real interest even in certain hard cases (such as suicide), and we justify our account by reference to what it is for a human being to function well or flourish. The very notion of flourishing, however, rests upon how we evaluate human nature normatively and our equally normative understanding of certain ethical terms, so it appears that all that we have accomplished thus far is to shift the relativism up a level from the individual to the culture. Cultural relativism weakens the first half of the statement by maintaining that what counts as a virtue in various cultures depends on the traditions within which we form our evaluative judgments. The necessity thesis, if this is true, amounts to nothing more than a definitional claim that whatever happens to be a virtue will be necessary for happiness in that culture.

What we need, to avoid this, is an ethical account that unapologetically and convincingly purports to be universally applicable to all people; in the terms of real interests, we need an account that is convincingly about what is in the real interest of any person, regardless of his or her culture.

Rational Relativism

First we must define the nature of our problem: what is cultural relativism, and why is it ever accepted? The answer is simple, but remains undefined. Moral cultural relativism, the kind we are concerned with, is the view that what is right or wrong is relative to, and hence possibly different in, different cultures.[65] The answer remains undefined because there is no uncontroversial definition of either morality or culture. Morality is not only defined differently by different theories (Kantianism, Utilitarianism, Contractarianism, Aristotelianism, etc.), but has a different scope under different theories as well (involving actions, or motivations, or all of one's being). Culture likewise suffers from an unclear scope; are cultures defined by the people, or by the practices of that culture, or by the beliefs of the people, and just how different must any of these be before we have a new culture instead of a subculture? Fortunately, we can ignore many, though not quite all, of these questions in what follows.

That anyone ever becomes a moral relativist we can blame generally on what Williams refers to as 'reflection,' a technical term in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* that denotes a constructive comparison of ethical values and their justifications with other

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[65]The following sources provide an excellent introduction to moral relativism: Carol Rovane, "Earning the Right to Realism or Relativism in Ethics," *Philosophical Issues*, *Realism and Relativism*, ed. Ernest Sosa and Enrique Villanueva (Boston: Blackwell Publishing, 2002); Gilbert Harman, "Is There a Single True Morality?" in *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation*, ed. Michael Krausz (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

cultures and often seems to include a genealogical account of one's own thick concepts

that deprives them of much of their standing in some way. By thick concepts Williams

means ethical terms of praise and blame that carry with them a specific account of what is

wrong (or right) with a certain way of acting (or thinking or being) tied to a broader

understanding of virtue and vice and particular practices (as opposed to thin concepts

such as 'good,' 'bad,' 'right,' and 'wrong'). These are destroyed as people reflect on the

logical gap between their universal ethical claims and their limited justification of them.[66]

Courage, to use our earlier example, was tied quite tightly to behavior in warfare in

Aristotle's society. To call someone a coward was to impute to him fear in the face of

foes of the *polis* who sought to destroy the basis of communal life. As Aristotle's most

famous pupil permanently altered the political relationships between people by

destroying the Greek city-state, he opened the Athenians to a broader perspective and

allowed for reflection on the value of courage, and hence on what constitutes courage.

Courage, for Epicurus and later for the Stoics and Christians, became a substantially

different virtue, though still recognizably related to the earlier heroic state of character.

The example of courage may mislead us into thinking that reflection is inherently

a good thing because it 'broadens our horizons' and helps us to comprehend new truths.

Reflection is, in a sense, inevitable as cultures collide in a shrinking world,[67] and there is

no way back from reflection to an earlier point, but Williams is ambivalent about the

effect that reflection has on life generally because of its destructive quality. At this point

the path divides into two related but distinct approaches to relativism. There is the

approach that considers relativism as a theoretical position and attempts to suggest what

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[66]Cf. Williams, *Ethics*, 167.

[67]Ibid., 168.

we should say (theoretically) in response to it. An alternative method is to consider what it would look like to face relativism as a member of an ethical community, and what it would mean to try to live a life in accordance with relativistic principles. Along these latter lines, Williams holds that relativism is untenable as a life-position, and reflection, unchecked, seems to lead (at least genealogically, perhaps necessarily) to relativism. What we need, Williams opines in his customary almost epigrammatic style, is *confidence* in some of our own thick concepts, enabling them to stand up to reflection.[68] Williams does not choose to give us a picture of confidence or to explain how it would enable us to retain and pass on some of our thick concepts; that is, Williams says little about theoretical relativism or possible responses to it. What he does say is that we must pass on reflection and free enquiry to our children to ensure the transparency of the very practices and institutions in which the thick concepts are embedded.[69] If our institutions and practices are transparent, then they can provide our thick concepts with the necessary support only if they are themselves justified and, at least so far as we can tell, legitimate, reliant upon true beliefs. It is instructive, then, that two of Williams' three "optimistic" beliefs briefly noted in the postscript involve a hope that social practices can be true, and that institutions and practices could be truthful, allowing them to withstand reflection.[70]

MacIntyre provides a theoretical response to relativism, and thereby sheds light on these optimistic beliefs in two essays on the problem of relativism. In tones

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[68]Williams, *Ethics*, 170; 200.

[69]Cf. Ibid., 173.

[70]Williams, *Ethics*, 198*ff.* The third optimistic belief is in "the meaning of an individual life." In general, Williams is practicing what he proclaims by committing himself to the tradition in which he finds himself, that of liberalism, which was itself shaped by Christian hopes: Christians have long been committed to the idea that there is only one Truth, so Williams' liberal commitment to transparency and truth are integral parts of the Christian message as well. Likewise, it is the steadfast witness of the scriptures that individual lives are meaningful, valued by God, and created in God's image.

reminiscent of the disquieting suggestion at the beginning of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre

notes that the disagreements among rival moral theories are intractable because they

infect not only the particular details of the theories but the principles to which the

theories apply for justification. It appears, then, that any rational justification must be

internal to different rival moral standpoints. He continues:

> From this it is sometimes further and at first sight plausibly inferred that this is an
> area of judgment in which no claims to truth can be sustained and that a rational
> person therefore could, at least *qua* rational person, be equally at home within the
> modes of life informed by the moral schemes of each of these standpoints.[71]

Relativism charges that there can be no 'truth of the matter' when it comes to ethical

claims, but only a truth relative to a particular moral theory or tradition. Any effective

theoretical response must demonstrate that particular traditions can (at least in principle)

appeal to a shared conception of truth and engage in meaningful critique and debate with

opposing traditions. Debates and critiques are not *merely* pounding on the table and

insisting on one's own view for reasons that the other person does not accept.

In "Colors, Cultures, and Practices," MacIntyre explores at length the apparent

relativism in color terms among various cultures, demonstrating that it amounts to more

than carving up the spectrum according to different schemata (for example, some cultures

use one word for both brown and yellow, while others fail to differentiate brown and

black), for as the schemata become part of larger practices, they become practically

untranslatable, and perhaps even incommensurable.[72] There are three possible responses

to this diversity. The first takes seriously the scientific findings that both the wavelengths

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[71]MacIntyre, "Moral Relativism, Truth, and Justification," in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays, Volume 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 54.

[72]MacIntyre, "Colors, Cultures, and Practices," in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays, Volume 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

reflected and the structure of perception are the same across all cultures (leaving aside those with defects in their color perception for moment), and concludes that this diversity reflects nothing more than subjective differences in language that could be erased through education. We could, somewhat tendentiously, say that those who take this view are externalists about color and color language, and the same objections face their view as face externalists about ethics: the science is not itself value free, and we cannot employ Western science to convince others steeped in a different language-in-use (MacIntyre's term for a current color language) precisely because they do not accept the principles upon which such an argument must build.

The second response accepts that there is a basic untranslatability of color terms between languages and concludes from this that while each language-in-use is justified by and in its own tradition and practices, it is impossible to moderate between these languages. We are left with color terms the truth of whose application is completely relative to different languages-in-use. My way of labeling colors can and *should* only be seen as having applicability for those in my own culture. No way of labeling colors, no way of dividing them, is better or worse than any other; they are just different.

What this response clearly misses is the ability of the anthropologists' whose work MacIntyre is relying upon to translate other languages' defects and strengths into English, and where translation falters, to provide explanations and descriptions that more or less adequately fill its place. In other words, not all languages are equal when it comes to labeling colors, because some can clearly label more than others (English labels black and brown and yellow separately, allowing us to differentiate color experiences more clearly and more clearly to explain colors of objects). Two problems remain: why should

we think that differentiating more colors is better, and how can we engage in critiques

and debates over still largely untranslatable terms? The answer, MacIntyre's third

response insists, lies in the practices that are generally shared between different

languages-in-use. MacIntyre offers an example concerning painting, in which it is clearly

valuable to differentiate colors so as to capture more precisely desired hues. The Italian

Renaissance painters were both able to communicate with painters of the Dutch

Renaissance, who had many more shades of black, as well as criticize the range of their

own palette in light of the broader Dutch palette. As they shared the same internal goods,

these two languages-in-use engaging in the same practice were able to undertake a

careful critique of their own and other palettes through their shared standard, and so to

engage in rational debate over that good and what it required.[73]

As we apply this response to moral relativism, MacIntyre's point is that we can

engage in debate because we share practices with similar enough internal goods, which is

hard to deny for color, but may seem easier to deny for morals. What significant

practices are shared between Westerners and the Chinese and tribal indigenous groups in

the Solomon Islands that would allow for this sort of debate and critique? While

MacIntyre does not address this question, we might offer any number of answers in his

defense: all cultures have shared the practice of educating children with the similar good

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[73]The Dutch and the Italians may not seem so different, but MacIntyre offers examples from Japanese and Western painters as well. MacIntyre concludes: "Relativism about social and cultural orders thus fails, insofar as the standards provided by practices, such as the practice of painting, can be brought to bear upon their evaluation. The languages-in-use of some social and cultural orders *are* more adequate than those of some others in this or that respect; the vocabularies of color of some social and cultural orders are more adequate than those of some others in respect of the tasks of color discrimination set by the practice of painting. It is not that the color judgments made by the inhabitants of such orders fail in respect of truth, but that the conceptual scheme informing those judgments is inadequate to the realities of color disclosed by scientific and philosophical enquiries into the nature of color. There is thus after all a possibility of dissenting from the established linguistic consensus regarding color in our own social and cultural order and the constraints which it imposes upon our judgments of color… through resort to the standards of adequacy and inadequacy provided by the institutionalized norms of some practice" (50).

of allowing that child and the culture as a whole to flourish, even if some have emphasized different aspects of that practice; likewise, all cultures have engaged in the practices of government, of families, and typically of religion. This is not to suggest that it would be easy to apply the internal goods of practices to a critique of others, but it should not be impossible. Indeed, there are examples of it having occurred as Westerners have encountered the educational practices of other cultures and been able to judge, according to the internal goods of the practice of teaching itself, that in some ways each culture is better and worse.[74]

The effectiveness of practice-dependent critique, however, does rely upon a more basic assumption on the part of the practitioners of any actual practice or tradition that they are committed to a tradition that captures the *truth* of moral claims. And here we see why no relativist could actually be a part of any tradition, for the relativist has already given up this most basic claim. In "Moral Relativism; Truth and Justification," MacIntyre demonstrates that a fuller response to relativism requires that he show how every tradition is implicitly or explicitly committed to the truth value of its claims, and that some traditions, at least, can be justified in that commitment.[75] In his article, MacIntyre relies on a Geachian argument to show that all assertions assume truth; all that need concern us here is the commonsense claim that believing in a tradition involves believing that it is true in its central claims.

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[74]Cf. Susan Wunderink "Culture Shock," *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* 14, no. 1 (January/February 2008): 46. Wunderink reviews *Innocents Abroad: American Teachers in the American Century*, by Jonathan Zimmerman.

[75]MacIntyre, "Moral Relativism," 61. On 59 MacIntyre defines a commitment to the truth of one's claims as involving three aspects: 1) the belief that my tradition is not partial and limited, but all others are; 2) that my mode of rational justification is complete and sound in a way that others are not; 3) the belief that if my mode of rational justification is not complete and sound, making it so will not affect whether it supports the central theses of my tradition.

While we all strive toward the truth from within the particular tradition that we inhabit, to the extent that we claim to have the truth we must admit that we might be wrong (no claim can be completely resistant to change if it claims to capture an objective truth external to that view, though in practice it might be completely resistant to disproof). The burden of proving that one has the truth, MacIntyre states in his typically opaque fashion, consists in accepting the heavy onus laid

> upon the adherents of each particular rival tradition of showing, so far as they can, that, if and only if the truth is indeed what they assert that it is, and if and only if it is appropriated rationally in the way that they say that it must be appropriated, can we adequately understand how, in the case of each rival moral standpoint, given the historical, social, psychological and intellectual circumstances in which that standpoint has been theoretically elaborated and embodied in practice, it is intelligible that this is how things should seem to be to the adherents of those other standpoints.[76]

Thus the tradition must be complex and falsifiable at many points, and will explain the disagreements among different theories.

Those within a particular tradition are forced to engage with other cultures as the problems and dilemmas endemic to their own beliefs become insupportable, and the solutions offered by another tradition look more inviting, especially if this second tradition is able to explain from its own viewpoint the problems of one's own tradition in terms of a partial perspective upon a wider truth.[77] MacIntyre does not pretend that such engagements are easy; they require a philosophical imagination that allows us to see

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[76]MacIntyre, "Moral Relativism," 70.

[77]We might call such an approach to philosophy Kuhnian, in that it presents philosophy as involving different paradigms, movement from one to another of which looks more or less like a conversion (cf. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), especially chapters V-X). MacIntyre notes that he was heavily influenced by Kuhn as concerns his conception of what it is to make progress in systematic thought (MacIntyre, "Preface," in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays, Volume 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), vii-viii). This general non-foundationalist way of doing philosophy is admirably described by Nicholas Wolterstorff in the preface to *Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), xi. Wolterstorff notes that this method seems to be gaining ground in analytic circles, and calls it *dialogic pluralism*.

another tradition from within its own justifications and thereby to offer an account of its

partiality. "The analogy here," MacIntyre writes, "is with the ability of an anthropologist

to learn not only how to inhabit an alternative and very different culture, but also how to

view her or his own culture from that alien perspective."[78]

If MacIntyre's theoretical account of the search for truth within a tradition

remains unsatisfactory, it is only because it seems to assume a too robust notion of what

an ethical theory is capable of and of how complete and systematic it can become. A

complete ethical account, on his view, will not only explain its own complex, multiply

falsifiable view, it will provide an account of the failings of every other possible view.

Beyond this brief and suggestive sketch, MacIntyre gives us no idea of what such a

theory would look like, but clearly it will need to be an impressively complete account of

all of human life. While MacIntyre does not pretend to have already offered such a

system, he certainly seems to suggest that this is more than simply an ideal which we can

never hope to approach; accounts such as this are supposed to have a practical role to

play in mediating disagreements. Such a theory seems impossible; it is more likely that

all engagement, like all change, will remain partial, but be effective nonetheless.

Perhaps MacIntyre has briefly forgotten Aristotle's key advice not to seek for

more certainty than a particular area of discourse allows. At any rate, while he has done

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[78]MacIntyre, "Moral Relativism," 72. This does not naively imply that those within a superseded cultural viewpoint or moral theory will inevitably succumb to the greater explanatory power of another tradition, but to the extent that they remain within that more partial viewpoint, the relationship between the traditions becomes asymmetrical in two different ways: "First, one of these two rival moral standpoints will have acquired through the exercise of philosophical and moral imagination the conceptual resources to provide not merely an accurate representation of its rival, but one which captures what by the standards of that rival is intractably problematic, while the continuing adherents of that rival will lack just that type of resource. And secondly it will have provided in its own terms a compelling explanation of why what is thus intractably problematic is so. But the terms in which that explanation is framed may well remain inaccessible to most and perhaps all continuing adherents of that rival standpoint. So on fundamental matters, moral or philosophical, the existence of continuing disagreement, even between highly intelligent people, should not lead us to suppose that there are not adequate resources available for the rational resolution of such disagreement" (73).

much to point the way towards how Williams' optimistic beliefs in truth and truthfulness might be theoretically filled out in a mediation between rival theories, we may do well to remain skeptical about the possibility of ever achieving a complete theory of the sort that he seems to posit, even as we hold out hope for continual improvement in the ethical accounts that describe how we actually live.

Living Relativism

And in living, we do not meet relativism theoretically, but practically, and as Williams and MacIntyre both insist, from within a particular tradition to which we are already committed. Thus, having concluded that there may well be reason for Williams' hope, we must turn to the experience of relativism in real life. MacIntyre's response to relativism in *Dependent Rational Animals*, already briefly noted above, concerns cultural relativism and our hope of having a rational debate between rival moral theories as well. We do not step outside of all belief to criticize our own theory, but work from within the tradition and by means of a communal exploration of the best objections to particular practices, beliefs, and concepts, as well as the best criticisms of our standards of justification. The best defense of any tradition, MacIntyre notes in an echo of Williams, is that it succeeds in withstanding this reflection.[79]

I cannot replace my entire ethical system of beliefs instantaneously, but only piecemeal, as particular judgments, modes of justification, and beliefs and concepts are successfully challenged through my application of practical reason to the justification of the particular by reference to my happiness, and through an imaginative and/or practice-

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[79]"When some local community embodying networks of giving and receiving is in good order, it is generally and characteristically because its judgments, standards, relationships, and institutions have been periodically the subject of communal debate and enquiry and have taken their present form in part as a result of such debate and enquiry" (157).

dependent engagement with other traditions.[80] While Aristotle had little consideration of what could be learned from non-Greek cultures, this general method should remind us of his own account of practical rationality in which we begin from the idea of a complete life and our own failure to achieve it and work toward that goal.

Williams' account of relativism likewise insists on the impossibility of being a relativist while being committed to a particular tradition, but he is far more willing to allow an ameliorated relativism predicated on distance. A relativism of distance arises in the face of notional confrontations with distant cultures that make no difference to our lives. Real confrontations with cultures that are real options for us force us to make moral judgments because they face us with considerations that can speak to our situation; if we do not judge other ways of life in these real confrontations, we are not committed to our own way of life. Other ways of life that are not real options cannot really confront us or come face-to-face with us because the confrontation itself seems 'merely academic;' in these cases, Williams argues, it is possible for us to adopt an attitude of relativism.[81] I think that there is something right about Williams' relativism of distance, but I believe that his real/notional distinction fails because of the ethical judgment inherent in seeing another culture as only notionally confronting our own.

Imagine two systems of belief, whether in ethics, science, or any other field.[82] What would it mean for their relationship to be relativistic in nature? First, they would

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[80]On the notion of replacing one's tradition piecemeal, and for an example of a very different, Hume-inspired ethical account of relativism that takes a similar approach to Williams and MacIntyre, cf. Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), chapter 9. Blackburn, too, insists that neither recognizing difference, nor eschewing external validation, need lead to relativism.

[81]Williams, "The Truth in Relativism," in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 141.

[82]Williams, "The Truth in Relativism," 133*ff.*

have to exclude each other. Allowing for the possibility of incommensurable systems, the most we can say here is that it must be impossible to live in both at the same time; the life-commitments of the one exclude the life-commitments of the other, and possibly vice versa. This exclusiveness explains why there appears to be a conflict between the two systems, even though relativism eventually assures us that there is not.

Second, there needs to be a confrontation between the systems. In Williams' relativism of distance, however, not just any confrontation will do, because total relativism is impossible, at least in ethics. Because ethical outlooks represent patterns of belief and ways of life, some of them are open to us, and some are not. To use Williams' example, we cannot now attempt to live the life of a medieval Samurai, but it is not especially difficult for a secular American to accept the ethic of Buddhism. The former is not a real option, but the latter is. For the secular American to continue as that rather than as a Buddhist, then, she must be implicitly committed to her way of life, which means that her entire way of life confronts the Buddhistic way of life and she assesses it as, in some way, less adequate than her own. It is not possible to commit oneself to a way of life without judging that it is correct, and its exclusiveness at the system level means that any excluded practice is implicitly judged to be less correct.[83]

Total relativism is impossible because we cannot adopt a relativistic attitude toward a system that is a real option for us. Relativism consists of the judgment that there is no real confrontation because there is not one truth for both systems—what is true for you is one thing, and what is true for me is another. By focusing on relativism as a particular attitude that people committed to ways of life must hold, Williams makes it clear that this attitude is impossible when we are face a genuine opponent.

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[83]Williams, "Truth in Relativism," 139.

Some ways of life, however, confront us only notionally, and it is possible for us to adopt a relativistic attitude toward them.[84] Since relativism is possible only when the system we confront is in some way distant from us, Williams calls this a relativism of distance. While he does not attempt to explain why we do not perceive some cultures as real confrontations, his examples of what cultures we would find as real options and which we would not are suggestive. The life of a medieval samurai or of a Bronze Age tribal chief are no longer real options for us, because we cannot possibly reconstruct *that* life. A group of utopian enthusiasts may attempt to make a life similar to it, but they cannot carry it off without pretending that modern, industrial society does not exist, and this would count as mass fantasy or delusion. Whether the members of that society could recreate such a hierarchical society, given our modern beliefs about equality, without suffering from a similar delusion is a different question, and one central to Williams' claim that there is no route back from reflectiveness.[85]

What is involved in our perception that these cultures only notionally confront us? As we already mentioned, it is virtually impossible for there to be a mere notional confrontation in today's world because of our modern travel and communication technology. Presumably then, at an earlier stage of technology, it was possible for cultures to take a relativistic attitude toward spatially distant cultures. The English, first finding out about the Aboriginal way of life in Australia from the journals of Captain Cook, may indeed have chosen to regard them more as curiosities than as human beings

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[84]In his earlier article "The Truth in Relativism," Williams argues that it is requisite for us to take this relativistic attitude, but he lightens his stance in *Ethics* (160, and Chapter 10, fn. 3).

[85]Williams, *Ethics*, 163. Unfortunately, Williams might be a little too optimistic about the extent to which it is generally believed that everyone actually is equal. The 'descent' into hierarchicalism might be easier that he thinks and not require any actual delusion. As is often the case in ethics, Nazi Germany in the 1930s provides a convincing example of just this sort of descent. Rare dissenters aside, the culture proved remarkably receptive to the idea that entire races were higher or lower. Is this impossible now?

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engaged in the same project that they were engaged in, that of living the best possible life. In such a situation, I agree, it would be quite possible to take a relativistic approach toward them. "Oh, it is all right for *them* to be sexually promiscuous," an Englishman might have said, "but it is a different matter entirely for *us*."[86]

When we see another culture as only notionally in confrontation with our own, it is not that we do not judge it, as Williams claims, but that we judge it to be so inferior that it does not represent any real threat to our implicit claim of living in the best way. When we fail to see another culture as a real threat for ourselves, we are already judging it, for how we see things is itself an ethical matter. The virtuous person not only acts correctly in given situations, *she perceives the situation correctly*, and so is *able* to act virtuously. We can correctly perceive that another culture is now impossible for us to inhabit, and thus not a real option, without adopting toward it the attitude that Williams defines as relativistic, but which amounts to the judgment that this way of life is not ethical at all. A relativism of distance encourages us to define some ways of life as *technically* ethical without perceiving them as *really* ethical ways of life at all.

It is interesting in this regard that Williams dismisses most judgments that past cultures are ethically superior to ours as buying into a myth and failing to see what such a life would entail. "Reactionary projects" that attempt to create past, supposedly contented, hierarchical societies face the immediate criticisms that they are fantasies, failures to see the past clearly, and impossible anyway because we are not now in that

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[86]For a harrowing account of Europeans engaged in systematic and paternalistic social engineering, see David Day's *Claiming a Continent: A New History of Australia* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001). The book describes some of the horrible 'charity' of the programs that led to "the Lost Generation," an entire generation of mixed blood Aborigines taken from their parents to be reared in state schools and mingled with white society with the explicit aim of slowly breeding out the Aborigines entirely.

'innocent' position.[87] Without denying that most reactionary projects of this sort

probably do fail to see the past clearly, it is notable that Williams adopts a decidedly

paternalistic tone toward past cultures: only in their 'innocence' could they possibly have

believed those silly things that they did believe. It was all right for *them* to accept such

injustices, ignorant as they were, but it is impossible for *us* now. Given Williams'

valuing of reflectiveness and transparency in ethical systems, it is clear that he is not

abstaining from judging such cultures, even though they are not real options for him; he

is rather judging them to be too inferior and different to be an actual threat to his way of

life. Thus it is possible to take a relativistic attitude of sorts toward them, but it is a

judgmental relativism that already denies their way of life an equal status to our own.

If we do not see another culture as markedly inferior to us, then we will still see it

as in some way a challenge to us, and Williams is certainly right to insist that we must

see such cultures clearly to judge them accurately. In fact, it seems that if we want to

understand them in themselves and see what sort of life they represent, we must not only

understand, in the social scientific fashion that Williams focuses on, what their life was

like; we must imaginatively engage in it, a point that he seems to ignore. We must, that

is, engage in just that moral and philosophical imagination that MacIntyre proposes. Is it

possible imaginatively to engage with all cultures? As Williams points out, cultures are

real options for us to varying degrees. Likewise, our ability to engage a culture

imaginatively appears to be a matter of degree, and clearly we must know a great deal

about a culture before it is ever possible.[88] Given the amount of work that it takes and the

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[87]Williams, *Ethics*, 163-4.

[88]As is often the case, it would appear that literature offers us the best chance to imaginatively engage with a culture, especially if we have great literature from that culture that we can engage with.

amount of knowledge that we have, there are probably some cultures that we simply

cannot ever know enough about to imagine ourselves in, and many that, due to human

limitations, we never actually will imaginatively engage. In these situations, we will

either take Williams' relativism of distance, which I have argued is really just a judgment

of their ethical inferiority, or we will attempt to abstain from judging the culture to be

either right or wrong while insisting that it must be one or the other. It seems to me that

this epistemic humility is the better part of virtue when it comes to the ethical attitude that

we should adopt toward them. Rather than give up on ethical objectivity, we should

accept that some cultures cannot practically confront us.[89]

If relativism is theoretically unimpressive and practically a nonstarter, then what

are we to make of Williams' criticism of the pretense to know others' real interests, even

when they are in other cultures—to have an ethics, that is, which is universally

applicable? Williams agrees with Aristotle that ethics must be closed, that it is only

addressed *to* a certain group because it cannot be based on any uncontentious premises,

but apparently criticizes his attempt to offer an ethical account that is still *for* everyone.

What would it look like for Aristotle's account not to be universal in application? It

would mean that it is addressed only to a particular group and is not believed to apply to

anyone else; in other words, particular applicability is cultural relativity. Even given a

relativism of distance, Williams is already committed, given the practical impossibility of

relativism in real confrontations, to the position that everyone, from within his own

tradition, believes in the universal applicability of his ethical truths. Perhaps we can most

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[89]Rovane has a similar argument based on pragmatic concerns. Why should we accept Williams' pessimism, she asks, when we do not yet know whether or not other cultures may be able to provide us with valuable insights and goads toward a more ethical life? Instead, we should try to embrace realism until such a time as it becomes obvious that realism is truly untenable. Rovane, 278-84.

generously read Williams, then, not as skeptical about ethical systems which claim to be for everyone, but rather as skeptical about the justification for this universal applicability purportedly offered by Aristotle, and generally skeptical about the ability of philosophy to provide any better justification from *outside* ethics. Insofar as a particular practitioner of one understanding of ethics is committed to the claim that this ethics is true *for* everyone, then, Williams would have no argument against her.

My critique of MacIntyre in *Dependent Rational Animals* is rather different. We can engage in ethics only from within a particular tradition, and in this work MacIntyre attempts to offer an account based on the Aristotelian tradition. Unfortunately, some of the details of his account become implausible unless we take him to be implicitly appealing to the Thomistic tradition, with its theistic premises, as well.

The alleged implausibility appears as MacIntyre discusses the concept of just generosity and the patterns of giving and receiving and natural law which justify this intriguing virtue. Perhaps the most obvious example is natural law: without assuming, much as Butler does, that there is a good God who designed my nature so that my responses to things might actually indicate something about their ethical value, why should anyone accept the premise that there is anything remotely like a natural law? To take another example, MacIntyre argues in chapter ten that *misericordia* (pity or mercy *sans* condescension) must extend universally, to anyone that we might meet. "Why is this so? *Misericordia* has regard to urgent and extreme need without respect of persons. It is the kind and scale of the need that dictates what has to be done, not whose need it is."[90] We might be excused for finding this reasoning circular. MacIntyre does go on to say that it is in the nature of communal life that *misericordia* be defined by need rather

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[90]MacIntyre, *DRA*, 124.

than person, or we cannot rely upon receiving when we are in need, but this seems obviously false. For much of history, something very like *misericordia* has been reliably practiced within communities and tribes without ever being extended to those outside of the tribe, and these communities flourished, or at least their lack of flourishing does not seem to be due to a lack of a universal application of *misericordia*. The missing premise, of course, is that all human beings are people as deserving of benefit from my virtues as my own tribe, and while this is easily supplied by a consideration of the Bible, it is difficult to see how MacIntyre's Aristotelianism could go about justifying it without that resource.

Christian Relativism?

The discussion of relativism and the need to begin from within one's own particular tradition leads us naturally to a discussion of what Christians should believe about relativism and the proper role and limits of reflection. Realism, as Rovane points out in keeping with MacIntyre, is most basically the acceptance that there is one complete body of truths that applies equally to everyone.[91] Any classical theist, it seems to me, must accept this claim. It is not possible for God to be wrong, so what he knows to be the truth is the one complete body of truth. At the same time, the realist is *not* committed to the thesis that this complete body of truth is accessible to human beings, so no amount of disagreement about the ethical life would count as a disproof that such a body of truth exists. Christians who believe that ethics must ultimately be grounded upon the deeper

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[91]Rovane, 265. Significantly, not everyone accepts Rovane's picture of realism and relativism, though I believe it is the correct one. Harman, for instance, defines the moral absolutist position in terms of a belief about reasons that are available to people: the absolutist believes that there are things that everyone has an adequate reason to hope or wish for. Harman, in other words, defines any open ethical account as relativism. He refuses to consider something as absolutism if it merely posits that there is one moral law for everyone without also positing that everyone has reason to follow that law (cf. Harman 370-1). This muddies the issue unhelpfully. There are many other views as well. Cf. Gowan and Rovane for a partial classification of such views, though neither considers the option I urge.

truths of a different reality can allow that we do not see that reality fully and do not always know how to live without acceding to relativism.

While for Christians there are some clear commands in Scripture, such as the commands to love mercy (or loyalty; the Hebrew is *hesed*) and care for the poor, to act justly, and to walk humbly with God, these commands, while clear, are not always easy to apply. Often our particular understanding of how we apply these commands depends more upon our cultural understandings, of which we can accurately give a genealogical account that should give us pause in accepting them at face value, than upon the clear meaning of the commands themselves. These ethical principles, while certainly not thin, can be thickened differently by different cultures in different times, and we should hesitate to assume that our own instantiation of them is the correct interpretation.

Relativism, as an attitude, is impossible when a completely different way of life faces me, but it is possible in a small way when particular practices that are sufficiently removed from these core principles seem to conflict with our own. We can, that is, take an attitude of relativism toward practices and beliefs that are sufficiently removed from the core principles, values, and beliefs that motivate our own ethical structure. Indeed, we can go even further: we *should* take an attitude of relativism toward practices and beliefs that are sufficiently removed from the core principles, values, and beliefs that motivate our own ethical structure.

Etiquette does not differ in kind from ethics, but by degree of cultural seriousness. As Philippa Foot points out in her seminal essay, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives,"[92] the 'should' of "You should hold your fork in your right hand as you eat,

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[92]Philippa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," *Philosophical Review* 81, no. 3 (July 1972): 305-16.

but in your left as you cut," is not different in kind from "You should not stab people with forks for no reason." It is different only in degree.[93] This is not to deny that there is an important difference between the two: it may be difficult to say whether Augustine or Boethius are in the Classical Era or in the Middle Ages, but that does not mean that there are not clear cases as well, such as Aristotle and Aquinas.[94] There are cases, though, where a mature person exposed to another practice should be able to abstain from judging because it is not part of what is crucially ethical—cases such as eating habits perhaps, or customs of driving. On the other hand, there will be cases that clearly are ethical where a practically committed person would find relativism untenable—cases such as systemic violence against a particular race. In between there will be many cases that are not clear at all, and the ability to discern whether or not relativism is appropriate, and the emotional and spiritual maturity to adopt the attitude of relativism when it is appropriate, requires virtues that appear closely related to practical wisdom and the ability to see the world accurately.

Conclusion

It is difficult to see how we could adequately specify any person's real interest exhaustively, and even harder to see how we could specify every person's real interest, from external criteria acceptable to everyone, but this should not dissuade us from the necessary belief that we know something about the real interests of everyone from within our own tradition. If we are unable to sustain this belief in the face of reflection, then as

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[93]This is not, naturally, her example, since this particular rule of etiquette does not apply in Britain.

[94]I owe this type of example to Hugo Meynell's "Ethics and the Limits of Bernard Williams," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 351-66.

Williams points out, it is likely that we must either alter our tradition or exchange it for another. The diversity of meanings of virtue terms is a genuine problem, but largely for our communication with other traditions, because the meaning of the virtue term within my own tradition must be justifiable from the specification of happiness within my own tradition. From within the Christian tradition, I have suggested, we must be willing to allow for some relativism in matters that are less central to our religious and ethical concerns, and must work reflectively between the twin poles of happiness and scripture as we attempt to gain an ever better understanding of how it is good for human beings to live, how they can truly be happy. We do not know precisely that list of virtues that is necessary for human beings to be happy, but we do know some of them, even if we must constantly work to understand even these virtues better. There is a set of virtues for human beings that is exclusively and exhaustively necessary for happiness, I conclude, but we cannot know it perfectly and must constantly work to understand it more fully. After considering how we can respond to counterexamples, we will take up the challenge of giving an example of this work in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

Like a Tree Planted by Water: Counterexamples and Justice

Relativism and the coincident concern with real interests have caused us to ameliorate the necessity thesis accordingly for Christians, but overall we continue to hold to a strong necessity thesis: there is some definite list of virtues, known in part and in generalities, that is necessary for human happiness even here on earth, and which is sufficient and necessary absolutely for happiness when heaven is considered. We turn now to the obvious counterexamples, to the claim that regardless of any fine theory of happiness, the fact remains that wicked people *are* happy. Once we have shown that these claims are false, we will turn to a demonstration of how the necessity thesis is supposed to be helpful in defining certain virtues, showing that a consideration of scripture and of human flourishing can give us a clear (if, in this chapter, necessarily vague) idea of what the personal virtue of justice consists in.

Counterexamples

The wicked flourish like the green bay tree, as happy as clams and a good deal more active, "by any ethological standard of the bright eye and the gleaming coat;"[1] if this is true, it is a decisive counterexample to the thesis of this entire essay, that virtue is necessary for happiness. There are few arguments for the conclusion that the wicked are or can be happy, and these usually take the form of plausibility primers: anecdotes and descriptions designed to 'prime the pump' of intuition. A theist such as Butler, as noted above, *does* have a strong argument that wicked people simply cannot be happy, though

[1]Williams, *Ethics*, 46.

admittedly one that does little to mediate between the theory and the observations appealed to by those who believe that wicked people are happy. A Thomistic response of the sort that MacIntyre hints at has a version of this response as well: virtue is necessary for true happiness, a state that is found only in communion with God in the beatific vision. Some of the virtues necessary for this life must be infused by God through grace (notably faith, hope, and love), so this does not become a 'gospel of works,' but the point remains that we must have these virtues to be saved and finally happy. The more costly, and perhaps more interesting, necessity thesis, however, must address happiness as we experience it now, though this need not be separated from spiritual practice.

What then can we say in response to these proposed counterexamples? While I will propose some general answers and make some observations relevant to any case, each counterexample finally must be addressed as it arises if we are to avoid a blank appeal to theory as our sole response. Certainly a proponent of the necessity thesis could reasonably explain that from within the boundaries of the tradition of virtue ethics generally and Aristotelianism generally, virtues are defined as those states necessary for happiness, and by relying on this definition, simply deny any place for counterexamples. There are two problems with this response: first, not everyone in virtue ethics accepts the necessity thesis, so it is not the case that it is *required* by the particular tradition; second, such a response makes the necessity thesis all but meaningless by making it analytic.

This is not to deny that the virtue ethicist who accepts the necessity thesis *must* rely upon this definitional response at some level; it is simply to urge that a meaningful defense of the necessity thesis must provide arguments for the understandings of virtue and happiness involved, as I did above, and must attempt to provide resources for dealing

with apparent counterexamples.[2] Of course, *all of these arguments, explanations, and observations will themselves assume the truth, at some level, of the tradition of which they are a part*. If we have learned anything from our discussion of real interests, it is that there is no starting point from outside all assumptions. Tradition-bound arguments are not simply circular, however, for there remains the hope that in appealing to particular examples and in honestly attempting to engage our imaginations within rival traditions, we will come to understand what before was closed to us.

Case by Case: Argument by Thought-Experiment

   Arguments by example come in two forms. The first, and simplest, attempts to offer a recognizable character who is both vicious in some clear way and perceivably happy; the second attempts to offer an account in which, typically, someone must choose between a life which would make her happy and a life which would be virtuous, and we are supposed to recognize that the two divide in a problematic fashion. Examples of happy vicious people, which we will turn to in a moment, are effective and clearly valid counterexamples to a claim of necessity, but division examples tend to fail because they fall foul of a dilemma, either assuming what they are trying to prove, or providing counterexamples to a sufficiency, but not a necessity, thesis.

   Thus, Daniel Haybron offers an example concerning a diplomat, Angela, who must choose between a well-earned, comfortable retirement and taking on one last, important, but taxing assignment, and argues that the Aristotelian must say that Angela

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[2]Thus, Haybron, who argues against 'perfectionist' views on the grounds that they generally confuse well-being, happiness, and the 'good life,' points out a general difficulty for perfectionist views: "they need to maintain credible theories of *both* well-being and virtue, and moves to preserve their account of one can easily undermine their view of the other." Daniel M. Haybron, "Well-Being and Virtue," 8.

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should take the assignment but that she would be happier retiring—happier, that is, if she were less virtuous: "In taking the job, Angela chose the path of greater excellence and virtue… but she was not securing or promoting her happiness or well-being. She was *sacrificing* it."[3] Haybron is wrong on both counts. The Aristotelian does not have one value and does not weigh international altruism above other values, such as the goods of a quiet life near family, nor, if we allow that taking on the assignment is more virtuous, should any Aristotelian allow that she is thereby obviously less happy since the virtuous nature of her decision is supposed to add to her happiness. He cannot *assume* that virtue is disconnected from happiness to *argue* that virtue is not necessary for happiness. His argument purports to be open to everyone while remaining tradition-bound.[4]

Perhaps, more plausibly, Haybron's conclusion is not that Angela would be just obviously happier if she retired, but that she *might* be, so that acting more virtuously does not ensure that she will be happier than when acting slightly less virtuously. If this, however, is his argument (he seems to be unaware of the distinction and says things suggesting both readings), then he is convicting the Aristotelian of not holding a sufficiency thesis, a charge to which the Aristotelian will happily plead guilty. Granted, acting more virtuously (allowing for the moment that it is more virtuous to take the assignment) does not guarantee her being happier, but she will certainly not gain greater happiness from acting viciously.

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[3]Haybron, "Well-Being and Virtue," 10.

[4]Haybron's arguments gain plausibility if we assume his psychological view of happiness, but this is precisely what is at issue. Perhaps the most charitable reading is that these are not the arguments they purport to be, but are a noting of the consequences that follow if we accept his earlier definitions and so are an attempt to help us imaginatively take on his perspective (cf. "Well-Being and Virtue," 6, where he notes an Aristotelian response but states that no one not already committed to Aristotelianism would accept it… which is rather the point).

Other examples, as noted above, are simpler and more to the point, and so are both harder and easier to answer. Haybron offers, as an example of this kind, Genghis Kahn, who seems to have acted morally by his own cultural standards, but surely fails to have the virtues that we have considered central to a Christian set of virtues, those of mercy and justice. Of course, Genghis Kahn had a nasty tendency to live in fear and commit Stalin-like purges of all of those close to him, and he died regretting that he had not conquered the whole world, so perhaps he is not the best example of happiness.[5] Steven M. Cahn presents, as a thought experiment, "Fred, a fictitious person, but an amalgamation of several people I have known."[6] Fred has pursued fame, wealth, and a reputation for probity, all of which he has acquired in spades, while caring nothing for friendship or truth. "Now he rests self-satisfied, basking in renown, delighting in luxuries, and relishing praise for his reputed commitment to the highest moral standards." Clearly Fred lives a life of great pleasure, and Cahn suggests that he is clearly happy; *we*, on the other hand, are not happy with him, and wish to deny his happiness out of moralizing pettiness. "We can," Cahn notes derisively, "define 'happiness' so as to falsify the claim that Fred is happy. This philosophical sleight-of-hand, though, accomplishes little, for Fred is wholly contented, suffering no worries or anxieties. Indeed, he is smug, as he revels in his exalted position."[7]

What shall we say to this example? Surely we do not wish to maintain the necessity thesis by a "philosophical sleight-of-hand," but our lengthy discussion of

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[5]Haybron, "Well-Being and Virtue," 5-6.

[6]Steven Cahn, "The Happy Immoralist," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 1.

[7]Ibid. Cahn is careful to assure us that Fred *desires* fame, wealth, and a reputation for probity, but does not desire friends and other such commonly recognized goods that he lacks, and that he rests self-satisfied; Cahn, we can safely conclude, holds to a desire-satisfaction or life-satisfaction theory of happiness.

happiness above has already attempted to avoid this by defining a defeasible concept that I allege to be recognizably one in use, and the one that concerns us most in ethics. Perhaps the best approach, then, is to suggest various concerns which push us toward the conclusion that Fred is not so happy as Cahn proposes by anyone's standards. As Williams notes after proposing the ethological standard quoted above, "it is a significant question, how far [such vicious happy people's] existence, indeed the thought of their existence, is a cultural phenomenon. They seem sleeker and finer at a distance."[8] The more closely we actually observe the tawdry business practices and ephemeral pleasures of such Machiavellian businesspeople as Fred, the less likely that we will consider them to be either so happy, or so evil, as they at first appear.

The considerations here are ancient and have been found powerful by a long line of philosophers, all of whom insist that happiness is not the sort of thing that we get by achieving things such as fame, wealth, or a *reputation* for probity: wealth is easily lost, and so an infirm basis for lasting happiness, and wealth, power, and renown merely set us up for the scorn and machinations of others, depriving us of any meaningful rest; likewise, we cannot control ephemeral fame but depend on the disquieting attentions of others who care about us less than we believe, making our happiness a practice in self-deception.[9] Fred may well live in a state of euphoria, and may (though I rather doubt that he would) count himself the happiest of persons, but this should not count overly much toward *our* counting him happy. The problem is not, as Cahn supposes, that we are not

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[8]Williams, *Ethics*, 46.

[9]Cf. Plato's *Republic* (one man's Fred is another man's Gyges); Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Victor Watts, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1999); Butler; and the conclusion of Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp, Oxford Philosophical Texts (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); these among others who suggest many more considerations that push the same direction.

happy to consider him happy, but that we have good reason to believe that Fred is himself deceived concerning his happiness.

I have, in following these ancient arguments, assumed with these classical authors that happiness is the sort of thing that one can be wrong about, that it needs to be long-lasting, and that it needs to be based on the truth. But only by assuming the opposite does Cahn's example gain any grasp on us. In short, it may well appear that the believer in the happily vicious person and I have nothing but alternative stories to offer, each of which assumes an understanding of happiness that the other denies. I have openly admitted the necessary circularity of any ethical theory which makes no pretense to openness, but there is no place to stand *outside* of an ethical theory, and so all that either of us can offer is a persuasive description. As I consider what the life of Fred would actually be like, filled with the possibility of being discovered, my only pleasures those that can be purchased and my own arrogant pride in what I have accomplished, and utterly lacking in friends and love, I cannot possibly consider Fred to be a happy person.

Williams' second point, that evil people are not so wicked as they seem, appears odd at first sight—certainly Fred isn't someone we want our daughter bringing home for dinner—but Williams points out how evil has become a more tawdry and petty affair, especially in modern life as evil has been institutionalized and collectivized, making it both more powerful and less interesting or obviously *vicious*. This is not to deny the real evil that the Freds of the world do, but rather to point out that few of them would accept the principles that Cahn imputes to Fred. People do not tend to think of themselves as evil anymore, if they ever did; they fall into it through a million little selfish and even seemingly unselfish decisions ("It will make life harder on everyone if I rock the

boat…").[10] Fred is not obviously a much more vicious person than the rest of us, but rather a weaker person, shaped by forces he does not understand and unable to appreciate pleasures better than any he has ever sought through his own puny spiritlessness. A second point in response to such counterexamples, then, is that even if we are right and virtue is necessary for happiness, none of us is *fully* virtuous or *fully* happy.

This is not, as it may appear, to fall back on the otherworldly nature of happiness. It is true, for Christians, that we will not be fully happy until we stand in the presence of God and partake of God's joy, but the thesis I wish to defend in this essay is stronger than that, incorporating as it does even such earthly (true) happiness as we can experience now. Even so, there is no doubt that given our current earthly (fallen) existence, none of us succeeds in being fully happy, lacking in nothing, just as none of us succeeds in being completely virtuous. The necessity thesis remains interesting if it maintains, as it does, that even so, a more virtuous life is necessary for more happiness. Fred, even reimagined, is surely less virtuous than most people because his loves are deeply confused, yet even so we must not allow our thought experiments to become so ridiculous that we imagine him to be utterly without virtue, and so it need not shock us if he manages to capture a few moments of (what certainly looks like) genuine happiness. Yet even so, in the very fact that these are but a few moments, Fred is obviously missing anything like the sort of lasting happiness that we sought to define in chapter two.

A similar sort of response must do for Gauguin as well. Gauguin felt deeply that he could not pursue his art in purity while weighed down with a family, and so

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[10]In his footnote, Williams intriguingly suggests that good has followed the exact opposite path, meaning, I take it, that as evil has become institutionalized, it has become much harder and more interesting to be good than it was in the past. This may or may not be true, but it is certainly an interesting suggestion.

abandoned his family for Paris, and then for the South Seas. Christians should clearly

insist that Gauguin's loves are badly disordered, but we need not deny that there are some

genuine virtues, or at least partial virtues, inherent in his steadfast search for artistic

purity and his disciplined devotion to his art. If he achieved some small measure of

happiness (and the biographical record gives us little reason to think that there was more)

in his new life, should this actually shock someone committed to the necessity thesis but

equally recognizant of the fallenness of human beings?

Curiously, we often ascribe happiness to others when we ourselves would not be

happy in similar circumstances. Cahn describes Fred as happy because he has a great

deal of wealth and fame and a good reputation and achieved his goals, but would Cahn

himself be happy knowing that his reputation was undeserved, that he had no friends, and

that the admiration of others was all false or based on envy? But if we would not be

happy in those circumstances, why believe that someone else is? Here we see a genuine

weakness of thought experiments that invent or amalgamate fictional characters in brief

examples: we can ascribe to the character whatever emotions we like, for in the absence

of a complete story, of the narrative unity of a life, our sense of verisimilitude is given

little to grasp. A careful consideration of fuller characters portrayed in rich, descriptive

literature provides the only cure, but such readings require care and space we cannot

assign them here; for a brief effort, however, let us turn to the work of Jane Austen.

Austen and Arguments through Narratives

In one of Austen's more obviously moralistic works, *Mansfield Park*, the young

Fanny Price, the penniless eldest daughter of a sister who eloped with a poor soldier, is

brought to live with her uncle, the wealthy Sir Thomas Bertram. Fanny, the picture of

goodness in the novel though perhaps too shy (in many ways the opposite of Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*, she interestingly manifests many of the same virtues), falls in love with Sir Thomas's younger son, the almost equally virtuous Edmund, though this is not returned until the conclusion of the work. The other three children of the house are, unfortunately, less good than Edmund, and live a life largely given over to the pursuit of pleasure, which they soon pursue in company with the newly arrived Crawfords. Henry Crawford, in particular, flirts with both daughters to an objectionable extent, but finally comes (in part, we are led to believe, because of her own steady indifference) to be possessed of a deep passion for Fanny which remains quite unrequited.

Henry represents everything that Fanny does not, he is impetuous and unsteady, and he ill-perceives how to act according to the deepest propriety, taking part in numerous flirtations and activities that he should not undertake. His own sister, who loves him rather too well to see his faults, indicates her shock that he loves Fanny and suggests (as a compliment!) that even when he ceases to love her he will still act the gentleman toward her. Henry's faults have their ground in his rearing, we are led to believe, for he takes as an exemplar the Admiral Crawford, who is, in every way, the true opposite of Fanny.[11] In the face of his sister's assertion, Henry, with all the blithe eloquence of his nature, assured her that it was *impossible* that he should ever cease to love Fanny or cease to work for her happiness in everything.

Having made his intentions known to Fanny, and being met with no encouragement, Henry refuses to accept this response and applies to her uncle as a suitor.

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[11]Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, in *The Complete Novels* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 656. Cf. his later description: "Henry Crawford, ruined by early independence and bad domestic example, indulged in the freaks of a cold-blooded vanity a little too long" (762).

It is through the eyes of virtuous and respected Sir Thomas that we see the world's perspective on Henry: he is a young man with "everything to recommend him; not merely situation in life, fortune, and character, but with more than common agreeableness, with address and conversation pleasing to every body."[12] In short, Henry appears the very image of respectability and agreeableness, and yet has the benefits of being something of a rogue; he is wealthy, powerful, approved by even the noble Sir Thomas and the virtuous Edmund, and able to assist Fanny and her family in innumerable ways (as he has already done for her much-loved brother). And yet Fanny refuses to marry him, and in so doing appears to be ungrateful, willful and perverse, and decidedly stupid, for there is little doubt that she would be marrying far above her prospects in taking Henry. Sir Thomas accuses her of all of this and more, and she will only insist that she cannot make him happy and that Henry would make her miserable, unwilling to accuse his cousins by describing the flirtations that she has witnessed as proof of Henry's intemperateness.

In stark juxtaposition to this pleasing picture of Henry and unflattering portrait of Fanny are Sir Thomas's comments in the first half of his interview with Fanny. Having found the frail girl without a fire in her apartment, Sir Thomas wishes to know why and Fanny rather confusedly tries to explain that her rather domineering Aunt Norris had not allowed it. Sir Thomas immediately understands and assures her that it will not continue, but also attempts to alleviate any bitterness that she might feel, though he knows her too well to suppose that she will feel any resentment. He notes, "You have an understanding, which will prevent you from receiving things only in part, and judging partially by the event.—You will take in the whole of the past, you will consider times, persons, and probabilities, and you will feel that *they* were not least your friends who were educating

[12]Austen, 668.

and preparing you for that mediocrity of condition which *seemed* to be your lot."[13] This, of course, is precisely what he fails to do in the immediately following conversation, taking Henry's apparent virtue and elegance as constancy and love, while Fanny, in considering the past, times, persons, and probabilities, knows Henry's true character and cannot brook an attachment to him, not only for her own sake but even for his.

Clearly Fanny has not only the virtues peculiar to Jane Austen's time and condition, but those described as essential by Aristotle and MacIntyre as well: the ability to see the true situation and to respond correctly, the patience to deal with others' infirmities and failings fairly, and the justice and prudence to refuse to subject herself to an ill-conceived marriage through a mistaken notion of obedience or duty or gratitude. In short, Fanny shows many of the virtues of the dependent rational animal, which are so hard to achieve, but in this scene demonstrates too that independence of practical reasoning that sets apart a truly virtuous person. Henry, contrariwise, is clearly vicious, being intemperate, selfish, and conniving, but he has just those social graces which allow him to fool both himself and others, even those who generally perceive other's character accurately, such as Sir Thomas and Edmund. And yet it is Fanny who appears to be miserable, having lost the respect of those whom she respects, and out of favor with the family that allows her to avoid a horrible existence with her own wretched family, while Henry appears to have all of the ill-gotten fruits of his apparent virtue and happiness.

Austen carefully demonstrates the falsity of this perspective through her continuing narrative. Henry, having been rejected by Fanny yet again, has an affair with Sir Thomas's eldest married daughter, ruining them both as well as his sister and

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[13]Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 666.

demonstrating to everyone his own inconstancy. Fanny and Edmund, brought together through the fallout from the affair, rapidly marry, making Fanny and everyone else very happy indeed. It is, importantly, *not* this happily-ever-after ending that shows the necessity of virtue for happiness; without this denouement, Fanny would still have been happy and Henry would have failed to secure this state in any genuine fashion.[14] Half-banished to her family's home in Portsmouth, Fanny remains the same virtuous person, unwilling still to snatch at the gallant Henry's offers or to allow that his flirtations meant more than she knew they meant, even though she has every reason to believe that she is thereby dooming herself to a life of true penury. Even more, while she is not, perhaps, finally happy until she attains Edmund, she is not actually miserable wherever she is, because she has the true understanding that her uncle ascribed to her.

Henry, on the other hand, is so inconstant that it is meaningless to speak of his happiness in any depth. Though able to appear fairly virtuous, he is unable to come to decisions on his own, when he does decide on his own usually does so badly, and is generally what we might today call 'flighty.' His own sister, in attempting to persuade Edmund that Henry must now marry the woman he has run off with, insists that Sir Thomas should not attempt to persuade her to leave him (though this was undoubtedly the more virtuous course), for then he would be much less likely to marry her having been given a chance to realize that he does not love her. If even his own sister, who has rather weak principles and loves him too much, sees the inconstancy in his character, it

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[14]Austen herself offers something of the difference between types of happiness that we described in such detail in chapter two, with all of the interest on the side of enduring and virtuous happiness. The week of the play, a period of the greatest indiscretion, becomes a litmus test of sorts for all of the characters. Those like Edmund who are truly virtuous regret it and see it as a time of general folly (689), while those who have more pretence to virtue than the true article, such as Henry's sister, Mary, continue to see it as a time of supreme happiness (694-5).

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must run deep. Austen concludes that Henry had once, "by an opening undesigned and unmerited," been led into the way of happiness, and that it would have been his if he had persevered in pursuing Fanny and become as virtuous as her influence would have made him. When the moment came to choose, however, he did not return to his property after his visit to Fanny in Portsmouth, as he had told her that he would and knew that he should, but instead went to London and fell into evil company. "Curiosity and vanity were both engaged, and the temptation of immediate pleasure was too strong for a mind unused to make any sacrifice to right,"[15] and so he falls into that misery which Fanny's virtue had protected her from in much worse circumstances, because he knows that it is his own vice which has led to his downfall.

From a distance it is undoubtedly Henry Crawford who appears to have the greatest happiness for much of *Mansfield Park*, but in his self-conceit and vanity, Henry fails to grasp the happiness that might eventually have been his under Fanny's tutelage, and in her virtue Fanny finally achieves that happiness that is her due reward. These are not the accidental or parochial conclusions of Jane Austen, nor the conclusions demanded by a moralized Western audience (as Cahn suggests), but the outcomes of a full description of the life made possible only through virtue, the life of true happiness, and these conclusions are echoed in every convincing account of virtue and happiness.

What Is It Good for?

Given certain natural Aristotelian assumptions that I tried to make plausible in the first chapter, and given certain Christian beliefs discussed above, we can and should maintain a fairly vigorous necessity thesis according to which true happiness depends

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[15]Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 762-3. As Aristotle notes, virtue and vice have very much to do with pleasure and pain; how we respond to them, and what we take them in.

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upon our having a certain list of virtues that we can begin to know partially now through an exploration of happiness and scripture. This is not to suggest that other ethical accounts may not have their own good reasons for accepting and defending the necessity thesis, but they will be rather different reasons, differently defended. Kantians, for example, may or may not accept Kant's teleological argument for heaven based on the need for ultimate justice, and hence the necessity (and sufficiency) of virtue for this ultimate happiness. Even if they do accept his argument, however, his acceptance of the necessity thesis will clearly be for different reasons and from different premises. Notably, Kant's acceptance of the necessity thesis did nothing to define the virtues, precisely because this happiness remains in the *noumenal* realm.

But does the necessity thesis help define the virtues or play any other role even in virtue ethics, or is it, at best, a mildly interesting corollary to some accounts of virtue ethics supported solely by definition? This is an important charge, in part because it is not entirely false: the necessity thesis, as we have already seen, does indeed rely largely on a particular definition of happiness which intelligent people can plausibly resist and on a certain understanding of its relationship to virtue. The answer takes two parts. First, as shown in chapter two, while the rich definition of happiness employed in the necessity thesis can be plausibly denied, it represents one central use of that concept and, moreover, the most important use in the decisions of practical rationality. When considering whether a particular state of character will lead to an end, this is the sort of end rational people have in mind, and not the more subjectivist view.

Second, the necessity thesis is not a mere corollary, because it has a number of important roles to play in virtue ethics and in practical life. Consider, first, the role

assigned it by Butler, who believed that proving the necessity thesis would give those who remained vicious excellent reasons to begin to strive to be virtuous. Striving for virtue, of course, is a complicated matter. It is like striving for happiness in that regard, and as Butler pointed out, too near a focus on the end in such matters is likely to result in missing exactly that end; just as happiness requires that we fulfill other particular desires, so virtue requires that we act from other particular motives, such as the desire for justice, or out of love for an individual, rather than from the general motive to be virtuous. Still, a second-order desire to be virtuous can give us a second-order reason to be virtuous when first order motivations are present but relatively weak, and so is worth inculcating.

Of course, Butler believed that he could give *anyone* good reasons to be virtuous because *everyone* possesses a conscience. The matter is rather more complicated for those who do not believe that ethics is open, because the attractions of a virtuous life gain purchase only on those who are already virtuous. This should indicate to us that happiness itself, as here described, will have a limited purchase on those lacking in virtue, meaning that they will not find it to be as attractive as it in fact is. The necessity thesis is not aimed at those outside of ethics except to the extent that it is part of a complete and coherent theory which may, through the mechanisms described at length above, become attractive to those from a competing theory or tradition.

This points, however, to the true role of the necessity thesis in education and motivation for those who desire virtue but are not yet fully virtuous. MacIntyre has an excellent discussion of the possibilities for failure inherent in the attempt to educate the young into virtue, which we do by helping them to achieve the virtues of independent practical reasoners as dependent animals. Children must learn to evaluate their reasons,

as well as their desires, by stepping back and asking if these are the sorts of desires and reasons which they should possess, and to do this adequately they must have an imagination capable of grasping different possible futures. It is an uncontroversial example of real interests at work to note that children, although they may well know their own *desires* better than anyone, still do not know, or do not always know, their own best *interests*.[16] To assist them in this transition, then, their parents must have the intellectual virtues to recognize this real interest and the moral virtues to apply the proper training consistently; the same, of course, goes for other teachers and adults in their lives.

We can now add to this admirable description a discussion of how the virtuous parent might try to inculcate a particular set of motivations within his or her child. How does the child come to want to be virtuous in the first place? Of course, a large part of this desire must come from being reared to value virtue through seeing admired exemplars value and consistently apply the various virtues which are described to the child. In the same way that a love for the Steelers or Lady Bears can be (somewhat) reliably inculcated in a child simply by surrounding the child with people who love and cheer on the Steelers or Lady Bears, evidence a value for these teams in their lives by watching games and being emotionally attached to their successes and failures, and generally acting like a fan, so virtuous parents can (somewhat) reliably inculcate a love for the virtues into a child simply by surrounding that child with people who take the virtues seriously, discuss them reverently, and enact them reliably.

It is precisely as the child begins to become an independent practical reasoner, however, that other tools may be necessary and should be employed, for the child should

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[16]Cf. MacIntyre, *DRA*, 71*ff.*

be given internal reasons, where possible, to act in virtuous ways even when she desires otherwise. She should be given reasons, that is, why *this* is a circumstance in which she should reshape her desires and act as she believes to be virtuous. It is here that the necessity thesis may play a role, as the child is shown that precisely that which she must desire most, her own happiness, defined as a complete, and virtuous life, requires that she be virtuous. It is only as she becomes virtuous that she will begin to achieve the happiness that she has already been reared to desire.

Nor does the necessity thesis cease to play this role when we cease to be children, precisely because none of us ever achieves full virtue. If we do not desire to act as we know that we should act, we are not fully virtuous, but we may yet be constant, and the continent man does not come in for Aristotle's worst criticism. In striving to act as we know we should, it may be helpful to remember what we have already accepted, that true happiness requires us to act as we should and that only such practice can inculcate the virtues more fully within.

The obvious objection is that we have reintroduced egoism by suggesting that people are *ultimately* virtuous just because this is required for happiness. This is false for much the same reason that it was false when charged against Butler: virtuous people do not act to attain happiness; they act for the reasons particular to the virtue that they are manifesting. It seems plausible that for some virtues this would include acting for my general well-being and happiness, as this egoistic reading suggests. If I am temperate, for example, it is quite right that at least one of the normal motivations for my not overeating is the knowledge that it will lead to a host of short-term and long-term derogations of my overall well-being and happiness. I may also be motivated by certain considerations of

justice (others do not have this sort of food, or this sort of food is produced in some unjust manner), or by considerations of love and generosity (my wife needs me to stay around for a while, so I have to watch my health for her), but surely it is right for one of my considerations and motivations to be simply my own happiness.[17] For many, if not most, virtues, however, I am not acting virtuously, I am not acting for the right reasons, if I take my own happiness into account as a central motivation. In saying that we may still rely upon the necessity thesis for needed motivation, then, I am not suggesting that it will commonly be our sole motivation for virtuous action, though it may be a goad toward virtue at times. I am less than fully virtuous if I must convince myself to act justly by considering the fact that it will be easier to live with myself after the fact, but this does not make this an untoward consideration for those striving to become more virtuous.

Even for the fully virtuous, if such existed, we might think that the necessity thesis can play a role as something of a second-order motivator, the cause of a desire to be virtuous. The difficulty is in seeing where this thought is supposed to arise. Certainly the virtuous person is not motivated to be virtuous *at the time* of a virtuous action by the consideration that this action will lead to his happiness, or he fails to be virtuous.[18] A wife might reasonably be insulted if her husband considers the effect that loving her, and acting appropriately, would have upon his own happiness, *at the time* when he should be loving her and acting appropriately. If, for example, she falls suddenly ill and he must convince himself to go to the hospital by considering how such an action will affect his own happiness, then we have serious reason to doubt whether he is virtuous (and

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[17]I owe a deeper understanding of this issue to Robert Roberts.

[18]I am assuming the above proviso concerning temperance, etc., where this *is* a proper concern.

specifically whether he *loves* her); in Williams' memorable phrase, he appears to be

having 'one thought too many.'[19] Suppose the illness continues for a long time, however,

that she is difficult and not herself due to the sickness and the drugs, and that his visits

are trying to him, though an expressed comfort to herself. The husband begins by going

to the hospital out of love, generosity, kindness, and generally a concern for his wife, but

suppose that on one particular hard day when the children are difficult and complaining

about the visit, he must convince himself to continue to manifest these virtues (by, we are

assuming, visiting his wife). What sorts of considerations might come into play?

He might well consider all of the ways that she has cared for him and all that he

owes to her (the rules of giving and receiving stressed by MacIntyre); he might convince

himself that he is the sort of man who visits his wife when she is in need, a virtuous man

who cares for his wife and *loves* her, and that she will be very disappointed if he cancels;

and he will consider some practical considerations, such as the fact that she will be more

difficult the next day and that their relationship will be harmed by his failure.[20] Might he

consider here, as well, that his own deepest happiness requires his virtuous action? He

might, and if it is of use to him, then it is well considered as he strives to act virtuously,

but just how much motivation might this actually give? This probably depends on how

lively a picture he paints to himself of his own happiness and its dependence on his

virtue. The more virtuous we are, ironically, the more aware we are of our own failings,

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[19]Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality," in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 18.

[20]Even if he succeeds in convincing himself to go, he looks no longer virtuous but only continent since he goes against some of his desires and inclinations in acting rightly, but this is false. The continent man does not consistently have the *right* desires to begin with and so must struggle against his own character in acting correctly; the virtuous man cannot have a struggle caused by his character when considering a virtuous action, but he may well have struggles caused by external factors of the sort this description employs. For two excellent discussions of this point, cf. Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices," in *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978): 1-18; and Hursthouse's discussion of Foot in chapter 4.

and it seems quite likely to me that any such attempt at motivation would falter on the shoals of a far too distant and imperceptible effect: sure, this failing will affect his virtue and make it harder for him to be happy, but other failings would prevent his full happiness even without this one, and happiness involves a fair amount of comfort and pleasure as well which he will be surrendering in visiting his wife. In short, while such a consideration may play such a secondary role in motivation, it will likely do so only in someone trained to consider this very intimately, and when it comes to training, some of the earlier considerations, such as his wife's real comfort and need, are better considerations to imbue within him.

There is, however, a consideration similar to this in which the necessity thesis might play a positive role, that of reflective endorsement, both personally and communally.[21] Recall what we said above in discussing practical reason and its role according to MacIntyre: in seeking to justify any particular practice, we must rely upon some deeper conception, some accepted and, when communal justification is the goal, some shared 'fact' or truth. For Aristotelians, the deepest fact that we can appeal to is happiness. The necessity thesis plays a role in reflective endorsement when a virtuous person stands back (perhaps in a 'cool' hour) and reflects on whether or not he is justified in accepting the ethic and particular virtues that he accepts. If he is able, through practical reason, to convince himself that by the standards and principles of his own theory he is so justified, then he reflectively can and should endorse that ethic and the particular virtues accepted in it. In endorsing it, he is strengthening his own warrant for

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[21]The term 'reflective endorsement' for this role comes from Hursthouse, who offers a response quite similar to the one that I have ascribed to MacIntyre and Williams (interestingly she attributes it to McDowell and Foot, though she notes that neither is likely to agree with her) (163*ff*).

his moral beliefs and perhaps even learning something of moral value. Here may be a place where philosophy has a positive role in ethics.[22] It is an interesting question whether Williams would accept this role, given his thesis concerning the limitations of philosophy in ethics. I think that he would; as we already pointed out above, Williams and MacIntyre both propose a similar justification, though neither appeals to the necessity thesis in doing so. Reflective endorsement is what we get when, with MacIntyre, we stand back from particular practices and subject them to criticism from the viewpoint of the whole, and likewise what we get when, with Williams, we find that our tradition is able to withstand reflection and the threat of cultural relativism. The fear, as noted before, is that this is merely circular, but the reality is that no more is possible; we can change our ethical beliefs bit by bit, in what Hursthouse calls a "Neurathian procedure," but there is no way to dry dock a lived tradition and critique it as a whole.[23] The attempt to do so, MacIntyre is always ready to remind us, leaves us outside of all community and unable to pursue rational discourse. Once we succeed in stepping outside of ethics, in other words, we do not find that we have discovered a privileged position with regard to ethics, rather we find precisely what we should have expected, a place *outside* of ethics and the discussions that only take place there.

The necessity thesis plays this role in reflective endorsement by acting as the bridge between virtue and the ground of practical rationality, happiness. In theory, it should be possible to move from a complete specification of happiness, then, to a complete specification of those character traits that are necessary for happiness. Here,

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[22]This formulation I owe to Roberts.

[23]Cf. Hursthouse, 165, where she cites McDowell and Quine. On McDowell, see especially "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 167-197 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

though, we do well to remember yet again Aristotle's warning about specificity and ethics; even accepting that happiness is defined within traditions, there is no such complete specification of happiness available in any living tradition, nor should we expect to find one. Happiness is a complex state, and it does not allow for a complete intrinsic or extrinsic definition; any attempt to offer one is sure to fall foul of far too many counterexamples even within a tradition. We are left, then, with the reflective practice endorsed in the last chapter: we must work from our tradition (Christianity, and particularly the scriptures) both in our understandings and lists of the virtues, and in our understanding of happiness, and also work dialectically from the shared understanding of happiness and flourishing, to define and defend a list of virtues that we can reflectively endorse. MacIntyre offers one interesting example of this procedure in *Dependent Rational Animals* in his treatment of 'just generosity,' though, to the detriment of his explanation's plausibility on certain points as I have already charged, he does not explain what he is doing, its use of the necessity thesis, or its dependence on a specific Christian tradition. Unlike Macintyre, I wish to highlight the procedure. So, rather than add a new and underappreciated virtue, I will consider accounts of how justice is necessary for happiness and how these common virtues fit into and are prescribed by our tradition, especially as that is spelled out in scripture. The result should look quite familiar, both in what it stresses procedurally and in its conclusion, and should enlighten us about the role of the necessity thesis in reflective endorsement and in clarifying debate.

Justice

We have seen that we cannot hope to begin from an objective account of human nature, accepted or acceptable by anyone, and argue from this to a precise account of the

virtues. Having surrendered this externalist dream, however, we face a new and mistaken

ambition: to derive a precise account of a virtue in all of its facets from our tradition-

bound, shared account of human nature. It is a noble ambition, but it suffers from the

flaw that Aristotle identified in the *Metaphysics*, the desire to systematize repeatedly until

we have one single, beautiful, ethical theory. Aristotle identified the cure as well in his

Ethics, to search only for that much precision as the subject matter allows. Human

beings, human affairs, and perhaps above all human relationships, are complex and are

simplified only at the cost of falsehood. Which does not mean that there is nothing for us

to say about the nature of the virtues, or that everything we say should be uttered 'under

erasure,' as if it is already falsified as we say it; we can and should understand and say

much that is true about ethics, and some (indeed much) of what we can understand about

the particular virtues should be derived from a careful understanding of our own tradition

and of what it means for human beings to flourish. I will try to say some of that in this

section, but it will necessarily remain partial for a number of related reasons.

First, there is the difficulty of offering an account of human nature. I have

colluded in the common MacIntyrean pretense that there is some simple, understandable,

and identifiable thing that is 'our' tradition, but of course there is a host of different,

overlapping and nested traditions. The largest pertinent shared tradition is perhaps

orthodox Christianity as a whole, including Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Coptic,

Protestant, and perhaps a few other nested traditions, all of which overlap on what C. S.

Lewis calls "mere Christianity," but sometimes on rather little else. This is the tradition

that I am going to try to work out of in this chapter, assuming as few controversial

premises as possible by relying on the more obvious scriptural passages in my account

both of human nature and of justice where applicable. Nested within this larger tradition

are innumerable smaller traditions, including not only the large denominations or cultures

(Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Evangelical), but even smaller shared traditions within

these. This complexity need not detain us much in a discussion of ethics since few of the

differences between these sub-traditions should appreciably alter the shape of the basic

virtues, but there will undoubtedly be differences, and where these exist and the traditions

collide, the procedures discussed above will have to come into play as they attempt to

determine which tradition best succeeds in attaining the goods of shared practices or,

failing that, in describing the situation accurately. It is, moreover, not incidental that we

(those involved in this immediate discussion) all share the Western tradition of modern

liberalism, to some extent or another, which has sometimes been taken to provide its own

distinctive view of justice. We are not only in nested traditions, but equally in

overlapping ones, and where these conflict it is the job of reason, working from a notion

of flourishing defined by our traditions, to determine which is most consistent.

Beyond defining the boundaries and contents of various shared traditions and the

communities that sustain them, the particular virtue that we have chosen to look at

presents its own difficulties. There have been many major and important accounts of

justice, from Plato's *Republic* to Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*, and

it is not always clear that they are addressing the same issue. Plato begins by considering

the personal virtue of justice and whether it is sufficient and necessary for happiness, but

his full answer centrally incorporates an account of justice in the *polis*, and only by

analogy in the individual. Rawls begins *A Theory of Justice* with the famous claim that

"Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought,"[24] and only later, and far more briefly than Plato, considers what it is for justice to be a virtue of individuals. While many, including perhaps Plato and Rawls, focus too much on the justice of institutions to the detriment of the personal virtue, we must first establish what the broader justice looks like before we can define the concern of the personal virtue.[25]

Robert Solomon, on the other hand, appears to focus too much upon the personal virtue in *A Passion for Justice*, where he argues that justice is natural (even appearing in other animals such as wolves and chimpanzees) and is related to the emotions (as are all virtues, of course), rather than simply being a theoretical and purely rational construct that demands our allegiance and respect.[26] He begins, "justice is basically not an ideal state or a scheme for the way of the world or a perfect government system, but rather the way that one *lives*, the way that one *feels*, the way that one acts and responds and seeks out situations in everyday life." Even more clearly, "Justice is a matter of personal character, not a state of the world. But what this means in practical terms is that what counts for justice is ultimately what we do, not the way the world is."[27]

Solomon is right, I believe, to focus on justice as a virtue of human beings, but in denying any place to an account of justice as an objective concern he divorces the virtue from its defining *telos*. It is not completely clear that we are not left, in *A Passion for Justice*, with a passion *of* justice, meaning that justice is *nothing but* a passion arising out

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[24]John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.

[25]Bernard Williams argues the same in his "Justice as a Virtue," in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 90.

[26]Robert Solomon, *A Passion for Justice* (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1990), 2.

[27]Ibid., 15; 20.

of other passions such as care and compassion, retribution, and vengeance, and not a passion *for* anything. When we have the virtue of justice, we are concerned that various objects be just, and so hope, wish, plan, and act to make states of affairs and relationships and institutions just, take pleasure in their justice, and fear and regret their injustice. All of these, Solomon rightly points out, arise out of the passions that he indicates, including such 'negative' virtues as resentment and vengeance,[28] but (what gets little mention in Solomon's account) these passions, including the passion of 'justice' that arises from these, must be educated and shaped by careful training and practice into a virtue of justice.[29] This training, in the case of justice, includes centrally an account of when states of affairs are just and when they fail to be just. This account is not, as Rawls would have it, based on any sort of complex principles of justice,[30] but must be based upon some shared understanding, some tradition, of *what* is just and *when* states of affairs, relationships, etc. are just. This justice is what a just person is then concerned to bring about. The education into justice must help the person become someone who desires to do just actions *because* they are just (and hope for just institutions because they are just, etc.) rather than for any (self) interest in their being just. The appropriate motivation for a just person is a love for justice, not self-interest or even a love for another person.[31]

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[28]This is remarkably in line with a Butlerian view of resentment as a good passion, one that protects us from harm and is only taken to vicious extremes after the fact.

[29]Cf. Solomon, 251ff, where he mentions the need for the passions to be educated. Unfortunately, this is one of the only, if not the only, time this is mentioned. Usually he proceeds as if justice just is the passions, and education of either reason of the passions is all but unnecessary.

[30]Cf. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 41.

[31]Cf. Aristotle on acting for the fine or noble (*NE* 1099a), MacIntyre in *DRA* (87), Rawls, *Theory* 414*ff*, and Williams, "Justice as a Virtue," 90.

Perhaps Solomon is reticent to offer an account of justice wherein the just person acts out of a concern for justice because of his belief that traditional discussions of justice focus overly much on justice as an altruistic virtue that does not benefit its possessor. He sounds this theme at some length in his second chapter, insisting that it simply is not true (as contractual theories require) that human beings are essentially selfish;[32] instead, our concerns encompass more than narrow self-interest, including our place in society and our vision of ourselves as well as the good of others, especially in our community.[33] The myth he wishes to defeat, then, is that of selfishness: "the view that all of our acts are basically selfish, whether we like it or not, and that we are therefore willing to be just only when it is in our own self-interest as well. (Corollary: an act that doesn't involve self-sacrifice can't really be justice.)"[34] This statement, as it stands, is a bit confused. If psychological egoism is true, then the corollary cannot be that "an act that doesn't involve self-sacrifice can't really be justice," because there is no act that does, or indeed *can* include self-sacrifice; if psychological egoism is true, we never act self-sacrificially, so it cannot be the case that just acts are self-sacrificial (assuming that just acts actually exist). The problem is not, as he suggests, that so many theorists accept psychological

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[32]Contractual theories typically require that rationality be defined in terms of acting for one's self-interest, so that those who make the contract are rational if and only if they accept terms that (in Rawls' case at least) will benefit them regardless of who they turn out to be or what they believe, etc. I think that this is deeply problematic. Why accept a definition of rationality divorced from a substantive conception of the good? Why think that people like this would be best able to design a society that benefits people? The theory already assumes its own, liberal, goods; it fails to be as neutral as it pretends. It is not clear to me, however, that a contractualist such as Rawls must believe that people are essentially selfish, but only that rationality is properly defined by self-interest. While contractualism is not committed to the selfishness theory, it is interesting that on some accounts at least, psychology is (cf. Elliot Sober, "What Is Psychological Egoism?" in *Behaviorism* 17 (1989): 89-102.).

[33]Solomon, 71-2.

[34]Solomon, 84.

egoism, but that they accept a particular, problematic, exclusive divide between egoism and altruism according to which *moral* actions are invariably *altruistic* actions.[35]

Egoism and Altruism

We can trace this division to Henry Sidgwick and his central distinction between egoism, a desire for our own happiness, and universal reason or conscience, the locus of morality.[36] Sidgwick himself considers this distinction "the most fundamental difference between the ethical thought of modern England and that of the old Greco-Roman world," and credits Butler with being the first to distinguish clearly this duality of the judging faculty because of his identification of conscience and self-love as the two dominant principles in reason, a reading of Butler that we earlier dismissed.[37] Sidgwick's error arises for the same reason that we saw there, because he considers morality to be a separate realm of human action with a peculiar principle and distinct characteristics. Butler does not share this assumption. The conscience is a uniquely moral faculty in the same sense that self-love is a uniquely egoistic faculty, but in neither case does this mean that this realm of action is separate or that we ever act purely from one faculty. The pure conscientious action is a myth, and it is not one that Butler is committed to.

As regards the equation of morality with altruism, the provenance of benevolence, Butler argues quite strongly in the "Dissertation" that benevolence, at least as a particular passion, is not entirely coincident with conscience, and that "benevolence and the want of

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[35]Generally the focus in such theories is actions, but the same divide is problematic for motivations, beliefs, desires, etc.

[36]The term 'altruism' was originally coined by Auguste Comte, then brought into English by his translators (*Oxford English Dictionary*, "Altruism").

[37]Henry Sidgwick, *History of Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1954), 197. We have already seen reasons to deny that Butler makes these two principles alone dominant without including benevolence and I will not rehearse them again here.

it, singly considered, are in no sort the whole of virtue and vice," as Sidgwick recognizes. Butler continues, "the fact then appears to be, that we are constituted so as to condemn falsehood, unprovoked violence, injustice, and to approve of benevolence to some preferably to others, abstracted from all consideration which conduct is likeliest to produce an overbalance of happiness or misery."[38] As we would expect from our earlier discussion of Butler, he denies the division between egoism and altruism; while we can speak of principles which tend to the good of ourselves and principles which tend to the good of others, it is ultimately in our own good (and necessary for it) to act virtuously and even altruistically, and altruism may or may not be moral in different situations. Perhaps most pertinently, as he insists in a number of sermons, benevolence is not more opposed to self-love than any other principle or desire, including some that we would normally denominate as being part of self-love.[39]

While Sidgwick recognizes that Butler distinguishes between benevolence and conscience, he does not follow him in doing so, for Butler supposedly develops this "intuitional" thought (conscience being intuitive) to the detriment of the more correct "utilitarian" line of thought that Butler hints at earlier in the sermons.[40] As Sidgwick traces the history of this division, he notes that the early Utilitarians (including Paley and at least the late Bentham) implausibly follow the account that is sometimes mistakenly attributed to Butler, that God's providence ensures that acting for the greatest happiness

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[38]Butler, "Dissertation" 8, 312-3.

[39]Cf. Butler, I.14, 51; V.1, 72; XI.7-16, 111-116.

[40]Sidgwick, 200.

always coincides with acting for our own happiness.[41] Mill decisively subordinates

personal happiness to general happiness, arguing, in other words, that we must act

morally (altruistically) even at the cost of our own happiness (egoism). The difficulty, of

course, is to convince people to follow a moral system that may have this effect, and

Mill's 'Stoic' response, as Sidgwick calls it, is to insist that only in so doing can we

achieve that happiness that is available. But Mill never attempts to offer a proof of this.[42]

Sidgwick's own attempt to solve the problem raised by decisively dividing

egoism from altruism need not detain us; the important point for the necessity thesis is

that the division that Sidgwick traces and partly invents as the chief distinction of British

ethics is ultimately only a partial distinction. As Butler recognized, we can differentiate

between principles in our human nature that tend to our own good (prudential concerns)

and those that tend to the good of others (benevolent concerns), but the division must

always at best imperfectly map morality, or the necessity thesis is false. Neither in our

motivations nor in the effect of our actions can there be any final distinction between

egoism and altruism if the latter is seen as the sole locus of morality.[43]

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[41]Sidgwick, 238-45. Bentham and Paley (along with Mill) are egoists, believing that we act only when we will attain our own happiness by so acting, and in this lies the difference between them and Butler in the present matter. Since Butler maintains that human beings have altruistic as well as egoistic impulses, but then wishes finally to insist that following these is not prejudicial to our own happiness, he is led to the nuanced view that we have traced in chapter three according to which we do not act *for* our happiness in all things, but all natural actions tend *to* our happiness by the grace and providence of God who has given us our nature. Butler, in other words, proffers a complex understanding of happiness as well as motivation, not only in moral actions but in every kind of action, that is simply lacking in Paley and Bentham, who claim that we act only so that we can gain happiness, where happiness is defined by pleasure.

[42]Sidgwick, 246-247; Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. Roger Crisp (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), chap. 3. This does not assume psychological egoism; in acting virtuously, Mill holds, we act for the love of virtue (which has become part of happiness for us). As we will note below, the division between egoism and altruism is not the same question as *why* we are virtuous.

[43]It is reasonable to question whether anyone has ever *actually* believed this, and there is no easy answer to the question. John Doris and Stephen Stich in the Stanford encyclopedia article on "Moral Psychology" write: "It is easy to find philosophers suggesting that altruism is required for morality or that egoism is incompatible with morality — and easier still to find philosophers who claim that *other*

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The necessity thesis maintains that virtue is necessary for happiness; we cannot be happy without being virtuous. Egoism is a concern for our own happiness, while altruism is a concern for the happiness of others. If altruism is, in addition, the sole locus of virtue, and altruism and egoism ever diverge, then clearly virtue is not necessary for happiness, because acting for my happiness (acting egoistically) might occasionally require that I act in a non-altruistic, hence vicious, way.

Stated baldly, it may look as if the necessity thesis has come up short on some serious shoals, for *surely* (we might think), egoism and altruism, my own happiness and the happiness of others, at least *occasionally* fail to coincide. If I eat this final scoop of ice cream, I am going to be happy, but my wife will be unhappy (and specifically unhappy with me!). Ice cream, like other material things, is a zero-sum good, meaning that if I have more, someone else has less.[44] Justice regularly deals with goods in various ways, and therefore acting justly and making sure that everyone gets their fair share (I am using these terms intuitively at the moment) will require that I have less than I otherwise could have, including at times when I really need/want more. Without considering such possible counterexamples in detail, a few general responses can be made that seem to me to be clearly right. First, we have already seen many reasons to deny that my happiness is simply proportional to my needs and wants, so the fact that I *want* more ice cream certainly does not settle the question of whether I will be happier if I eat it. As the cases

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philosophers think this" (John Doris and Stephen Stich, "Moral Psychology" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta [on-line] (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, accessed 29 October, 2008); available from http://plato.stanford.edu; Internet.). They then list a series of statements from introductory texts that seem to claim that altruism and morality are coextensive. It is doubtful, however, that any major moral philosopher has ever claimed this simplistic of an identity.

[44]Butler argues rather convincingly that the separation between egoism and altruism arises from applying the zero-sum thinking of property to areas in which it has no application, apparently through a mistaken belief that happiness has any set connection to the amount of property that we have (XI.19, 116).

become more serious and convincing (involving much more serious goods, such as freedom from fear and safety), so too does the implausibility that there is any simple counterexample in which acting for my happiness is possible without the virtues.

Second, the problematic assertion of a divide between egoism and altruism is carried on at both a motivational or psychological and at an objective level. An ethicist may hold that we are motivated either egoistically or altruistically (but not both of course), or that our actions actually have either an egoistic or altruistic effect (or both), so the egoism/altruism either comes in at the level of perceived interests or at the level of real interests. The typical responses to the egoism/altruism divide address each of these separately. We have already seen that Butler denies that altruism, or benevolence, is all of morality, because we do not know what is actually best for others, and great monstrosities can be done in the name of love.[45] He goes to great pains to argue, however, that this does not mean that we merely act egoistically, for we naturally have impulses to do good for others which are no less part of ourselves, and their fulfillment no less part of our happiness, than any impulse that we have toward our own happiness.[46] Likewise, on the objective side Butler argues that people in all ages have professed to find the greatest peace, contentment, and happiness when they engage in benevolent actions, so that in reality they do not separate either.[47] Those who insist on the separation deny that true happiness is gained through serving others, but he notes that it has maintained people through "sickness, poverty, disgrace, and in the very pangs of death;

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[45]Or as Bono puts it, "what more in the name of love?"

[46]Butler, Sermon XI.9, 112: "Immoderate self-love does very ill consult its own interest: and, how much soever a paradox it may appear, it is certainly true that even from self-love we should endeavour to get over all inordinate regard to and consideration of ourselves."

[47]Ibid., XI.13, 114: "But that any affection tends to the happiness of another does not hinder its tending to one's own happiness too."

whereas it is manifest all other enjoyments fail in these circumstances. This surely looks

suspicious of having somewhat in it. Self-love, methinks, should be alarmed. May she

not possibly pass over greater pleasures than those she is so wholly taken up with?"[48] He

concludes with a flourish: "Thus it appears, that *benevolence and the pursuit of publick*

good hath at least as great respect to self-love and the pursuit of private good as any

other particular passions, and their respective pursuits."[49]

Other philosophers have made similar points, and we can simplify them into two

basic claims: first, we often act morally when we do not act altruistically (as when we are

temperate), and vice versa (as when we act foolishly and sacrificially give what is

harmful to another); second, our own good cannot be separated from the good of others,

especially of the community of which we are a part. This points us back to the communal

aim of MacIntyre's re-imagination of how power could be balanced within communities

defined by the assumption of my good within the communal good.[50] It need not assume

this critique of liberal nation states, however, for it is true even of our communities as

they stand today, as atomistic and anonymous as they may be, that my good is often

achieved only as I help others, and others are often helped only as I help myself, because

our goods remain intertwined.[51] Only in caring for and educating me could an older

generation ensure that they would have what they need when they are in need, and yet it

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[48]Butler, Sermon XI.15, 115.

[49]Ibid., XI.16, 116.

[50]Cf. *After Virtue*, 229: "what education in the virtues teaches me is that my good as a man is one and the same as the good of those others with whom I am bound up in human community. There is no way of my pursuing my good which is necessarily antagonistic to you pursuing yours because *the* good is neither mine peculiarly nor yours peculiarly—goods are not private property." The trouble arises, as Butler puts it, from applying zero-sum thinking to non-zero-sum goods, like the goods of our community.

[51]Our identities and lives, as Charles Taylor puts it, remain ineluctably dialogical. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), chapters IV and V.

may well not be I who provide their care. Was their action altruistic, giving when they

will receive nothing back from me, or egoistic, giving because only in that way could

they be part of a community in which they would be cared for? The distinction ceases to

have practical application. We do not do what is virtuous because it is necessary for us to

be happy—we do not do what is altruistic because it is necessary egoistically—but in

acting for the good of others, we act for our own good, and the contrary (if we truly

understand our own good) is equally the case. It is clear that the egoism/altruism divide

is overly simplistic, and yet it lies at the bottom of many doubtful moral intuitions.

Justice as a Virtue of Communities

Solomon fails to give an account of justice as a virtue of anything more than an

individual, and in so doing fails to give a convincing account of justice as a virtue of

anything. I will not attempt to offer a full account of justice as a virtue of communities,

but we must consider what this question amounts to, and how it fits into an account of

justice as a personal virtue derived from an account of flourishing and from our tradition.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, in his intriguing and tightly argued *Justice*, suggests that

there are two basic theories of justice: justice as a proper ordering of a community, and

justice as inherent rights. Justice as a right order (Plato's *Republic*) equates justice with

there being a certain correct ordering in the society, such that the wise rule, the

courageous defend, and the stupid serve, etc. What makes this the *right* order, for Plato,

is its matching an eternal form; later right order theorists are more likely to ascribe it to a

natural set of obligations or to an artificial contract.[52] Individual rights theories, on the

other hand, define justice as the state of everyone receiving what is due him or her;

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[52]Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 29.

everyone having his or her rights respected. As Wolterstorff tightens this distinction, it reduces to the issue of inherent rights attaching to worth: do human beings have inherent rights because of their worth (inherent rights), or are rights conferred to human beings through human or divine agency (right order)?[53] The question is not whether people have natural and inalienable rights, but what accounts for the rights that we have.

An inherent rights version of justice fits well with eudaimonism, which focuses on the value of the good individual rather than on the goodness of our actions or of the outcomes of our actions. Christian virtue ethicists, especially, may find in the Christian assumption of the worth of each individual a strong attraction to a theory of justice that focuses on this value, rather than on the value of a coherent whole. Unfortunately, Wolterstorff insists that a theory of inherent rights cannot be developed within eudaimonism due to the theoretical focus on the agent's life being well-lived, rather than on the rights of others. Wolterstorff's argument will help us hone our understanding of the role of the necessity thesis in eudaimonism, and will provide a valuable prolegomena to our own brief specification of the virtue of justice from tradition and flourishing.

Wolterstorff claims that eudaimonism is "agent-centered" in a problematic fashion, and so gives an account of the goods to which we have a right that contradicts inherent right theories of justice. In other words, eudaimonism picks out the wrong goods for the wrong reasons. Eudaimonism, he argues, claims that I am faced at any given moment with a host of good actions, and "I choose among candidates on the basis of which, in my judgment, will contribute most to my living my life well…. Not whether it contributes to *your* living *your* life well, but whether it contributes to *my* living *my* life well." Suppose, he says, that I recognize that some state of affairs, say your being

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[53]Wolterstorff, 35-8.

healthy, is a good for you. So far this is merely descriptive, "it does not imply anything as to the role of that recognition in my living of my life." The next step is to consider whether I should do something to bring about that state of affairs:

> I take it to be of the essence of eudaimonism to claim that my recognition that your being healthy would be a natural good in your life is not sufficient reason for me to seek to bring it about…. The only consideration that is sufficient reason for me to incorporate that action into my life is my judgment that doing so would make for my life being as well lived as it would be otherwise…. I include that action in my life if and only if I judge that it is a good action and that performing it will make *my* life [at] least as well lived as it would be otherwise.[54]

The conclusion is that these are the wrong reasons to bring about a good in someone else's life if, as believed by inherent right theorists, the reason to bring about, or not to hinder, someone else's having some good, is just that he has a *right* to that good.

Not only do eudaimonists give the wrong account of reasons for action, they also give the wrong account of goods. Happiness, Wolterstorff correctly notes, is an activity, but many of the goods to which I have a right are not activities (food, my paycheck, etc.). Could these be, Wolterstorff asks, necessary for happiness even if not part of it and so genuine goods? His answer is no, because he takes as authoritative Cooper's creative reading according to which external goods are only impediments or implements for virtue, the sole good.[55] As we saw above, this is a misreading of Aristotle and an unintuitive account of external goods. There is no reason, then, why Aristotelian eudaimonism cannot make perfect sense of the claim that my getting my paycheck is a genuine good (to which I may have a right). Likewise, not having someone speak slanderously behind my back or even after I die, even if I never know of either and it has no effect on me, are genuine goods (to which I may have a right).

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[54]Wolterstorff, 153-4.

[55]Ibid., 176.

The response to Wolterstorff's account of our reasons for action requires a longer answer. According to an inherent right theorist such as Wolterstorff, when you have a right, that is a *sufficient* reason for me to do an action, while according to the eudaimonist, he charges, it must be such as will contribute to my living my life well. This confuses the issue by collapsing two different levels of reasons for action and buying into the idea that I must either act egoistically or altruistically, so that if an action is moral it cannot be done for my benefit. As explained in the last chapter in some detail, when I step back from action and consider my life in general, it is the case that I endorse my having and seeking to have certain virtues according to whether or not that virtue is necessary for my happiness, where this is understood as above defended. Faced with a given need or right, however, I act appropriately out of that virtue and do not consider whether or not this particular action will have a salutary effect on my happiness. Any given right, then, is *sufficient* for me to act, to make that action part of my life, precisely *because* I am already virtuous in the way necessary to recognize and act on that right and have already endorsed my having this virtue (as described above).

Wolterstorff presents the test case as my recognizing that something will contribute to *your* happiness, and suggests that this should give someone sufficient reason to do the action (all things considered), but does not according to the eudaimonist. Granted that Aristotle does not have the conceptual resources to speak this way, for the Christian virtue ethicist, this is precisely what the virtues of benevolence and charity (for example) give us reason to do, an action that contributes to someone else's happiness regardless of the effect on my happiness.[56] When I stand back and consider whether I

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[56]Wolterstorff seems on the verge of recognizing this when he notes that eudaimonism is not egoistic: most of the ancient writers found a place in the life well lived, the happy life, for friendship. "And

should be benevolent and charitable, I must work from my tradition (which unanimously declares that I must) and from an account of flourishing that takes into account my communal nature (so that surely charity must extend at least to that community), and decide whether to have the virtues. When I then recognize someone whose happiness I can increase, and I see that this is a good action, that it does not diminish others' happiness unduly, etc., then I am motivated to increase that person's happiness.

But why are we not speaking of justice and rights as Wolterstorff did? Wolterstorff falls into a familiar modern trap of trying to make all of morality, or at least a substantial portion of it, a matter of justice; this is a move that the virtue ethicist should resist.[57] Perhaps the thought is that our action will be more assured, that we will be more certain to act, if someone has a *right* to a certain action on my part as opposed to if it is simply the charitable thing to do. This would only be the case if we raise children to consider rights as the most important moral concept and ignore inculcating the other virtues. While I agree with Wolterstorff that the rights tradition, as he represents it, is not inherently individualizing,[58] there is a danger in deliberately educating our children to recognize rights as unassailable without equally teaching them that they must have charity and courage and temperance, the danger of moral minimalism. If morality

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part of what goes into that complex activity that is friendship is seeking to promote natural goods of various sorts in the life of one's friend" (153), even if this involves dying for the friend. But just as accepting friendship means doing many particular actions that are not to my personal benefit, so does accepting any of the virtues, and since the virtuous person acts *out of* her virtue when acting virtuously, and not out of some calculation of personal happiness, this should have led him to recognize that virtue ethics demands that something being the right action is sufficient for my doing it. If the virtuous motivation is a mere recognition of someone else's inherent rights, then *that* will be the virtuous person's motivation.

[57]Solomon is guilty of the same problem. Cf. Hursthouse, 6, who complains about this phenomenon of collapsing morality into justice, and also of assuming that only justice is an *absolute* requirement.

[58]Wolterstorff, 4.

becomes nothing more than *avoiding* stepping on others' rights, then surely we have an anemic view of humanity, of our connections to others, and of morality.

I fail to see any reason, then, why a virtue ethicist cannot offer a theory of justice based on inherent worth and the rights that attach to that worth. A just state of affairs, one in which everyone receives his due, is one in which the goods given (or retained, etc.) are equal to the worth and deserts of each person. Justice as a personal virtue, if we accept Wolterstorff's theoretical account, is the disposition to recognize that worth and to judge correctly what that worth deserves and requires in different circumstances, and to act accordingly. While my account of justice as a personal virtue does not depend on the correctness of Wolterstorff's account, I believe that it points out one essential feature of morality, which we can clearly derive from our shared Christian tradition, in a way not open to a right order account: the value and worth of each individual life.[59]

If we accept, for the moment, something like Wolterstorff's account, then what does a just society look like? A society is just when everyone receives his or her due, when each of our rights is respected and met. What we need, then, is a list of rights, or at least a procedure for arriving at such a list, a way of determining what the value of each person requires. Given the many wonderful 'rights' to which people have asserted a claim (Wolterstorff's example is the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, which declares in Article 24 that everybody has a right to periodic vacations with pay),[60] how do we know what our *real* rights are? Wolterstorff's initial answer is that "that to which one has a right is normally a good of some sort—more specifically, a good in one's life or

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[59]Wolterstorff makes this point as well (43).

[60]Wolterstorff, 2.

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history."[61] Immediately a familiar problem arises: are these real goods (things in our real interest) or simply perceived goods? Problems lie in either direction. If these are real goods, then our lack of an independent and complete account of individual real interests means that we cannot know to what people have a right. If these are perceived goods, then we end up claiming the 'right' to periodic vacations with pay, chocolate fudgesicles (when we are eight), and whatever else we say we need (children quickly learn that "I need it" is more powerful than "I want it").

While Wolterstorff never addresses and perhaps does not recognize this particular problem, he comes down on the side of real interests. We determine what is in our real interests by considering what we *really* need, but we have no reliable access to this. Functioning accounts underdetermine the answer, and desire-satisfaction theories give the wrong answer for reasons similar to those we considered in chapter two, most significantly, because we desire many things that are bad for us and bad in themselves. Consider, though, the desires of a parent for his child: the parent will have a better view of what is actually good for the child outside of what that child may or may not desire, and the parent has a better idea of how to achieve these goods. Of course, parents are still wrong at times; what we need to consider, then, is the desires that God has for his creatures, desires that are always for our real interests and based on a true knowledge of our character. I believe that Wolterstorff is correct, or at least that he is looking in the right direction; what God desires for us, or to put it another way, what he knows to be good for us, really is good for us. Unfortunately, this tells us nothing about how we come to know what God desires for us. Wolterstorff recognizes this lacuna and makes no effort

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[61]Wolterstorff, 23.

to fill it because it is not his project in this book.[62] If we are going to come to any

understanding of what the real goods are in people's lives from God's desires, then we

must begin, no doubt, from scripture and the Christian tradition; to the extent that

happiness, the *telos* of life, determines some things as needed for human life to go well,

we can reliably add these in as well. We are left, then, with precisely the account we

have already offered for how to define the virtues: we must work both from our particular

tradition and from the sense of happiness that we receive from that tradition to determine

what is necessary for that life and how a particular virtue fits into it.

Personal Justice: Justice as a Virtue in Christianity and as Necessary for Happiness

We begin from an account of happiness and the constituent parts thereof, and here

too we must begin from our tradition. In the biblical picture, as in a common sense view

of human nature, human beings are primarily communal creatures, meaning that they

flourish only in community. We partake in community not only to fulfill our emotional

needs for love and caring, though this is a sufficient reason in itself, but because of our

dependence on and need for others at so many points in our lives. Both our need for love

and care and sharing of experiences and this crucial dependence require that these

communities be of a certain sort; a mere conglomeration of people associating together

for a common end, as in a business, is insufficient. The community must be one in which

the value of each individual is affirmed (i.e. a community of love), in which (some of) an

individual's talents are given a place for practice and appreciation, and in which at least

some of the central common goods to be pursued are internally motivating for each

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[62]Wolterstorff, 236-7. I understand that he is only attempting to offer the deep theoretical
structure of justice, but it seems rather odd that the reader, having read 393 tightly-argued pages on the
topic, should still know nothing beyond the intuitive list of *what* rights people actually have.

individual (hence not like a corporation). It is sufficient for our understanding of justice that we recognize the need for communities of this sort, even if in reality they are always only imperfectly realized and perhaps partially realized in multiple settings.[63] I recognize, of course, that all of these claims are deniable; I will not argue for them here.[64]

What picture of justice (as a personal virtue) does this give us? The just person must, preeminently, be able to perceive what the real interests of others consist in, and how these may best be met. This includes not only, in the fully virtuous person, a reflective process whereby the just person defines justice and the particular rights of individuals from his tradition and from happiness as described, but more importantly involves a particular moral vision in day-to-day life. The complexity of this moral vision cannot be overstated; determining *what* inherent rights people have does not begin to determine *how* these rights are to be respected and fulfilled in particular circumstances, or *who* is valuable. Unlike MacIntyre, however, we can recognize freely that while the recognition of individual human beings as valuable cannot be derived in any obvious sense from the communal needs of human beings, a proper understanding of scripture in

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[63]While this certainly seems to be less than ideal, these aspects of community are present for most people today in different spheres of their lives: their talents are recognized and appreciated at work, their love is achieved at home and among a small group of geographically separate friends, and the only common goods internal to their own motivation are pursued, at best, with their nuclear family. This makes it harder to recognize and harder to achieve both our own happiness and justice.

[64]Many of these claims, of course, are argued for quite powerfully by MacIntyre in *DRA*; I will not rehearse his arguments again here. For biblical passages that suggest some of these ideas, cf. Leviticus and Deuteronomy, where the Judaic ideal is spelled out in some detail and include the ideas of communal sin and redemption (Lev. 16; Deut. 23), of communal festivals (Lev. 23; Deut. 16), and of basic justice before God (Deut. 15)); cf. also the prophets (esp. Isaiah and Amos), where the idea of care for the poor and the alien becomes central to the concept of justice (*hesed*: also loyalty). There are many books on justice in the Bible. I found the following helpful: Walter J. Houston's *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 428, ed. Andrew Mein (New York: T&T Clark, 2006); Mark Gray's *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 432, ed. Andrew Mein (New York: T&T Clark, 2006); and Nelson Glueck's *Hesed in the Bible*, tr. Alfred Gottschalk, ed. Elias L. Epstein (Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1967).

which each person is a creation and child of God must include the recognition that everyone is valuable. As Roberts recognizes, while the just person must see *every* person as having certain rights or, to avoid that language, certain claims to just consideration and action, this is not grounded solely in the person's need, but in the person's *value*.[65] This is not, of course, to deny that many of the claims of justice are based on a particular relationship of the person to us, or a particular status or merit of that individual. It would be unjust (among other vices) of me to refuse my wife food bought with money I earned; the same is clearly not true of a stranger who has plenty of money of his own. In affirming the universality of human dignity, however, our tradition insists that every person *matters* and must be taken into account in our plans, beliefs, actions, and hopes.

The communal needs of human beings tell us much about what justice looks like and about the sort of vision that a just person must have. A just person will recognize the dependencies of others as a legitimate claim on her time and abilities, and will strive to ensure that everyone has his needs fulfilled, including the needs to practice his particular abilities and talents and to be appreciated for engaging in these. She will be willing to accept benefits from some, and pass those benefits on to others, and she will be motivated to educate others to do the same. The just person will be so motivated because of a second aspect of justice as a personal virtue: she will *be concerned* about justice. Seeing justice done will bring her pleasure and vice versa, and she will find in justice a sufficient reason to engage in even very difficult projects and undertakings, potentially even at great cost to herself. She will plan, desire, wish, and work to see justice done, and will fear and be disappointed at injustice. Many of these actions, such as education, will not

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[65]Roberts, "Justice," projected chapter in *Emotions and Virtues: An Essay in Moral Psychology* (forthcoming), 8-10. Roberts points out that we seem to assume the inherent value or "dignity" of human beings because of the West's reliance on Judaism, Stoicism, and Christianity.

be motivated and should not be described simply as justice, of course. She will educate those she loves out of charity and generosity as much as out of justice, and will often need courage, perseverance, and truthfulness (for example) to be just as well. These should not be swallowed up in the virtue of justice; in their connectedness lies the truth of the doctrine of the unity of the virtues, even if we should not accept an absolute unity.[66]

Along with requiring other 'moral' virtues, in attempting to determine the real interests of others the just person must use a rather large dose of practical wisdom. If a child refuses to share a piece of chocolate with a sibling, the parent must see not only what is *equal* (half of the chocolate to each because the children are of equal merit), but what is *good* for both the child that refuses to share and the child that wishes to have some of the chocolate. Perhaps in particular circumstances both children will be better off if the entire piece of chocolate is taken retributively from the unsharing child and given to the other, or if both are deprived of the chocolate retributively. I have said little about retributive (vs. distributive) justice thus far and will not attempt to fill that lacuna now, but certainly the moral vision of justice must incorporate retribution as well as equal distribution into its calculations. The just person must also realize that the sorts of control posited here over one's child must precisely be limited as we deal with other adults because of the good of, the need for, and hence the right to some level of self-determination in human beings. Because of the scriptural understanding that we are each

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[66]Cf. Neera Kapur Badhwar, "The Limited Unity of Virtue," in *Nous* 30, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 306-19, for an interesting account of what the unity of the virtues thesis requires, and a version that might make more sense in today's fragmented society. Badhwar argues that it no longer makes sense to claim that we cannot have any virtues without all of them, but it may still make sense to claim that we cannot have any of the virtues specific to one realm of life (work, or home, or church) without having all of them. I find his account intriguing, but ultimately dissatisfying: a virtuous person is precisely someone able to be a coherent, integrated personality in different situations; defining a unity of the virtues based upon disintegration looks like a redefinition of virtue that allows for a destructive compartmentalization.

valuable and moral creatures, we have the right not only to help the community, but to determine in some sense how we will help the community and how we will fail to help both the community and ourselves; we have the right not to help, though this especially is a right that must be tempered and ordered in complex ways by both our own good and the good of others with which our own good is inextricably bound. Justice, as a personal virtue, is the habit of being concerned about justice and working to achieve justice in all of its complex forms wherever and whenever possible.

Conclusion: Like a Tree Planted by Water

We have considered the virtue of justice precisely because it seems most at odds with the necessity thesis. Not only does it not seem necessary for happiness, it appears at times to be absolutely contrary to it, requiring us to give and to receive what we would much rather forgo, occasionally even requiring us to give up our lives. This (mis)understanding of justice we have shown to rely upon a false dichotomy between egoism and altruism that assumes that if something is good for someone else, it is not good for me, and vice versa, and that assumes that morality (including justice) is specifically good for someone else. This is a false dichotomy, and we should reject the conclusion. Justice is not only often good for me, it is absolutely necessary for my happiness; even if at times it requires sacrifices that prevent us from fully achieving happiness, there is no happiness apart from it, or indeed, we conclude, apart from any of the true list of virtues. Because virtue is necessary for happiness.

This brings us to that other famous tree in the Psalms, the tree planted by water in Psalm one. The Psalm begins, "Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers," but who delight

in God's law. Such people are like trees planted by clear flowing streams of water that

flourish all of their days. The metaphor for the wicked is the opposite: they are not like

firm-rooted trees that flourish, but like the remainders of harvested wheat, like chaff that

blows around in the wind and never settles anywhere.[67] The description of the vicious

mirrors that offered by Plato and Aristotle: the vicious are never alike "not even to

themselves,"[68] but are "in internal conflict, and have an appetite for one thing but wish

for another… for bad people are full of regret."[69] If this is what the vicious are like,

Aristotle concludes, we ought to do everything in our power to avoid becoming vicious,

for surely they cannot be happy. This, sadly, is the life that many of us know all too well.

Blown about on the winds of our own passions, we react rather than reflect, usually badly

and with too little consideration of the person we respond to, and any sort of enduring

character, settled and fitting our local and cosmic environment, becomes an impossibility.

In such a state, it is perhaps not surprising that 'happiness' has drifted in meaning toward

an ephemera totally disconnected from our characters and virtues.

Aristotle, as we have seen, blithely assumes that a certain parochial list of those

virtues common to Athenian society is necessary for *eudaimonia*, an active state that

involves the character and intellectual virtues over a complete life and with sufficient

external goods. Pulled by the intuition expressed by the psalmist that virtue must

inevitably result in happiness, but equally pushed by observation toward the belief that

virtuous people do sometimes fail to be happy, Aristotle insists that while virtue is

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[67]Psalm 1, NRSV. Not surprisingly, this suggests a sufficiency thesis as well as a necessity thesis.

[68]Plato, *Lysis*, tr. Stanley Lombardo, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co, 1997), 698.

[69]Aristotle, *NE* 1166b.

necessary for happiness, it is not *sufficient*. By defining both happiness and the virtues normatively, Aristotle avoids offering the account of metaphysical biology with which he has often been charged, though he certainly believed that his own ethical outlook was the correct one and applicable to everyone.

'Happiness,' at least in one central meaning, is similar to 'εὐδαιμονία' in involving non-mentalist criteria, consisting of an enduring state of being, centrally involving the emotions, and requiring that there be some form of *fit* between us and both our immediate situation and the cosmos more broadly. Other descriptions of happiness fail to account for some of our central intuitions about this good state, especially the belief that it requires an alteration in our character, and not just our mood. The truly happy person is one who has those states of character necessary for his flourishing in his local and universal context, and these states of character are defined as the virtues. So the virtues are necessary for happiness.

This formulation of the argument raises more questions than it answers, prime among them being why we should accept this account of the connection; fancy footwork aside, why we should believe that happiness requires the virtues, rather than good looks, good luck, and no conscience. Butler, despite common misreadings, has a knock-down, drag-out argument based upon an assumed shared faculty, the conscience, a faculty that explains, perhaps, a little too much. It is difficult to believe that everyone has a reliable source of knowledge about the rightness or wrongness of their actions, and that only self-deception separates the virtuous wheat from the wicked chaff. An attempt to fill this lacuna with an assumption of God's clear revelation fails to reassure us that everyone

shares any external premises upon which we could argue to prove that virtue is necessary for happiness.

Having abandoned an externalist ethical account, we spent the last two chapters exploring an internalist account and its resiliency in the face of such traditional gales as relativism and the apparent glee of the unrepentant. The claim that we cannot know anyone's real interests proved uninteresting and unconvincing. Just as trees need water to flourish, so human beings have certain needs that are set by our biology. The claim that this account of flourishing is itself culturally bound proved a stiffer breeze, but it need not uproot us from our own beliefs. Different accounts *can*, with difficulty, and *should*, with charity, engage each other in rational ethical discussion through imagination. Even more powerfully, it is impossible to be a practicing relativist from within ethics, and destructive to be one from outside of it. Before this powerful gale, the tree beside the stream of water should have strong roots: the Christian should, I argued, hold firmly to her core beliefs, while allowing that many of the branches of her ethical outlook are dead wood, unnecessary addenda that do not derive from scripture. We should be relativists about the branches, while maintaining that our core beliefs do indeed apply to everyone. Telling the difference between the live branches and the dead wood, I confess without explanation, is difficult and requires virtues closely related to practical wisdom.

And those who appear to bear fruit while living the wild life away from the stream of virtue? They are largely chimera of our cultural imagination, neither so healthy nor so wild as they at first appear, and in convincing accounts, generally deeply unhappy, appearances to the contrary. They are certainly green and lively, but a closer look reveals the worm within. This led us to a final consideration of a particular virtue that appears

rather contrary to happiness, justice, and to the conclusion that those who are just do not act against their own interest simply because they act for the interests of others.

Virtue does not guarantee happiness on earth, and in certain circumstances it may not even be a very good bet, but we have seen good reason to believe that there is no happiness without the virtues, which we must, therefore and thereby, constantly work to define and understand. Perhaps it is appropriate, then, to end with the psalmist's reflection on how we learn what it is to act virtuously. We must, he says, meditate on the law of God both night and day, turning our thoughts to what is good and pure and avoiding the temptations and the counsels of the wicked. It may often look as if the tree planted in the way of the wicked flourishes like the green bay tree, but this is merely the illusion of a day; to flourish, we must be planted by the streams of God, dependent on grace for our sustenance and bearing the fruits of faith, hope, and love in due season.

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