NATURAL GOODNESS AND NORMATIVE EVALUATION

by

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(Under the Direction of Melissa Seymour Fahmy)

ABSTRACT

Philippa Foot, in her 2001 book *Natural Goodness*, argues that moral goodness belongs to a special category of goodness she calls 'natural goodness'. Natural, in this context, is synonymous with 'intrinsic' and 'autonomous'. This is a category of goodness which is properly attributable only to living organisms themselves and to their parts, characteristics, and operations. Each organism, when operating well, actualizes a form of life characteristic of its species. A feature, or operation of an organism is good, according to natural goodness, if it is an Aristotelian necessity for some aspect of the life of the organism. Foot believes that her account of natural goodness implies a framework for moral discourse, within which moral disputes can take place. I argue that Foot's account of natural goodness is incapable of grounding a useful framework, because humans are not in a position to construct a reasonably comprehensive account of human nature, which grounds moral judgments according to Foot's theory. Foot's project can be salvaged by adopting an account of normative evaluation that is grounded in Foot's foundationalist account of natural goodness, but which also takes into account the problem of incomplete knowledge. I propose such an account of normative evaluation, and argue that it grounds a framework for moral discourse by

recognizing, not only, the insights of Foot's account of natural goodness, but also the fact of our incomplete knowledge.

INDEX WORDS: Philippa Foot, Natural Goodness, Normative Evaluation,

Metaethics, Ethics, Virtue

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B.A., Texas State University, 2003

M.A., Texas Tech University, 2006

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2017

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May 2017

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Natural Goodness

In her 2001 book *Natural Goodness* Philippa Foot argues that there is a special category of goodness, which includes moral goodness and is uniquely attributable to living organisms. She calls this category 'natural goodness'.[1] Natural goodness is "attributable only to living things themselves and to their parts, characteristics, and operations" and "is intrinsic or 'autonomous' goodness in that it depends directly on the relation of an individual to the 'life form' of its species."[2] This category is unique to living things because they are capable of being evaluated relative to their nature, what Foot refers to as the life form of the species. This is what makes this category of goodness autonomous, or natural. Judgments about natural goodness do not appeal to anything outside the life form of the organism. What it means for an oak tree to be healthy depends upon the kind of organism that an oak tree is and is independent, for example, from any value humans might place on having oak trees. It would be a judgment of natural goodness to say that it is good for an oak to have deep roots, if by this judgment we mean that it is part of what it means for an oak tree to be healthy that it have deep roots. On the other hand, it would be a judgment of what Foot calls 'secondary goodness' if we were to say that it is good for an oak tree to have sprawling branches, if

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[1] Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford, New York: Clarendon; Oxford University Press, 2001).
[2] Ibid., 26.

by this judgment we mean that it is good because it offers people a shady place out of the sun to sit outside. It is no part of the health of the oak tree that it offer people a shady place to sit. This second judgment, about the branches belongs to the category of secondary goodness, since it is indexed to some good outside what is necessary for the health of the tree, while the first judgment, about roots, is a judgment of natural goodness. It is the tree, being the type of organism that it is, that generates the criteria for goodness, and this is why Foot takes natural, intrinsic, and autonomous to be synonymous.

Foot presents this account of goodness as a response to a variety of non-cognitivist theories. She has in her sights a collection of subjectivist accounts of normative judgments including the emotivism of A.J. Ayer and C. L. Stevenson, Richard Hare's prescriptivism, and Allan Gibbard's expressivism. These theories of normative judgment and others like grow out of, what Foot calls, G. E. Moore's anti-naturalism. What Moore, and those who followed, are trying to explain is the fact that normative judgments seem to be uniquely distinct from judgments of that seem to have a similar form. Though the two propositions 'X is good' and 'X is red' seem to share a form, the first proposition, the normative judgment, implies something beyond a mere description of facts. The non-cognitivists claim that this something more is explained by "the presence of individual feeling, attitude, or intention, and thus goes beyond 'description' or 'assertion of fact'."[3]

> What all these theories tried to do, then, was to give the *conditions of use* of sentences such as 'It is morally objectionable to break promises' in terms of

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[3] Foot, *Natural Goodness.*, p. 7

something that must be true about the speaker. He must have certain feelings or attitudes; he must commit himself to acting in a certain way; he must at least feel remorse if he does not so act. *Meaning was thus to be explained in terms of a speaker's attitude, intentions, or state of mind.*[4]

This account of the uniqueness of normative judgment creates a gap between assertions of facts and moral judgments. Facts and values appear to belong to two separate realms. This is because, for the non-cognitivist, "Propositions about matters of fact were assertable if their truth conditions were fulfilled, but moral judgments, through conditions of utterance were essentially linked to an individual speaker's subjective state."[5] This creates a gap between the grounds for a judgment and the judgment itself and is the source of what Foot describes as "the apparently unquestionable distinction between 'descriptive' and 'evaluative' language, more or less taken for granted in much of contemporary ethics."[6] This gap is the target of Foot's criticism of the non-cognitivists. She describes the mistake of non-cognitivism:

> It is the mistake of so construing what is 'special' about moral judgement that the grounds of a moral judgement do not reach all the way to it. Whatever 'grounds' may have been given, someone may be unready, indeed unable, to make the moral judgement, because he has not *got* the attitude or feeling, is not *in* the 'conative' state of mind, is not *ready to* take the decision to act: whatever it is that the theory says is required. It is this gap between ground and moral judgement that I am denying. In my view there are no such conditions on moral judgement and therefore no such gap.[7]

Although the non-cognitivists make a mistake in trying to explain what is 'special' about moral judgments through reference to some feature of the agent, they are on the right

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[4] Ibid., p. 8
[5] Ibid., p. 8
[6] Ibid., p. 7
[7] Ibid., p. 9

track in so far as they have attempted to explain the unique nature of moral judgment through reference to a feature that can explain the motivating force of normative judgments. To say that 'X is good' always implies some kind of action, some 'should', that 'X is red' does not. Foot calls this 'Hume's practicality requirement. She points out that "Morality, Hume had said, is necessarily practical, serving to produce and prevent action." The non-cognitivists are right to recognize and try to meet Hume's practicality requirement. However, Foot argues, they are lead astray by a mistake that traces back to Moore. The basic mistake is in assuming that the two propositions 'X is good' and 'X is red' have a similar form. If this were the case, then it would be appropriate to expect that the difference between these two propositions would be found in something unique about the predicate 'good'. Moore makes exactly this move, claiming that 'good' is a non-natural property and the non-cognitivists try to clarify the nature of this property by making it a property of agents' subjectivity.

Foot rejects this assumption that the basic form of normative judgment should be understood as 'X is good'. She points out that in most cases such a proposition is "void for uncertainty."[8] While 'red', as in the proposition 'X is red', can be understood independently of any particular noun to which X might refer, 'good', as in 'X is good' cannot. Foot rightly claims that, "whether a particular F is a good F depends radically on what we substitute for 'F'."[9] This distinction between predicates like 'red' and 'good' is made, Foot points out, by Peter Geach in his 1956 article 'Good and Evil'. Geach recognizes that there is a logical difference between 'good' and 'red', and Foot intends

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[8] Ibid., p. 2
[9] Ibid., p. 3

her theory of natural goodness to describe the logical category of goodness to which moral judgments belong. The conception of goodness which Foot presents is objective, denying the subjectivism of the non-cognitivists, denies the gap entailed by non-cognitivist accounts between fact and moral judgments, and yet meets Hume's practicality requirement by explaining the action-guiding nature of normative assertions.

Foot believes that her account of natural goodness will meet Hume's practicality requirement if we adopt a more robust conception of practical reason. According to Foot, moral judgment is action guiding because acting morally is part of practical rationality. Two common conceptions of practical rationality hold that "rationality is the following of perceived self-interest; alternatively, that it is the pursuit, careful and cognizant, of the maximum satisfaction of present desires."[10] The problem, according to Foot, is with taking either of these preconceived notions of practical reason to be sufficient as an account of practical reason. Rather, she argues, we should recognize that there are a multitude of ways in which an action can be, or an agent can act, contrary to practical reason. In addition to self-interest and preference-satisfaction, moral goodness is an aspect of practical rationality. She illustrates this by arguing that we can understand virtue in terms of the recognition of reasons.

> Those who possess these virtues [justice, charity, courage, and temperance] possess them in so far as they recognize certain considerations (such as the fact of a promise, or of a neighbor's need) as powerful, and in may circumstances compelling, reasons for acting. They recognize reasons and act on them.[11]

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[10] Ibid., p. 13
[11] Ibid., p. 12

Moral judgments, on this account, are action guiding because to make a moral judgment is to make a judgment about what an agent has reasons to do. This isn't to claim that practical reason is reducible to the recognition of reasons we would generally classify as moral. Foot wants us to expand, rather than replace, our conception of practical rationality to include self-interest, preference satisfaction, and moral goodness. An account of practical rationality must take account of all these categories of reasons and weigh them in particular contexts. It would be a mistake to reduce practical reason to moral reasons because, as Foot says, "it is not always rational to give help where it is needed, to keep a promise, or even, I believe, always to speak the truth."[12] The best account of practical reason is a synthesis.

> We should not think in terms of rival theories, but of the different parts of practical rationality, no one of which should be mistaken for the whole. An action can be contrary to practical rationality in that it is dishonest or disrespectful of others' right, *or* that it is foolishly imprudent, *or*, again that the agent is, for example, careless, timid, or half-hearted in going for what he wants."[13]

Foot gives an example of a burglar who was caught during a home invasion because he decided to sit on the couch and watch television in the house he was burgling. The decision to stay in the house to watch TV was imprudent, and we can intelligibly say that he should have gotten out of there as quickly as possible. We can make this judgment without implying the moral permissibility of the burglary. It is perfectly coherent to recognize both the imprudence and the immorality of the action. The burglar made at least two failures of practical reason, in respect to prudence and moral permissibility.

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[12] Ibid., p. 11
[13] Ibid., p. 13

There is a common thread which underpins these different aspects of practical rationality. "There is no criterion for practical rationality," Foot claims, "that is not *derived from* that of goodness of the will."[14] Judgments of practical rationality will always be judgments about the will of the agent. "The root notion," Foot explains, "is that of the goodness of human beings in respect of their actions; which means, to repeat, goodness of the will rather than of such things as sight, dexterity, or memory."[15] Though practical reason is a multifaceted concept, there is a unity to judgments regarding the practical reason since they are always judgments of the will in respect to the rationality or irrationality of an action. "It is because moral action is a requirement of practical rationality that it has a special connection to the will."[16] This is why, according to Foot, her account of natural goodness will meet Hume's practicality requirement. Foot calls her view a 'practical rationality' account of moral judgment:

> On a 'practical rationality' account, a moral judgement says something about the action of any individual to whom it applies: namely, something about the reason that there is for *him* to do it or not do it, whether or not he recognizes that, and whether or not, if he does recognize it, he also acts on it as he should. Moreover, it can explain moral action in an individual who knows that he has reason to act morally; because acting on reasons is a basic mode of operation in human beings. This, too, is part of my account of the way in which morality is necessarily practical: it serves to produce and prevent action, *because the understanding of reasons can do that.[17]*

Moral judgments are judgments about the reasons agents have for action. However, natural goodness avoids the subjectivism of the non-cognitivists because the judgments

[14] Sanford S. Levy, "Philippa Foot's Theory of Natural Goodness," *Forum Philosophicum: International Journal for Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2009): 1–15., p. 11
[15] Ibid., p. 14
[16] Ibid., p. 21
[17] Ibid., p. 18

about reasons are not grounded in some feature of the agent's subjectivity. Instead, judgments of natural goodness are grounded in objective facts about the life from of an organism.

Like the non-cognitivists, Foot approaches her considerations of goodness by focusing on the nature of normative judgments. There is a unique logical structure which grounds all judgments regarding natural goodness. Foot takes herself to be offering an account of this type of normative judgment. Her express task is to "describe a particular type of evaluation and to argue that moral evaluation of human action is of this logical type."[18] Here a distinction must be made between two senses of evaluation. On the one hand, 'evaluation' can refer to the *process of* evaluating and on the other hand, it can refer to the judgment which is the culmination of this process. In order to disambiguate, from here on I will use 'normative evaluation'[19] to refer to the *process* of evaluation and 'normative judgment' to refer to the propositional conclusion of the evaluation. The proposition: 'People should keep their promises', for example, is a normative judgment and the way we figure out that people should keep their promises is through a process of normative evaluation.

When Foot says she is describing a particular type of evaluation, what I take her to be doing is offering an account of the truth making conditions of a normative judgment. While the non-cognitivists explain the truth of a normative judgment in reference to some fact about the speaker's attitudes, Foot is offering what I consider to

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[18] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 3.
[19] Unless specified otherwise, 'normative evaluation' refers to the evaluation of some feature or operation of an organism in terms of natural goodness (natural normative evaluation). Discussions of secondary goodness are not relevant to the purposes of this project.

be a foundationalist account of goodness grounded in facts about species. The normative judgment that deep roots are good for an oak tree is true because of some foundational, natural facts about oak trees and how they go about living. I go into more detail regarding the nature of these facts and their connection to natural goodness in the second chapter. For now, suffice it to say that Foot's theory of natural goodness avoids the non-cognitivist subjectivism and denies the gap between judgments and their grounds by rooting her concept of goodness in these objective, natural facts about the life form of organisms. However, although grounding goodness in natural facts is what allows Foot to avoid the shortcomings of the non-cognitivists, it is also the source of a significant challenge facing her theory, one which she does not explicitly address. I call this challenge the problem of incomplete knowledge.

2. The Problem of Incomplete Knowledge

The problem of incomplete knowledge is a challenge which arises out of Foot's grounding her theory of goodness on foundational facts about the nature of organisms when we have incomplete knowledge of these facts. When we are considering the goodness of deep roots for an oak tree, the judgment that deep roots are good for the oak seems almost self-evident. This is because we, at least in some general sense, understand how oak trees work and what they need to survive. We can often tell by looking whether a plant or animal is sick or healthy, or at least we believe that we could tell. Things are less self-evident when we consider organisms we we are less familiar

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with or which are more complicated. We are not in a position to be as confident about judgments in these cases where we don't know as much about an organism, how it survives, how it reproduces, the life form of its species. In chapter three I argue that human rationality creates, with us, an extremely complicated case and argue that we are not in a position to know the kinds of foundational, natural facts that ground normative judgments on Foot's theory of natural goodness. This is not an objection that could be raised against the non-cognitivists. You don't need to *know* anything in order to have whatever attitude the theory might require for authentic, or coherent judgment. It is precisely because Foot denies the gap between judgments and their grounding in objective fact, that her theory must account for how we are to make justifiable normative judgments when we, arguably, do not have access to all the facts on which those judgments are supposed to be grounded. Even without the arguments in chapter three, the disagreements about any particular account of human nature and the widespread abandonment of the project of constructing such an account should begin to motivate the worry that, at least when it comes to human beings, we exist is a state of incomplete knowledge regarding our own natures. I argue in chapter four that the problem of incomplete knowledge is not unique to the human case, that the apparently 'self-evident' nature of judgments regarding relatively simpler organisms is really an illusion.

3. Normative Evaluation

When I described Foot's project as one of explaining the grounds for normative judgments I made the distinction between particular normative judgments and the process of evaluation which can justify those judgments. That distinction is important, as it is key to solving the problem of incomplete knowledge. Foot offers an account of the truth making conditions for normative judgments. I go into more detail on what these conditions are in the next chapter, but for now it is sufficient to know that normative judgments depend on empirical facts about a particular organism and a description of the life-form of the species to which that organism belongs. The problem of incomplete knowledge challenges that we can not make justified normative judgements since, given the complexity of human nature, it does not seem likely that we can construct a reasonably comprehensive account of our own life-form to ground such judgments. The problem assumes that the structure of justification for normative judgments in Foot's theory mirrors the structure of truth for these same normative claims. The first step to solving the problem of incomplete knowledge is recognizing and rejecting this assumption. If the structure of justification did mirror the structure of truth, then on Foot's theory, then the process of justification would begin with constructing a reasonably comprehensive account of some organism's nature. Next we would make an empirical observation about some particular subject of evaluation, be it a specific organism or some feature or practice of that organism. The conjunction of this empirical premise with some relevant subsection of our account of that organism's nature would generate a normative judgment. For instance, we know of oak trees that they require

deep, strong roots in order to take in nutrients and withstand environmental pressures like wind and gravity in order to keep their leaves in position to photosynthesize. These are facts about the nature of oak trees and grounds the judgment of some particular oak that it is good in virtue of its having deep, strong roots. I argue in chapter four that this is not the best way to think about normative judgment, either in the human cases or the non-human cases. I reject the assumption that the structure of justification mirrors the structure of truth and argue that instead our normative judgments should be justified through a process of normative evaluation which is a process of inquiry into a specific set of questions which are entailed by Foot's theory of natural goodness. The process of normative evaluation I am proposing is not divorced from Foot's theory, simply tacked on as a solution to the problem. Rather, its structure is determined by the conjunction of the nature of Foot's theory and the recognition that we are in a state of incomplete knowledge regarding our own nature and that of other organisms.

4. The Scope of 'Natural Goodness'

Before I present the overall structure of this project, I think it is important to make note of the scope of Foot's project and what she is not doing in *Natural Goodness*. Foot defines the scope of her project on the first page of *Natural Goodness*, but not, I'm afraid, in a way that is sufficiently clarificatory. The first question Foot poses is: "What is this book about?"[20] She answer: "It is a book of *moral* philosophy, which means that we must discuss right and wrong and virtue and vice, the traditional subjects of moral

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[20] Foot, *Natural Goodness.*, p. 1

judgment." However, she continues, "being a book of *philosophy*, it has to do only with a peculiar type of question about these subjects that is perhaps best identified either by example or by the special kind of malaise that we feel when examples of it appear."[21] This answer sets the conversational, yet engaging tone which continues throughout *Natural Goodness*, but I'm afraid does not answer the question. I believe that the best way to read *Natural Goodness* is as a work of meta-ethics, focused on the concept of goodness through an evaluation of the nature of normative judgment. It is not merely an academic point to indicate that Foot's project is this narrow. It would be easy to believe that she is making more substantive conclusions about particular moral issues. After all, the book is rife with specific examples of human and non-human flourishing and deficiency. Foot discusses in her first chapter, as I've mentioned, a specific conception of virtue in terms of the recognition of reasons and she dedicates a whole chapter to considering the relationship between happiness and human good. Although, as I cover in the sixth chapter, I do think that Foot's work here has implications, in particular, for virtue ethics, it would be mistaken to read *Natural Goodness* as a treatise on virtue, or applied ethics. The claims she makes about virtue and about human and non-human flourishing serve as illustrations of the structure of normativity which she is attempting to describe. She has explicitly states that her methodology will involve presenting examples meant to illustrate the nature of moral judgment. Her discussion of happiness is in the context of answering an objection her claims about practical rationality, not to present a positive account of the relationship between virtue and happiness, though she

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[21] Ibid., p. 1

does offer insights which may be helpful for someone engaged in that project. That her

examples should be taken as illustrating the structure of normative judgment rather than

as conclusions of a positive moral theory is evidenced by the fact that she does not

tackle specific moral dilemmas. She takes widely non-controversial cases because the

purpose is, again, not to engage in moral theory at the practical level. In the postscript

to *Natural Goodness* Foot considers the question of where we are left in regards to

'disputes about substantial moral questions' in light of the theory of goodness she has

presented:

> Do I really believe that I have described a method for settling them all? The
> proper reply is that in a way nothing is settled, but everything is left as it was. The
> account of vice as a natural defect merely gives a framework within which
> disputes are said to take place, and tries to get rid of some intruding
> philosophical theories and abstractions that tend to trip us up.[22]

It is important to see that Foot's project is, in one sense, modest. She is focused on one

specific thesis, that vice is a natural defect, or as I have presented it, that normative

judgments, including moral judgments, are judgments of natural goodness. On the other

hand, the implications of *Natural Goodness* are far reaching, not because it offers

specific answers to particular moral questions, but because it implies a framework, an

orientation from which to approach these questions. One way to understand my project

is as an attempt to present an account of this framework in the context of our

incomplete knowledge. Foot is right to see her theory as entailing a framework for moral

discourse, but the structure of this framework will be shaped not only by the

foundationalist account of goodness which Foot presents, but also the way we relate to

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[22] Ibid., p. 116

this foundation, in particular, that we do not have access to all of the facts which constitute Foot's normative foundation. Certainly the framework from which we approach moral questions would be different if we did have a reasonably comprehensive account of human nature.

5. Project Outline

My purpose in this work is to develop and defend an account of normative evaluation which can build from and supplement Foot's foundationalism and to consider the implications of such an account for moral development and virtue. To this end I begin chapter two with a presentation of Foot's account of natural goodness, beginning with the apparently simpler non-human cases. I explain what natural goodness is, defining the concepts Aristotelian categorical and Aristotelian necessity, which are key to understanding the normative structure which Foot is proposing. In order to better clarify the foundations of Foot's account I consider two objections. The first is leveled against Foot's appeal to a species level criteria for goodness and is raised by Michael Slote and Sanford S. Levy. The second is that Foot's theory of natural goodness does not offer an adequate criteria for judging normative tradeoffs. This objection come from Tim Lewens.

Once I have adequately presented Foot's theory as it applies to non-human organisms I shift, in chapter three, to her arguments that this normative structure applies to human beings, including judgments in the moral realm. I consider two additional

objections to Foot's view, these focusing specifically on apparent challenges facing this shift into the human realm. The first objection charges that the theory of natural goodness is incapable, without begging the question, of prohibiting a number of clearly objectionable behaviors. The second objection, coming from Frans Svensson, is that moral evaluations are unique in ways that distinguish them from the types of evaluations that can be derived from the theory of natural goodness. I argue that, though this objection is ultimately misguided, it is grounded in a real challenge to Foot's position which stems from the human capacity for rationality. I discuss some of the ways in which our capacity for reason makes us unique to the non-human cases, as understood by Foot. Reason, I then show, does pose a problem for Foot's theory of natural goodness which I call the problem of incomplete knowledge. I illustrate some ways in which the rational capacity makes the human cases appear vastly more complex than the non-human cases and argue that Foot's theory faces a significant problem given the fact that we do not have access to the natural facts which form the foundation of Foot's theory.

I propose my solution to this problem in chapter four. I argue that we must abandon a foundationalist account of normative justification, in the face of our incomplete knowledge. This foundationalist picture should be replaced by a procedural account of normative evaluation. This process is informed by the structure of natural goodness by being directed as a search for the teleological relationship which grounds natural goodness. I give an example of this process by considering the practice of promise keeping, working through a consideration of the role that promise keeping plays

in human life and ultimately concluding that it is good for humans to be promise keepers. After describing this process of normative evaluation as a process of inquiry into questions determined by the structure of natural goodness I consider two potential objections. The first is that the process as I describe it is insufficient as an account of justification for a naturalistic theory like Foot's. The second is that the process I propose is disconnected from Foot's naturalism, that the objectivity offered by her account is ultimately illusory given the state of incomplete knowledge which motivates my account. Responding to these objections I argue that the objective structure of natural goodness does shape the process of normative inquiry, in part by implying the value of certain normative attitudes that I refer to as virtues of inquiry.

In the fifth chapter I discuss the role that human ends play in the theory of natural goodness. Humans are often considered unique in their capacity to set and pursue ends. It seems reasonable to expect this feature to inform our understanding of our nature, and thus to have implications for normative evaluation and judgment. However, particular ends are also appropriate objects of normative evaluation. I argue that Foot's theory of natural goodness and my account of normative evaluation are capable of accounting for ends in both of these ways.

In the fifth chapter I consider the implications of Foot's natural goodness and my account of normative evaluation for a theory of virtue. Foot proposes that virtue can be understood in terms of the recognition of reasons. I argue that this account of virtue fits very well with my account of normative evaluation and consider some implications of

what has been said thus far regarding natural goodness and normative evaluation for understanding particular virtues and the nature of virtuous agents.

Chapter 2: Philippa Foot's *Natural Goodness*

1. Introduction

In this chapter I will present Foot's account of natural goodness, focusing primarily on the comparatively simpler cases of plants and non-human animals. Chapter three will address natural goodness for humans in more detail. Of particular import are a number of definitions which are necessary for understanding the scope of natural goodness, the way in which it arises concurrently with life, and why the appropriate criteria for normative judgments is found at the species level. Following this explanation of Foot's account of natural goodness, I will address several objections raised by critics of Foot's work. For instance, Sanford S. Levy raises some objections which seem to indicate that the species level criteria proposed by Foot is inadequate.[23] I will present the cases and objections that he offers in order to illustrate that Foot's theory of natural goodness is capable of answering these concerns and that a species level criterion for goodness is in fact the best way of making sense of his examples. I will conclude by considering some objections raised by Tim Lewens that are intended to show that Foot's theory is incapable of offering a way of adjudicating in cases of normative trade-offs. Even in the simpler cases of non-human organisms, Lewens argues, Foot hasn't given us a way of adjudicating between potentially conflicting values. I will argue

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[23] Levy, "Philippa Foot's Theory of Natural Goodness."

that he hasn't successfully illustrated this weakness in Foot's position, and will question the assumption that the kinds of trade-offs that Lewens has in mind actually call for adjudication. In many cases, at least, there is no reason to privilege one life strategy over another, even if they promote different aspects of an organism's form of life.

2. Natural Goodness

Foot presents her theory of natural goodness as a rejection of G. E. Moore's assumption that 'goodness' should be treated as a predicative adjective like 'red'. A predicative adjective "operates in independence of any noun to which it is attached."[24] 'Red' is a predicative adjective since we can speak intelligibly and informatively about an object being red without any other knowledge of the object. However, Foot argues that treating goodness as a predicative adjective "makes it hard to see the real logical grammar of evaluation, in which, in most contexts, 'good' requires to be complemented by a noun that plays an essential role in determining whether we are able to speak of goodness rather than badness, or indeed of goodness or badness at all."[25] 'Goodness' is a different type of property than 'red' since "whether a particular F is a good F depends radically on what we substitute for 'F'."[26] This claim encompasses the structure of Foot's theory of goodness. She offers an account of goodness on which the

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[24] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 1, 2.
[25] Ibid., 2.
[26] Ibid., 3.

goodness of an organisms, or its features, depends upon some set of facts about that particular organism and about the type of organism it is.

As I pointed out earlier, natural goodness belongs to a special category which only applies to evaluations of living organisms. This category is distinct from what Foot refers to as 'secondary goodness'. Secondary goodness is a category which can apply both to living organisms and nonliving objects. For non-living things this goodness is constituted by a relationship to some living organism or organisms. For instance, when we say that rich soil is good for crops, it is in this secondary sense. To say that rich soil is good, in this sense, is to point out that the soil has some feature, specifically being rich in nutrients, which is beneficial to the crops. This is secondary goodness because it points beyond the nature of the soil to a relationship between the soil and crops. Natural goodness, on the other hand, arises with the nature of the organism. The goodness of artifacts, or tools, also falls into this secondary category. The goodness of a tool, like a hammer, can only be understood in reference to some tool user which imposes some function on the tool. Organisms, in virtue of being alive, generate their own criteria for goodness. It is secondary goodness which is in operation when we say that it is good for crops to be healthy, in the sense that it benefits the farmer. It is a judgment of natural goodness to say that the crops are healthy. It is a judgment of secondary goodness to say that this is good for the farmer. In this case the goodness of a living thing, the crops, is understood in terms of a relationship to a different species, human beings, and is secondary goodness. Secondary goodness is distinct from natural goodness because natural goodness is intrinsic to a particular type of organism. That is to say that some

object of normative evaluation, for instance the visual capacity of an individual hawk, can be evaluated in terms of some relationship this capacity bears to the species to which this individual belongs. In order to unpack the details of this relationship we can consider the comparatively simple cases of plants and non-human animals. This is where Foot begins her own presentation of the theory.

Beginning with plants and non-human animals, Foot draws inspiration from Michael Thompson.[27] She adopts the following, slightly modified, version of a criteria which he offers:[28] "if we have a true [teleological] natural-history proposition to the effect that S's are F, then if a certain individual S… is not F it is therefore not as it should be." [29] Foot adds the teleological requirement to the criteria. Natural-history sentences have the form 'S is F', or 'S's are F', where S refers to a species, or life form, and F is a predicate.[30] A typical proposition of this form would be: Rabbits are herbivores.

The truth-making conditions for these propositions are not what might seem to follow from the form. In order for a natural-history proposition to be true, it is neither required that all S's are F, or even that most S's are F.[31] To illustrate, consider the following propositions: Cats are four-legged and Humans have 32 teeth. The proposition that cats are four-legged is true even though there are, of course, exceptions. Unfortunately, some cats lose a leg in the course of their lives, and others, as a result of

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[27] Michael Thompson, "The Representation of Life," in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory: Essays in Honour of Philippa Foot*, ed. Rosalind Hursthouse, Gavin Lawrence, and And Warren Quinn, The Representation of Life (Oxford University Press, 1995), 247–96.

[28] Ibid., 295.

[29] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 6.

[30] Ibid., 27.

[31] Ibid., 28.

a birth defect, may never have developed all four legs. The proposition that humans have 32 teeth is true even though for many reasons, including the common practice of pulling wisdom teeth, most humans do not have exactly 32 teeth.

Natural-history propositions refer to the 'natural-history' of a species, giving an account of how members of the species live.[32] These propositions do not imply the absolute stability of species, but do depend on their relative stability through time.[33] As Foot explains: "They tell how a kind of plant or animal, considered at a particular time and in its natural habitat, develops, sustains itself, defends itself, and reproduces."[34] This statement captures the modification Foot adds to Thompson's criteria of judgment, that is, that the predicate in the natural-history proposition must refer to a trait or operation which is teleologically related to the life form of the organism. The distinction between teleological and non-teleological predicates, and the relevance of it, can be seen by comparing the following two propositions: (1) Oak trees have deep roots, and (2) Oak trees have leaves which rustle in the wind.[35] The first proposition includes a predicate which is teleologically related to the life form of the oak. Deep roots play a clear role in the life of an oak, allowing the tree to remain upright, which is necessary for photosynthesis and for the tree to draw in nutrients from the soil. The rustling of tree leaves presumably does not play a role in the life of the tree. It does not contribute to photosynthesis, reproduction, or any other life process. This predicate, having leaves which rustle in the wind, is not teleologically related to the life form of the species.

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 29.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 29, 30.

Another example Foot uses is the typically bright color of the blue tit's head, which presumably plays no role in reproduction or self-maintenance for the bird, compared to the bright color of the male peacock's tail, which plays a role in the bird's finding a mate. It makes sense, Foot claims, to judge a peacock with drab tail feathers to be deficient whereas it does not make sense to make a similar judgment about the blue tit with a drab crown. "What is crucial to all teleological propositions," according to Foot, "is the expectation of an answer to the question: 'What part does it play in the life cycle of things of the species S?' In other words, 'What is its function?' or 'What good does it do?'"[36] I believe that Foot adopts the term *Aristotelian categorical*, which Thompson treats as equivalent to natural-history proposition, in order to represent the importance of this teleological requirement. What distinguishes an Aristotelian categorical from a statistical proposition is the teleology; that it is about the life function of a species.[37] The nature of this teleological relationship is one of necessity. This is a particular understanding of necessity, which Foot refers to as *Aristotelian necessity*, borrowing the term from G. E. M. Anscombe.[38] 'Aristotelian necessity' refers to the teleological relationship that an object of normative evaluation must bear towards a life form in order to be good in the manner required for natural goodness. As Foot says,

> These 'Aristotelian categoricals' depend on what the particular species of plants and animals need, on their natural habitat, and the ways of making out that are in their repertoire. These things together determine what it is for members of a particular species to be as they should be, and to do that which they should do.[39]

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[36] Ibid., 31, 32.
[37] Ibid., 33.
[38] G. E. M. Anscombe, *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G.E.M. Anscombe (Book)*, 1st ed., vol. iii, 1991.
[39] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 14, 15.

The Aristotelian categorical that states 'deer are swift' is true because swiftness is a trait which is necessary, in the sense of Aristotelian necessity, to deer survival. Given the nature of the deer, it is necessary that the deer be able to avoid predators, and the strategy which is open to them is fleeing. Other prey animals achieve this Aristotelian necessity of avoiding predators in different ways, camouflage, burrowing, climbing, etc. This is not to say that swiftness is necessary in the sense that not being swift will guarantee the demise of the deer. It is very possible that deer may happen to live in an area without predators. This contingent possibility does not undermine the role that swiftness plays in the life form of deer, considered at the species level.

Foot proposes many other instances of things she takes to be Aristotelian necessities throughout *Natural Goodness*. For example, she claims that it is necessary for plants to have water, birds to build nests, wolves to hunt in packs, and for humans to develop moral virtues, to cooperate, and to cultivate a respect for truth, art, and scholarship.[40] All of these things, Foot believes, are necessary to the respective life forms in this sense. This necessity is what constitutes the teleological relationship which grounds normative judgments. It is important to note, at this point, that though all these examples, for both humans and non-human organisms are all instances of the same type of goodness, since their goodness is constituted by their relationship to the life form of the organism, these life forms are not identical. Foot understands the life forms of plants and non-human animals as best understood in terms of self-maintenance and reproduction. To understand the life forms of different organisms, what makes one

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[40] Ibid., 14 – 16, 35.

species different from another, we have to investigate the different ways they live, that is, the different ways they maintain themselves and reproduce. For humans, Foot believes, life is constituted by more than just strategies for self-maintenance and reproduction. I will address natural goodness for humans in the third chapter. For now, it is just important to note that, though there are important differences between the life forms of humans and non-human organisms, the structure of goodness is the same. I'll address this similarity of structure in the following chapter as well.

The Aristotelian categorical is normative in this uniquely 'natural' way because it entails a criterion for evaluation which is inherent in the individual as having the form of life that it has, that is, as being a member of its species.

> And this is why Aristotelian categoricals are able to describe norms rather than statistical normalities. It *matters* in the reproductive life of the peacock that the tail should be brightly colored, whereas our assumption has been that the blue on the head of the blue tit plays no part in what here counts as 'its life'.[41]

The predicates to which Aristotelian categoricals refer matter in an autonomous, or intrinsic way, that is, without reference to some goal, end, or good outside the organisms' form of life.

> Thus, evaluation of an individual living thing in its own right, with no reference to our interests or desires, is possible where there is intersection of two types of propositions: on the one hand, Aristotelian categoricals (life-form descriptions relating to the species), and on the other, propositions about particular individuals that are the subject of evaluation.[42]

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[41] Ibid., 33.
[42] Ibid.

This can be seen as a statement of the fundamental goal of Foot's theory of natural goodness; to ground judgments of this unique, yet wide ranging category of natural goodness.

Normative judgments based on Aristotelian categoricals imply that if some feature F is good for members of a species S, then it is good for an F to be S even in some particular case where F might (1) fail to contribute to the well-being of an organism (understood in terms of reproduction and self-maintenance for plants and non-human animals), or (2) turn out to be detrimental to the achievement of this end.[43] For example, swiftness is good for deer because it is their primary form of defense. This is true even when swiftness isn't sufficient to escape, or when the fast deer is the first into the hunter's trap.[44] In addition, Aristotelian categoricals are in reference to the species' natural habitat. So being slow is still a defect for a deer, even in a zoo where speed has no effect on a deer's self-maintenance or reproduction.[45] Finally, Aristotelian categoricals are not merely self-interested. These propositions can describe the fact that cooperation and other-regarding practices at least partly constitute the life form of a species. Foot gives numerous examples to illustrate this including the hunting packs of wolves, dancing bees, bee stings, and other-grooming monkeys.[46]

Foot nicely summarizes what has been said regarding the theory of natural goodness as applied to plants and non-human animals:[47]

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[43] Ibid., 34.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 35.
[47] Ibid., 33, 34.

(a) There was the life cycle, which in those cases consisted roughly of self-maintenance and reproduction.

(b) There was the set of propositions saying *how* for a certain species this was achieved; how nourishment was obtained, how development took place, what defenses were available, and how reproduction was secured.

(c) From all this, *norms* were derived, requiring, for instance, a certain degree of swiftness in the deer, night vision in the owl, and cooperative hunting in the wolf.

(d) By the application of these norms to an individual member of the relevant species it (this individual) was judged to be as it should be or, by contrast, to a lesser or greater degree defective in a certain respect.

In this summary (a) and (b) are Aristotelian categoricals, which Foot describes as "the 'how and what' of the life cycle,"[48] propositions entailing, or explaining, the Aristotelian necessity of some predicate.

3. The Inadequacy of a Species Level Criteria for Goodness

At this point I will respond to a number of objections which have been raised against Foot's theory of Natural Normativity. The first of these is raised by both Michael Slote and Sanford S. Levy and is directed at Foot grounding of her criterion for

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[48] Ibid., 34.

normative evaluation at the species level.[49,50] Levy argues that Foot's dependence on species level natural history sentences is arbitrary and problematic. "The species," he claims, "is far too broad a category to capture many of the relevant natural history sentences and norms."[51] This can be seen when looking at Foot's oft referenced honeybee. Foot says, according to Levy, that "humans need virtue as bees need to sting."[52] However, as Levy points out, not all honeybees sting. The queens, workers, drones, etc. all have different functions.[53] In focusing at the species level, then, Foot appears to be oversimplifying the form of life the bees have, not recognizing that the different sub-groups of honey bee lead varying types of lives dependent on their 'job'. Thus, a species level criterion for goodness is incapable of accounting for this intra-species variation. Instead, it seems we would require different criteria for success, different Aristotelian categoricals, for each type of bee within the species.

The virtue / sting comparison which Levy points to is a reference to Foot's quoting Peter Geach: "Men need virtues as bees need stings,"[54] though she then clarifies; "I should prefer to say that virtues play a necessary part in the life of human beings as do stings in the life of bees."[55] There is a subtle but important difference between Levy's description of Foot's use of Geach's phrase here and what is actually said. To say 'bees need to sting' is certainly an oversimplification and misrepresentation

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[49] Michael Slote, "Review: Natural Goodness," *Mind; a Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* 112, no. 445 (2003): 130–39.
[50] Levy, "Philippa Foot's Theory of Natural Goodness."
[51] Ibid., 8.
[52] Ibid., 9.
[53] Ibid., 8, 9.
[54] Foot, *Natural Goodness,* 35.
[55] Ibid.

of the honeybee, as Levy points out. However, to say 'bees need stings' is very different. As Foot points out, when Geach makes this comparison what he is illustrating is the way in which virtue can be other-regarding. Thus, to say 'bees need stings' is not to say that all bees sting, or that all bees should sting, but rather that they depend on those who do. This is not an oversimplification of the life of the bee, but is rather, as Foot intended, an illustration that the evaluations generated by her theory are not all self-interested.

Do we not still, however, need to modify Foot's theory to accommodate the different jobs found in a honeybee hive? It seems that the criterion for success is different for a worker and a queen. If this is so, then we seem to have reason to doubt Foot's locating the criterion for evaluation at the species level.

Foot and Geach both surely recognize that different honeybees contribute to the survival of the hive in different ways depending on their job. It is this cooperative, interdependent nature they were both appealing to. Furthermore, each honeybee's fitness must be understood relative to their job (worker, drone, queen, etc.). It would be incorrect to fault a drone for not stinging in protection of the hive as drones do not have the capacity to sting. All of this may be true, yet none of these jobs can be understood in a vacuum. It doesn't make sense to talk about the things the worker bee does without the context of the hive. To describe another creature which lived like the worker bee, but wasn't a member of a hive, if this would even be possible, would be to describe a very different form of life. Part of what it means to be a honeybee is to live in a hive and to contribute to the survival of the hive in that way which appropriate given its capacities.

That is the species-wide criteria for success, or health, in the honeybee. To recognize, as Levy does, that the criteria of success points towards specific jobs is just to recognize an interesting fact about hive insects. But we can recognize this fact without moving away from the species level account of the honeybees' form of life. Furthermore, we cannot recognize the teleological nature of these jobs without reference to this species level account. For example, if we consider the worker bee without reference to the hive, then the act of stinging, being a significant risk to the bee, takes on a very different appearance. It isn't clear that stinging could convincingly be described as a proper function of the worker bee outside the context of the hive, since the function is actually to protect the hive, even at great risk to the individual. Given that honeybees are hive insects, and I've argued that we cannot understand their form of life without reference to the hive, then an Aristotelian categorical describing the proper functioning of the honeybee must include reference to the hive. Perhaps a simple life-form description might be: 'Honeybees work in service to the hive.' This Aristotelian categorical would indicate that a worker bee which does not sting when it is needed to protect the hive is deficient, as is a worker bee that is unable to sting. Of course, worker bees contribute to the hive in other ways, and can be evaluated in virtue of their fitness to fulfill these jobs as well. Recognizing that individuals have different capacities, for example in the way that worker bees differ from queen bees, is not to abandon the species level criteria. The relevance of any feature of any bee can only be properly understood in reference to the hive.

Levy depends on another example throughout most of his arguments, the coyote. We can see in coyotes a species whose members live in very diverse habitats with very different requirements for survival.[56] They can live anywhere from national forests to urban cities. In some habitats they are apex predators but not in others. In some habitats a fear of humans is a beneficial trait, but in others it is maladaptive behavior. Even within a habitat a coyote family might come upon a unique strategy which benefits their survival which is not common practice for others sharing that habitat. Accounting for these variations in subspecies populations would require, Levy believes, a restructuring of Foot's theory. Such a reworking is not as innocuous a modification as it might first appear. The first problem, according to Levy, is that there is no non-arbitrary stopping point in the division.[57] The move from taking species as the standard to subpopulations opens up the potential for a regress all the way down to the individual. This is a subjectivist result that Foot would clearly find unpalatable.

If we can, or should, shift the criterion for evaluation to sub-populations within species then, according to Levy, "things often considered vices, like lying, become role-specific human virtues, on Foot's view."[58] To make this case Levy returns to the bee analogy. As noted earlier, it is an oversimplification to treat all honeybees as if they were the same. Not all bees sting, and it would be profoundly problematic for the hive if they did. Levy points out that, since stinging kills the bee, it would be disastrous if the queen were to sting. Analogously, Levy argues, it is not necessary that all humans

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[56] Levy, "Philippa Foot's Theory of Natural Goodness," 9, 10.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 11.

possess the virtues of bravery, or honesty. It is only those in comparatively dangerous

professions, such as military or police, for which bravery is necessary. According to

Levy, "the average clerk, salesperson, gardener, or philosopher working in a college

that requires no research has little need for courage beyond what is required to walk out

the door in the morning and order an Egg McMuffin."[59] Presumably, just as it is the

worker bees' job to sting, it is part of the soldiers' and police officers' job to be brave.

Considering honesty, Levy claims that, "Depending on one's role in the community

honesty can be a detriment both to the individual and the community."[60] For example,

Levy claims that honesty is not a virtue in labor negotiations.[61] "It can be a disaster for

the negotiator, who might find herself without a job, and for the group, which gave away

its final position at the start of the negotiation."[62] This is again analogous to a stinging

queen bee, since she would both destroy herself and the hive were she to sting.

When it comes to the honeybees, Levy doesn't quite have his facts correct. It is

neither true that stinging inherently kills the bee, nor that it is disastrous for the hive

when the queen stings. When a worker bee stings a mammal it is fairly common for the

stinger to get stuck in the skin, since it is barbed. Pulling away and ripping off the stinger

is what kills the bee. Queen bees' stinger are not barbed, however, and thus stinging is

relatively safe for the queen, and at times common.

It may seem that this is the kind of empirical minutia that we need not worry

about. After all, as we philosophers so often do, we could just say for the sake of

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[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

argument that Levy's facts are correct, and thus his point is still made. To some extent this is a reasonable response, however for a naturalistic theory like Foot's it is often just these kinds of details that distinguish a justified judgment from an unjustified one. It isn't as simple as just claiming that it would be disastrous for the queen to sting, this has to be grounded in the facts. This also applies to Levy's conceptions of bravery and honesty. It seems overly narrow to restrict the realm of bravery only to those whose careers involve risk of physical harm to one's person. Bravery can be required for innumerable reasons from overcoming addiction, dealing with psychological obstacles, changing careers, going back to school, standing up for your convictions, or challenging injustice. All of these things and countless others involve facing fear, weighing the risk of failure with the importance of the reward, and even in these less than life-threatening cases these processes can be quite difficult and require real strength of character. In order to adjudicate between Levy's narrow conception of bravery and my broader one we need to develop a conception of what bravery is. For Foot this means placing it in the context of a human life and understanding the role that bravery plays in human life. Until we do this, it seems premature to draw the conclusions that Levy does. This also applies to Levy's conception of honesty, which also seems overly narrow. As I mentioned earlier, Levy claims that honesty is not a virtue in labor negotiations, since it would be disastrous for the negotiator to give away his final position at the start of the negotiation. This only seems problematic on a very narrow conception of honesty. It should be possible to construct an account of honesty which can accommodate the common human practice of negotiation. It seems like an over demanding conception of

honesty which would require a negotiator to give away his final position at the start of the negotiation. However, there is still a more troubling case. Levy's coyote example seems to indicate that Foot's position, with the subspecies modification, entails that traditional vices may serve as role-specific virtues.

As noted previously, the life forms of coyotes, the ways in which they achieve the ends of reproduction and self-maintenance can vary significantly. As Levy describes:

> There are sub-populations of coyotes all the way down to niche populations. These different populations are not like the different roles bees play for the good of the hive. The coyote populations may not interact, and if they do, they may not contribute to a group good. Different coyotes simply have different ways of getting on in the world. The same is true of humans.[63]

One niche population in human society which Levy thinks drives home the problem for Foot is organized crime. "This is a paradigm of immorality, and yet it is a way humans get along in the world."[64] Levy considers the proposition: 'Humans prey upon each other,' to be a true Aristotelian categorical. This is a sentence that describes a way of getting on in the world embodied by members of this niche sub-group. "Preying on other people serves major functions in the lives of individuals,"[65] Levy claims.

There are animal analogues to organized crime as well, Levy points out. For example, lions. The male lion drives off or kills other males to become head of the pride, even killing off the offspring of his competition. He does very little hunting, living off the work of others, yet receiving the 'lion's share.' The male lion's way of life, no matter how

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[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid., 12.

destructive it is, must, if we apply Foot's account to sub-groups, be considered appropriate. Male lions which engage in these activities are doing what male lions should. Additionally, Levy points out, "the majority of male lions are not good lions since only a minority win prides and reproduce."[66] Unless, that is, we recognize that another way male lions "make a living"[67] is to slink off in the face of larger, more aggressive lions. Again Levy is drawing too narrow a picture of success for male lions. It is not the case that the only way to be a good male lion is to be head of a pack, or 'slink off'. Rather, it is the male lions' role to compete for that position, ensuring that the strongest is in the role, or to separate from the group and lead a pride of their own. Having male lions which are not the current pride leader is itself important, as they serve as replacement when the current alpha male either dies or becomes too weak to fill the role. Thus both types of male lions are good lions, since they both actualize traits which "play a role in the life-cycle of the lion."[68]

Levy draws an analogy between the activity of male lions, along with the highly diversified forms the coyote's life takes, and human organized crime. He concludes that "the life of organized crime is as much a human niche requiring its own virtues as the life of the city coyote is a niche requiring its own virtues… Such is a way humans and lions get on in the world. This is not a quirky example. It is easy to find similar ones."[69] The response that 'human communities would be better off without organized crime,' is

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

far too utilitarian for Foot, Levy rightly recognizes.[70] Perhaps, he considers, Foot can

accept the natural goodness of organized crime. "After all, presumably she already

needs to accept that the Marburg virus is naturally good to the extent that it produces

the horrible symptoms needed to reproduce."[71]

This quip about the Marburg virus, along with the heavy dependence on animal

analogies exemplifies a couple of common ways of misreading Foot. The first is

assuming that the theory of natural goodness implies the goodness of any particular

species. While it is true that a virus that is unable to reproduce in whatever way that

virus typically reproduces is defective, it certainly does not follow that it is 'all things

considered' good that the virus reproduces, or even exist. The recognition that it is good

for an oak to have strong roots does not entail that it is good for there to be oak trees.

Foot is very explicit about this. A different type of argument needs to be made if one

wants to defend the claim that it is good for oak trees or viruses or even humans to

exist. This argument is outside the scope of Foot's theory.

The second common mistake is to read too much into the analogies between the

human and non-human organic realms. The similarity which Foot is attempting to

illustrate is a similarity in the logical structure of evaluations of goodness. There is

absolutely no implication that the content of those judgments will be comparable. When

she appeals to examples of cooperation, or other regardingness in the animal realm the

purpose of those examples is to show that the structure of evaluation which she is

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[70] Ibid., 12, 13.
[71] Ibid., 13.

proposing can recognize the goodness of other-regarding traits. Instances of non-cooperation in the animal realm, such as Levy's description of the male lion, don't imply anything regarding the content of judgments in human cases.

Returning to Levy's argument regarding organized crime and the possibility that his modified version of Foot's theory might classify traditional vices as role-specific virtues, we see that he begins, again, with a misleading description of the natural facts. Though the pride leaders do not typically hunt for the pride, it is incorrect to conclude that they do not contribute to the well-being of the pride. As in the case of bees, we are led astray when we look at the actions of one member or sub-group in isolation from the rest of the group to which they belong. The female lions are fit to hunt, being smaller, quicker, and more agile. The alpha male, however, is fit to protect the pride from other predators, being stronger and stockier. Though he does appear to take a large portion of the hunt away from the females this is often to distribute amongst the young. Again, this clarification is neither meant to imply that there are no instances of selfish, or uncooperative behavior found in nature, nor to imply that since there is a cooperative function to the male lion's action, then there must also be in the case of organized crime. Rather, the point is to illustrate that the male lion seems 'greedy' when his actions are misunderstood. Furthermore, this misunderstanding comes from treating the actions of members and sub-groups as the standard for success. Those actions cannot be properly understood except in respect to their role in the group to which they belong. Since the way in which lions, bees, and other animals group themselves is a fact about the life form of the species, Foot's species level criterion stands intact and is perfectly

capable of accounting for the existence of roles within groups. In the lion case, for example, success qua lion can only be understood through reference to the success of the pride. In order to be a good lion, a lion must contribute to the pride. Of course male and female lions contribute to the pride in different ways. Furthermore, we can talk about the strength of a lion, or the hunting prowess, but if we try to extract these features from the context of the pride we will have an incomplete picture, at best, of what it means to be a good lion.

A species level criterion allows us to make sense of exactly those phenomena with which Levy is concerned. What we can take away from Levy's cases is that the recognition that an animal is a social animal should move us to try to understand the nature of that social relationship. Though male and female lions do so in different ways, their criterion for success will still be understood in terms of the role they play in their pride.

This means that we ought not treat the mafia family as an independent, uniquely adapted form of life. There are female lions that are good hunters and female lions that are poor hunters. Those poor hunters may 'get by', but they do so *despite* this feature, not because of it. Likewise, there are human ways of life that are good and those which are not. On Foot's theory we can ask whether the Mafioso gets by because he preys on others or despite that fact. We can even ask whether it is correct to say he 'gets on' in a way which could be considered good. Just as a slow deer in a zoo may survive, it doesn't follow that slowness is good for deer. It may be that preying on others cannot be justifiably considered a legitimate strategy on Foot's theory in so far as it is incompatible

with other strategies which pursue goods more important than the accumulation of power and wealth.

What determines the difference between a legitimate and illegitimate strategy is a higher order, species level, standard. Foot gives us the form of the judgment, but not the content of the standard from which that judgment is derived. Hopefully I've given reason, following Foot, to see that that standard is not subjectivist, or socially relative, but is still capable of accounting for the fact that members of a species are not all homogenous and need not all have the same characteristics, or do the same things in order to be judged 'good.'

Even the coyote case is best understood in terms of a species level standard, despite the fact that they can embody a variety of apparently distinct strategies. Part of what makes coyotes the type of animal they are is their adaptability. This is a species level feature of the coyote that Foot's theory is perfectly capable of recognizing. Being an adaptable species means that they are capable of finding ways of surviving in a variety of environments. We would expect of an adaptable species to adopt different environment specific strategies. There is nothing about Foot's theory that entails that every individual in a species or every group in a species must adopt the same strategies for living. Some species are more homogenous than others. In chapter three I discuss the ways in which the human capacity for reason makes the human case more complex and show that Foot's account of natural goodness is capable of making sense of the pluralism found in human lives. This flexibility does not entail subjectivity. There is still a species level standard, adaptability in the case of the coyote, and this standard can be

met in a plurality of ways, though not in just *any* way. There may be a number of ways a

coyote pack can adapt to their environment and what counts as success will depend

both on the strategies open to the coyotes and to the demands of their environment.

4. No Criteria for Normative Tradeoffs

The next objection, presented by Tim Lewens, is that natural facts cannot resolve

questions involving what he calls 'trade-offs', even in the cases of plants and

non-human animals. Specifically, Lewens considers a hypothetical trade-off between

self-maintenance and reproduction. Expressing his 'biological objection' Lewens would

have us consider the following:

> Suppose we ask how a given organism should be. Should it live for a long
> time, thereby using resources that would have enabled it to have more
> offspring? Or should it have a smaller number of healthy offspring, and
> then die shortly afterwards, leaving resources to future generations?[72]

In order to answer this question, Lewens believes we need to know whether

self-maintenance or reproduction is more important, specifically, which "is the more

important element of flourishing?"[73] Lewens tells us that, according to Foot's theory of

natural goodness, it must be 'natural facts alone' which decide the issue.[74] Consider an

example in which members of the same species have differing life spans which

correspond to different reproductive tendencies. Some die earlier and produce more

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[72] Tim Lewens, "Foot Note," *Analysis* 70, no. 3 (2010): 469, 470.
[73] Ibid., 470.
[74] Ibid.

offspring, while others produce fewer offspring but live longer. The biologist, Lewens

says, might say that the latter 'malfunction' on grounds of biological adaptation. "But

from the perspective of individual health and flourishing, these longer lived individuals

might be judged better off than those that die early."[75] This inconsonance of

interpretations is problematic, according to Lewens. "There is a gap between the sort of

normative notion of flourishing that Foot seeks to capture, and the theories of good

biological functioning based on reproductive output."[76]

      There are two potential responses that Lewens believes are open to Foot, but

both are unsatisfactory. The first response would be to recognize that "the human good

is more complex than the good of plant or animal species."[77] This is something that Foot

herself claims, but in itself this recognition does not solve the problem at hand. Perhaps

Foot can argue that once these complexities are worked out, something that she does

not do in *Natural Goodness*, the issues of trade-offs can be resolved.[78] However,

Lewens argues, the human case "consists in a complexification of a fundamentally

similar form of evaluation that we can bring to plants and animals."[79] But Foot's attempt

to ground evaluations on theories of biological function doesn't work in even the

comparatively simple cases of plants and non-human animals.[80] Thus, not only does

this 'complexification' not solve the comparatively simple cases, but we seem to have

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[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., 470, 471.

no reason to think that the issue of trade-offs will become less problematic in the more complex cases involving human goodness.

The other possible solution, as Lewens sees it, is to say that "Foot's account of function should not be confused with the technical biological notion of function."[81] As she makes clear in a note[82], Foot does not intend 'function' to be understood in terms of evolutionary biology.[83] Lewens proposes that, "Foot might remind us that her Aristotelian theory says that what underpins how species' members ought to be is not that which *contributes*, or has contributed, to development, self-maintenance and reproduction, but rather that which is *necessary* for these things."[84] Thus, if dying early isn't necessary for reproduction, then the organism which lives significantly longer may not be said to be defective. This is so even if dying earlier *contributes* to higher rates of reproduction.[85] This solution, Lewens argues, "raises far more problems than it solves."[86] To illustrate this he considers the following example from Foot:

> We are, let us suppose, evaluating the roots of a particular oak tree, saying perhaps that it has good roots because they are as sturdy and deep as an oak's roots should be. Had its roots been spindly and all near the surface they would have been bad roots; but as it is they are good. Oak trees need to stay upright because, unlike creeping plants, they have no possibility of life on the ground, and they are tall heavy trees. Therefore, oaks need to have deep sturdy roots: there is something wrong with them if they do not, and this is how the normative proposition can be derived. The good of the oak is its individual and reproductive life cycle, and what is necessary for this is an Aristotelian necessity in this case.

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[81] Ibid., 471.
[82] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 23.
[83] Lewens, "Foot Note," 471.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.

> Since it cannot bend like a reed in the wind, an oak that is as an oak should be is one that has deep and sturdy roots.[87]

Lewens interprets Foot to be saying that "Oaks need strong roots, because strong roots are the only possible way for them to stay upright."[88] Given this interpretation, Lewens is skeptical of Foot's use of modality, since we can certainly imagine oak trees staying upright without strong roots, or oaks that stay upright by leaning on other trees.[89] This, however, is not his primary dissatisfaction with this picture. "But more to the point," he says, "peacocks do not *need* gaudy tails in order to survive and reproduce; it is simply that without them their chances of gaining a mate are greatly reduced."[90] Lewens is certainly correct in recognizing that "surely Foot would want to say that a peacock with a drab tail is defective."[91] Thus, given the strong sense of modality, which Lewens believes is necessary for Foot to differentiate her theory from 'the technical biological notion of function,' the theory of natural goodness becomes untenable, unable to justify Foot's desired conclusions even in the simple cases of plants and non-human animals. So Lewens concludes that "the onus is on Foot to explain to us what sorts of things species' natures are, what sorts of facts might make them one way rather than another, how we might decide between two competing judgments about the nature of a given

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[87] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 46.
[88] Lewens, "Foot Note," 473.
[89] Ibid., 472.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.

species and so forth,"[92] and he believes that neither a biological nor Aristotelian account of function are adequate.

Lewens is correct both in regards to the complexification involved with the move from plants and non-human animals to humans and the fact that Foot's theory of natural goodness is not grounded in a technical biological notion of function. However, neither of these aspects of the theory is intended to adjudicate between values in the way Lewens presumes it must. Furthermore, his interpretation of Foot's use of modality is certainly misguided. I will address this second issue first.

Lewens' reading of Foot when she says that strong roots are necessary for the oak tree is much too strong. Foot is clearly aware that some oaks might stay upright and continue to survive by leaning on other trees or other objects. However, this is not the way oak trees go about staying upright. We might say of such a tree, anthropomorphizing a bit, that it was lucky to fall in just the right way, just as we might say the swiftest deer was unlucky to run into the hunter's trap. That an oak might lean on something else to stay upright does not undermine the judgment that strong roots are good for an oak tree, just as the swift deer being caught, due to its swiftness, does not undermine the judgment that it is good for deer to be quick. The criteria for goodness is not relative to the success or failure of a particular organism. Rather, the goodness of some feature of an organism is grounded in the relationship between that feature and the organism's form of life. That is, does the feature play a role in the form of life of this species? If the answer is yes, then the feature is an Aristotelian necessity

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[92] Ibid.

for this species. However, the issue of modality is distinct from the issue of trade-offs. We still need to find a standard which can adjudicate between these two values. Or do we? This is where Lewens goes wrong, assuming that such a dilemma must be resolved.

There is no reason to think that one of these two values, self-maintenance or reproduction, needs to be held primary, or that every question involving tradeoffs needs an answer. This is not to say that either of these values, independent of the other, can be held as a sufficient criterion for success. In the case of plants and non-human animals, self-maintenance and reproduction are what jointly constitute the life form of species. We've already seen, from the discussion of Levy, that the criterion for success can be multiply-realizable amongst members of the same species. This fact puts pressure on Lewens' objections, indicating that he is demanding too much of the theory. Why should we think that either the longer-lived but lower reproducing or shorter-lived but higher reproducing member of a species is superior? At least within a range we should be able to recognize both 'strategies' as legitimate. There is, of course, a limit to the degree of trade-off which we would consider successful. For instance, if the lifespan of the organism interferes with the survival of the population, or if the organism reproduces to such an extent that the survival of the population is threatened, then we see a problem. Given that the life form of a species consists in self-maintenance and reproduction, a degree of variation within the species is expected and does not constitute a deficiency.

The ability for Foot's account of natural goodness to accommodate variation is all the more important when the theory is applied to human beings. Foot's theory is challenging subjectivist and relativist conceptions of goodness, and it is natural to worry about the potential for an absolutist position based on an untenable ground that could potentially be applied in illicit, exclusionary ways. One of the most interesting aspects of her theory is its promise of objectivity without absolutism, a context sensitive objectivity.

5. Conclusion

I have attempted to present Foot's conception of natural goodness in some detail, explaining the relationship between Aristotelian categoricals, Aristotelian necessity, and natural goodness. I have argued that the best way to understand goodness is in reference to a species' life form. What distinguishes one species from another are those features and strategies which constitute their form of life, that is, for non-human organisms, the way they go about self-maintenance and reproduction. I've responded to objections from Sanford S. Levy and Tim Lewens which are directed at Foot's conception of natural goodness, with a particular focus on non-human organisms. In the following chapter I will consider natural goodness for human beings and introduce what I take to be the most significant challenge facing Foot's account, that is, justifying normative judgments when we have incomplete knowledge of the life form, or nature, of a species.

Chapter 3: The Problem of Incomplete Knowledge

1. Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the application of the theory of natural goodness to human beings and consider a number of challenges specifically levied against this shift in Foot's theory from plants and non-human animals to human beings. Though the objections which I will consider here are ultimately unconvincing, I believe they are rooted in a more fundamental problem for natural goodness, the problem of incomplete knowledge. That there is a problem with incomplete knowledge is also indicated by a shift in the way Foot discusses natural goodness in the human case. Foot's discussion of human natural goodness comes primarily in the form of intuitive appeals to deprivation. Considering the different ways in which a person might be deprived, or depraved, allows us to draw, at least, some general conclusions about what things are necessary for a good human life. This is very different from her straightforward examples in the non-human cases, where the nature of an organism, the life form description of a species, was taken to be fairly apparent. Since we know what it is for an oak tree to be healthy, we understand how the tree takes in nutrients, etc. we have a clear criterion for evaluation. This strategy of coming at human goodness through considering deprivation is indicative of the fact that we don't have a comprehensive account of what constitutes a well-lived human life. She uses uncontroversial instances

of deprivation, to draw conclusions about human goodness that might not themselves be uncontroversial at first blush. This is the problem of incomplete knowledge, and I believe that this problem lies at the root of a number of objections raised against Foot's theory of natural goodness, though it is never explicitly acknowledged. Scott Woodcock considers a set of specific normative judgments regarding human beings which he believes Foot's theory is unable to justify without question begging.[93] Frans Svensson argues that moral evaluations are unique, and that Foot's theory is incapable of offering particular moral content.[94] Finally, Christopher Toner argues that rationality makes humans unique, and thus that Foot's theory, even if it works in the non-human cases, cannot account for goodness in rational beings.[95] Toner references similar objections raised by John McDowell.[96] Though I do not find their criticisms convincing, for reasons I enumerate below, they are correct to recognize that the human capacity for rationality does significantly distinguish the human form of life. I discuss the implications of rationality for human life at the end of this chapter. I will argue that the capacity for rationality does not sufficiently distinguish humans from other organisms such that we need an alternative account of goodness. Natural goodness still applies to humans, though our rational capacity does make it particularly difficult to construct a comprehensive account of the human life form, or we might say, of human nature.

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[93] Scott Woodcock, "Philippa Foot's Virtue Ethics Has an Achilles' Heel," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review/Revue Canadienne de Philosophie* 45, no. 03 (2006): 445–68.

[94] Frans Svensson, "Does Non-Cognitivism Rest on a Mistake?," *Utilitas* 19, no. 2 (2007): 184–200.

[95] Christopher Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism: Requirements for a Successful Theory," *Metaphilosophy* 39, no. 2 (2008): 32.

[96] John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory: Essays in Honour of Philippa Foot*, ed. Rosalind Hursthouse, Gavin Lawrence, and And Warren Quinn (Oxford University Press, 1995).

2. Human Natural Goodness

As stated earlier, Foot believes that natural goodness applies in the context of all living organisms including humans and judgments about morality. She intends to show that "there is no change in the meaning of 'good' between the word as it appears in 'good roots' and as it appears in 'good dispositions of the human will.'"[97] In order to prove this she attempts to show that these 'patterns of Natural Normativity' hold for both evaluation of human characteristics and activities in general as well as goodness of the will. I'll consider each of these in turn.

Evaluations of plants and non-human animals retain the same logical structure despite the vast differences among them.[98] Despite these vast dissimilarities in strategies, capabilities, etc. between plants and non-human animals, goodness lies in suitability for self-maintenance and reproduction. Goodness for humans, however, is not reducible to self-maintenance and reproduction, though these are still relevant. For example, Foot points out that "the great (if often troubling) good of having children has to do with the love and ambition of parents for children, the special role of grandparents, and many other things that simply do not belong to animal life."[99] So even the straightforward good of reproduction becomes much more complex for humans. If the human life-form is not reducible to self-maintenance and reproduction, then in what does it consist?

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[97] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 39.
[98] Ibid., 40.
[99] Ibid., 42.

Foot avoids offering a specific, positive account of the human life-form, that is, what other naturalistic accounts might refer to as 'the good' for human beings. However, "For all the diversities of human life," she says, "it is possible to give some quite general account of human necessities, that is, of what is quite generally needed for human good, if only by starting from the negative idea of human deprivation."[100] When Foot refers to an account of 'human necessities, what she must be referring to are Aristotelian necessities. At least some Aristotelian necessities for humans can be recognized by thinking about some basic traits and capacities and asking whether or not someone who was lacking this would be deprived in some way. The intuitive judgment that someone is deprived in so far as they lack some trait or capacity is an indication that this person is kept from realizing or achieving some good in virtue of this absence, even if we aren't able to label what specific good is at play here. This is not to say that such intuitive considerations are the final word on Aristotelian necessities, but rather a first step in thinking about 'human good'.

One example which Foot uses to illustrate this is the imagination required to understand stories, songs, jokes, etc.[101] Anyone who lacks this imaginative capacity would likely be seen as deprived, even though this capacity cannot easily be understood in terms of reproduction or self-maintenance. Again, the judgment that a person would be deprived due to lacking this capacity, Foot takes to be intuitively plausible. But what is this person deprived of precisely? Is there anything good that comes from understanding stories, songs, or jokes? It seems that Foot is leaving it to

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[100] Ibid., 43.
[101] Ibid.

the reader to think of all the good that comes from engagement with these practices, to

figure out why we are the kinds of creatures for whom these practices are Aristotelian

necessities. If engagement with these practices is an Aristotelian necessity, then it is the

capacity for imagination (though not exclusively) that makes this possible. Thus, the

conclusions following from this consideration of deprivation retain the same logical

structure as our earlier evaluations of plants and non-human animals. Foot concludes

that

> In spite of the diversity of human goods—the elements that can make up good
> human lives—it is therefore possible that the concept of a good human life plays
> the same part in determining goodness of human characteristics and operations
> that the concept of flourishing plays in the determination of goodness in plants
> and animals.[102]

So Foot believes that we can intuitively recognize that lacking some traits or capacities,

or the inability to engage in some important social / cooperative practices, constitutes a

deficiency. These are deficiencies because these traits, capacities, and practices are

necessary to some aspect of the human form of life.

The strategy Foot has employed here is indicative of the problem of incomplete

knowledge. She is attempting to show that the logical structure of normative judgments

regarding human traits and practices shares the same logical structure as judgments

regarding plant and non-human traits and operations. However, unlike when she

discusses plants and non-human animals, she does not illustrate this structure by

directly referring to the Aristotelian necessity of a feature or operation. Earlier, she

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[102] Ibid., 44.

claims that oak trees have deep roots, or equivalently, that deep roots are good for oak trees. This proposition is justified by explaining, directly, the necessity which is realized by the possession of deep roots. That is, the deep roots allow the tree to nourish and sustain itself, keeping itself upright providing access to sunlight and nutrients from the soil. However, in the human case the illustration is not direct in this way. Rather, she adopts an indirect strategy, getting to claims about the human good by way of intuitive appeals to deprivation. If we recognize the cases she describes as cases of deprivation, then this must be deprivation of something necessary for the realization of some human good. The reason she must adopt this roundabout strategy is because we do not have access to all the facts about the human life form. We exist in a state of incomplete knowledge regarding the natural facts which form the foundation for Foot's account of natural goodness. The challenge of incomplete knowledge is most obvious when we consider human nature, in all its complexity. However, this is not a feature unique to considerations of human nature. Our knowledge is far from complete in the non-human cases as well. We regularly improve our understanding of non-human organisms, coming to better understand how they live. Foot illustrates the structure of natural goodness using very simple examples. We should not let these seemingly straightforward examples lead us to overconfidence regarding our understanding or to oversimplify the life forms of non-human organisms.

More needs to be said about how we can come to justify normative judgments, in a state of incomplete knowledge of the foundational facts. Foot's purpose in *Natural Goodness* is to argue for the structural similarity of judgments of natural goodness. She

wants to show that there is such a category of goodness and that this category

encompasses judgments of goodness in plants, non-human animals, and human

beings, including moral judgments. It is beyond the scope of her structural argument to

offer a strategy for normative evaluation in the complicated human cases. However, if

her account of natural goodness is ultimately going to be practical for moral evaluation,

then this issue does need to be addressed. Skepticism regarding the theory's

applicability to human beings drives a number of objections which I will consider in the

next section. In chapter four I discuss the challenge of incomplete knowledge in more

detail and propose a process of normative evaluation which I believe can supplement

Foot's account of natural goodness and explain how we can come to justify moral

judgments even in a state of incomplete knowledge regarding our own nature.

    Foot's intuitive appeals to deprivation indicate a structural similarity between

normative judgments of plants and non-human animals and normative judgments about

human beings. Having defended this structural similarity Foot presents an illustration

that these patterns of natural goodness hold for evaluation of the human will as well. To

make this case she presents Elizabeth Anscombe's account of promise keeping.

Anscombe argues that "much human good hangs on the possibility of one person being

able to bind another's will by something in the nature of a promise or other contract."[103]

She continues by pointing out that we are very limited in the ways we can bind another's

will. Force and authority are only useful in the most limited of cases, and few people

have either the power or authority to bind others in most circumstances. Promise

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[103] Ibid., 45.

keeping is a practice which overcomes these limitations and allows us to productively

pursue many goods which are necessary for the realization of important aspects of

human life. These considerations lead Anscombe to conclude that to break a promise,

then, is to act badly, excepting some special circumstances.[104] Anscombe considers this

ability to bind others' wills an Aristotelian necessity. Anscombe's account of promising,

Foot notes, "depends on an identification of elements of human good together with the

story about what creatures of the human species can and cannot do."[105] Natural facts

are what ground normative judgment in this case of human willing, and Foot seems to

take this case as representative of other instances of human willing. Again, this is the

same structure that we appealed to when evaluating the roots of an oak tree, that is, the

logical structure of natural goodness applied to judgments of human willing.

The spirit of Anscombe's account of promise keeping is on point. She is

attempting to justify the judgment that promise keeping is good by illustrating that a

relationship of Aristotelian necessity obtains between the practice of promise keeping

and some aspect of the human life form, namely, human interdependence and the

pursuit of complex ends over time, for example. However, I disagree with some

fundamental details of her account, particularly understanding promise keeping in terms

of binding others' wills. In chapter four, as an example of the process of normative

evaluation which I argue is necessary to supplement Foot's account of natural

goodness, I offer an alternative account of the goodness of promise keeping, which

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[104] Ibid., 46.
[105] Ibid.

focuses on the relationship between the practice of promise keeping and human cooperation.

3. Question Begging

Scott Woodcock's basic thesis is that Foot's account faces a dilemma. The theory; "either sanctions prescriptive claims that are clearly objectionable or…begs the question…by tacitly appealing to an independent ethical standpoint to sanitize the theory's normative implications."[106] Woodcock presents three cases in which he believes that Foot's account of natural goodness leads to objectionable normative claims and argues that the only way to avoid these objectionable normative conclusions is "by begging the questions of how human goodness ought to be identified."[107] The three cases he considers are disability, xenophobia, and conformity. The disability case involves examples like deafness and infertility. Woodcock claims that Foot's theory implies that people with these conditions are unable to live fully human lives, and that even if there is a case to be made that 'all things considered' they are not defective on Foot's theory it at least implies that they are "*prima facie* defective as humans in the specifically normative sense that Foot aims to establish in her book."[108]

It is true that Foot is committed to the conclusion that people with these conditions have a deficiency. It isn't clear, however, why this conclusion is as pernicious

[106] Woodcock, "Philippa Foot's Virtue Ethics Has an Achilles' Heel."
[107] Ibid., 450.
[108] Ibid., 451.

as Woodcock seems to believe. Though Foot is arguing that there is a category to which all goodness of a certain kind belongs, she also recognizes distinctions within that category. In this case, the relevant distinction is between deficiencies which we have no control over and cannot be held responsible for, and those deficiencies which are 'of the will', for which we are responsible. Though Foot herself may not see a strong reason for drawing the distinction between moral and nonmoral goodness, her theory is perfectly compatible with this distinction. I have deficient eyesight and wear corrective lenses which allow me to drive safely and engage in other activities that enrich my life. It would be problematic if Foot's theory entailed that this deficiency constituted a flaw in regards to my personhood, or in terms of my moral agency, but it seems acceptable to me to recognize that I have a deficiency relative to my particular biological kind. It would also be problematic if we were to trace distinctions regarding worthiness onto these biological distinctions. It may be true that humans have had an unfortunate tendency to attribute worthiness on the basis of biological differences which cannot legitimately ground these attributions. This is an important concern and something towards which we should always be attentive. However, Foot's theory does not entail that recognizing that a person has a biological deficiency bears any relationship to that person's worth, or worthiness of respect.

Although I may be grateful for my glasses and the activities I'm able to engage in thanks to this technology, it doesn't follow that without them I would be unable to live a fully human life and neither does Foot's theory necessarily imply this problematic conclusion. I will argue later in this chapter that natural goodness implies a plurality both

of kinds of good human lives and of ways of pursuing a specific type of good life. So the theory is, at least in principle, open to the possibility that people can live good lives even with these physical deficiencies. It is important to recognize exactly what is and is not being implied by the term deficiency in the context of natural goodness and not to impose upon the term connotations which simply do not apply to the usage in this context.

In Woodcock's second case, xenophobia, he notes an empirical connection between altruism, an attitude Foot and others find praiseworthy, and problematic forms of prejudice against those outside the agent's social group. He argues that:

> The problem for Foot is that there is nothing obviously defective, according to an empirically informed articulation of her natural normativity, about a human who employs practical reason in a way that generates altruistic behavior towards the members of her own group but who is highly biased (perhaps even violently so) against those outside her group.[109]

One reason why there might appear to be 'nothing obviously defective' in this case is because Foot has not laid the groundwork for particular instances of moral judgment in *Natural Goodness*. Her arguments in this brief text are focused on the logical structure of goodness, the 'grammar' of normative judgment. Any particular examples of good traits, or practices are in service of illustrating this structure. She has not, and has not intended to, offer an account of how particular judgments regarding specific human cases are made. It cannot be obviously, or even justifiably, concluded that there is a distinction between

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[109] Ibid., 458.

altruism and prejudice, in the sense that Woodcock discusses, until an account

has been given explaining how particular judgments are made in human cases.

We might be disappointed that Foot hasn't offered such an account, but this gap

in the theory is a feature of the scope of Foot's project, not an indication of a flaw

in her theory. Until an account has been offered to explain the process by which

we justify normative judgments in human cases, we cannot be surprised that

particular judgments are left unjustified. I will attempt to offer just such an

account in the following chapter.

Woodcock's third case considers conformity and focuses on the natural human

tendency to imitate and conform to fellow members of a social group. This imitation is in

many cases an important adaptive tool, according to Woodcock, but sometimes "allows

for situations where maladaptive behavior is unreflectively replicated."[110] According to

Woodcock:

> What we obviously want is a way to endorse the predispositions for
> imitation and group solidarity without being forced to sanction cases where
> these predispositions spiral out of control. But Foot has no principled way
> of accomplishing this…Foot does not have a way to separate out
> praiseworthy facts about the human life cycle from those that are
> pernicious.[111]

This worry about separating out praiseworthy from pernicious facts will be a recurring

issue brought up in following objections. If there is no principled, non-question begging

way to make this distinction, this is a real problem for Foot.

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[110] Ibid., 459.
[111] Ibid., 459, 460.

However, Woodcock himself describes the behavior in question as maladaptive. If there is a case to be made for this conclusion, as there likely is, then why should we think that the theory of natural goodness would prescribe such a behavior? Additionally, there is no reason to think that natural goodness would prescribe any behavior that was 'unreflectively replicated'. Arguably, the capacity for reflection is an important human feature and Foot's account should be able to account for the goodness of this capacity and the goodness of its application in appropriate contexts. Nothing that has been said thus far gives reason to think that Foot's account is incapable of recognizing these facts and my discussion of normative evaluation in the fourth chapter should make it more clear how, from the account of natural goodness, the kinds of judgments which Woodcock is looking for can be justified.

4. The Uniqueness of Moral Evaluations

In the next objection, Frans Svensson wants to put aside, to some extent, the question of goodness for plants and animals. He claims that, "moral evaluation is so significantly different from the evaluation of parts and operations in plants and animals, that even if Foot is right about the latter, she is wrong about moral evaluation, for it belongs in a different category of evaluative judgments."[112] Here Svensson is attacking one of Foot's important and novel claims, that the evaluation of goodness in humans, even in matters of the will, share the same logical structure with evaluations of goodness in plants and non-human animals. Svensson points out that Foot admits that

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[112] Svensson, "Does Non-Cognitivism Rest on a Mistake?," 193.

"Moral judgments are essentially practical in having an *action-guiding*, or perhaps *prescriptive*, element. They are thereby closely connected to choice in a way that is exclusively applicable to human beings."[113] For example, though a person born without the ability to learn language "suffers from a severe handicap, we would never dream of saying that this constitutes a moral flaw in that person."[114] Thus, Svensson agrees with Foot that "moral goodness is confined to what is voluntary,"[115] though Foot is not overly concerned with the various uses of the term moral. However, Svensson argues:

> Human life exhibits such tremendous diversity between different cultures, societies and historical contexts, that any attempt to find a general characterization of it that would cover all of these differences seems a more or less hopeless enterprise, especially if it is meant to provide us with determinate standards of what there is moral reason for us to do and avoid.[116]

This skepticism about the possibility of formulating such a characterization seems to drive Svensson's critical analysis. Foot's appeal to Aristotelian necessities is unhelpful, Svensson believes. She can describe the importance of the institution of promise keeping, imagination, and that "we need virtues such as loyalty, fairness and kindness, as well as codes of conduct, in order to pursue and sustain friendship and family ties," etc. However, this account "does not tell us what kind of friendships to engage in, what codes of conduct should look like or how to weigh different requirements against each other if in conflict."[117] We might offer relativistic answers to these questions, looking to

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[113] Ibid., 194.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., 195.

social or cultural norms to provide content to these concepts, but as Svensson rightly notes, this would be unacceptable to Foot.[118]

This worry is less troubling if we recognize that natural goodness need not give a single, definitive answer to each of these questions. Perhaps there are many kinds of friendship we might engage in, and multiple ways to structure our conduct. Furthermore, there is no reason to think that the only way to achieve this pluralism is through relativism. Just as coyotes can adopt a variety of strategies for living, so can human beings. Furthermore, not just any strategy will work for coyotes and not every strategy that works for one group of coyotes will work for another. Natural facts determine which strategies will work for which situations. It is likewise for human beings, but this is not relativism. It is a combination of facts about the type of animal the coyote is along with facts about the environment the coyote finds itself in that determine what strategies will count as good. For humans, the social, economic, and political facts are not givens like the features of a coyote's environment. The institutions, norms, laws, etc. which constitute the social facts are themselves human constructs and are open to evaluation. Even though there may be many ways which humans might legitimately organize themselves, it does not follow that any possible organization is good. We have to ask the same question of these institutions that we ask when evaluating the roots of an oak. What, if any, role does it play in the life form of the species? Not every human institution is necessary, in the sense of Aristotelian necessity, for the realization of some aspect of the human life form. Many are arguably counter-productive. Though it is pluralist, Foot's

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[118] Ibid.

theory can't be relativistic; we are able to evaluate social norms and institutions by

searching for this teleological relationship, which is a real, objective feature of anything

which is good.

Even if this problem of complexity can be solved, Svensson still poses the

following question: how are "statements of facts about the nature of our human life-form

or species meant to carry any reason-giving force?"[119] The most plausible interpretation,

Svensson believes, is:

> that human beings characteristically find it desirable for its own sake, or
> characteristically take there to be reason, to join in songs and dances, and
> to pursue family life. And if that is true, then why not say that a person who
> does not conceive of things in this way is defective or bad *qua* human
> being…[and] that a person is doing or acting well, *qua* human, in so far as
> she joins in activities human beings characteristically take there to be
> reason to join in.[120]

But even this view is untenable, according to Svensson, since "It seems plausible that

people in some respects *characteristically* engage, or *characteristically have* engaged in

morally bad behavior."[121] Here Svensson seems to be offering an argument reminiscent

of Levy and Slote. This morally bad behavior can come as either immoral actions, or

failures to engage in morally required actions. For example, Svensson argues that there

can be strong, non-utilitarian arguments, to the effect that Western nations should be

doing much more to reduce suffering in impoverished parts of the world than we do. Our

characteristic activity is exactly what such an argument is attacking. Another example

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[119] Ibid., 195, 196.
[120] Ibid., 196.
[121] Ibid., 197.

Svensson uses is wartime atrocities. "I have heard it suggested, for example, that in war it is 'natural' or characteristic for human beings to perform all sorts of atrocities, even in situations where they are not directly threatened."[122] These cases make Svensson skeptical that statements of fact about the human form of life can serve as action guiding, or 'carry any reason-giving force.'

The problem with trying to understand natural goodness by appealing to 'characteristic' activities, or features, is that this concept 'characteristic' does not embody the teleological aspect of Foot's theory. It is in the teleology that we find the normativity in natural goodness. That something is characteristic is completely irrelevant to the question of goodness. It is characteristic of leaves that they rustle in the wind. However, this feature is epiphenomenal in relation to the life form of the tree. That a feature bears the specific teleological relationship described by Foot, that it is an Aristotelian necessity for the organism's life form, is what makes it good.

5. Rationality and Human Uniqueness

Often the capacity for reason is taken to be the distinctive difference between humans and non-human organisms. Whether this capacity is unique to humans, or it is more properly understood in terms of a scale, the capacity for reason seems to pose a significant challenge to Foot's attempt to apply the account of natural goodness to

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[122] Ibid.

human beings. Christopher Toner and John McDowell are both concerned about this issue. Toner's take on Foot's Thompsonian naturalism is as follows:

> Although Foot has certainly elaborated upon Thompson's view, the basic idea is the same: that we may derive, from how a species or life form does characteristically live (how it develops, survives, and reproduces), norms governing how a particular specimen *should* live. A wolf, for example, should engage in cooperative pack hunting, and if it does not, is defective as a wolf.[123]

This conception of the 'basic idea' is too basic. Foot's account cannot be adequately presented without recognizing the key role that the Aristotelian necessity plays in grounding goodness. The teleological relationship between a characteristic trait or life strategy and some aspect of an organism's life form is what grounds the normative judgment. Even so, Toner presents an interesting objection to Foot by way of a thought experiment he borrows from John McDowell.[124] He would have us imagine an otherwise ordinary wolf imbued with the faculty of reason. Toner believes that McDowell's rational wolf "points to the logical weakness of appeal to Aristotelian categoricals".[125] As he puts it:

> just as one cannot infer from "Humans have thirty-two teeth" and "I am a human" that "I have thirty-two teeth," neither can we infer from "Wolves need or do such-and-such" and "He is a wolf" to "He needs such-and-such"—for reason allows us to step back from our animal nature and question its decisiveness in practical problems.[126]

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[123] Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism: Requirements for a Successful Theory," 224.
[124] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."
[125] Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism: Requirements for a Successful Theory," 225.
[126] Ibid.

Aristotelian categoricals, according to this objection, are insufficient as grounds for action because all they can do is describe some facts about an organism. But, Toner believes, reason allows us to 'step back' from any mere fact and decide, independently, what we will do. This objection is grounded in precisely the fact / judgment distinction that Foot rejects when criticizing the non-cognitivists, and is unconvincing for a number of reasons. First, the apparent failure of the inference about teeth has nothing to do with rationality. Furthermore, it is not an actual failure, since the Aristotelian categorical does not entail that a particular member of the species possesses a specific trait or actualizes a specific life strategy. The generic wolf entailment he mentions also misses the mark. The Aristotelian categorical is not supposed to entail that because some trait is an Aristotelian necessity for a type of organism that a particular individual will 'need' that trait. The Aristotelian categorical 'Deer are swift' could be understood as 'Deer need to be swift'. It is no failure of this proposition that it does not entail *of a particular deer* that it needs to be swift, in the sense that swiftness is necessary for its survival. A deer in a zoo need not be swift, since there are no predators. However, if such a deer were not swift, it would still be defective. Observing this lack, it would make sense to ask what was wrong with this deer. In other words, it is not a feature of natural goodness that goodness is understood in terms of what an *individual organism* needs. Rather it is grounded in what is necessary for organisms *of a particular type*. That an individual wolf could survive without contributing to the hunt, by living the life of a scavenger, is not relevant to the determination of whether that wolf is or is not a good wolf specimen.

Furthermore, returning to the teeth inference, not having thirty-two teeth is no deficiency, but not having enough teeth to masticate is. The specific number is not normatively relevant, but what is relevant is being able to achieve the ends for which having teeth are necessary. There is an important difference between a characteristic a type of organism simply *has* and a characteristic this type of organism *needs*. It is precisely this difference which explains why the first natural-history proposition, "Humans have thirty-two teeth," will not ground a normative evaluation, but the Aristotelian categorical, "Wolves hunt in packs" will.

Finally, the claim that rationality allows us to 'step back' from the descriptive propositions regarding what we need and make judgments independent of that, is either misguided or irrelevant. If by this, Toner means that we have the capacity to freely choose not to pursue what we need, then that *may* be true, but it is not relevant to Foot's claims about natural goodness. She does not claim that we are determined to do what is good for us, or even what we recognize as good for us. What she does say is that a judgment that 'X is good', in the sense of natural goodness, implies that we have reason, though not necessarily an overriding reason, to do or pursue X, regardless of what we actually choose. This comes out in the next objection regarding 'authority' as well.

McDowell focuses a bit more directly on the influence of reason, when attempting to undercut Foot's view, in a passage which Toner himself refers to:

> With the onset of reason, then, the nature of the species abdicates from a previously unquestionable authority over the behaviour of the individual animal…

This can easily leave the individual interest of the deliberator looking like the only candidate to take over the vacant throne."[127] [128]

The same concern with reason and the authority of nature is considered by both Micah Lott[129] and Rosalind Hursthouse.[130]

However, this objection involves an equivocation on the term authority. When reason enters the picture nature may well 'abdicate… authority over the behaviour of the individual animal,' in the sense that the individual is no longer determined by instinct, but now bears the freedom and responsibility that comes along with a rational capacity. It isn't clear why this would change the role the animal's nature plays in determining what is good for that animal, that is, why nature is not still *authoritative*, in the sense that it is the determining factor in normative judgment and gives reasons for action. The fact that the individual in question is now capable of making normative judgment does not entail that the individual is now able to 'determine', in the sense of control, the truth of a normative judgment. Reason allows an individual to determine, meaning discover, the truth of a normative judgment. Toner finds McDowell's point compelling, however. He says:

> This telling point, I think, brings down the curtain on any naïve hope that simple appeal to Aristotelian categoricals could all by itself provide a foundation for ethics. For, such natural-historical judgments describe how an evolved species does, in fact, propagate itself, and McDowell is right in pointing out that "So what?" is a perfectly legitimate question.[131]

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[127] Ibid., 225, 226.
[128] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 154.
[129] Micah Lott, "Why Be a Good Human Being? Natural Goodness, Reason, and the Authority of Nature," *Philosophia* 42 (2014): 774.
[130] Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 220.
[131] Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism: Requirements for a Successful Theory," 226.

Foot's view is not that a 'simple appeal to Aristotelian categoricals could all by itself provide a foundation for ethics.' The claim is that Aristotelian categoricals, in Foot's sense, that is propositions which refer to some Aristotelian necessity, ground judgments of goodness. I must return to the distinction that Toner fails to recognize in his 'basic' summing up of Foot's position. This is the distinction between a mere natural-historical judgment and an Aristotelian categorical, which he treats as synonymous. Understanding Foot's account of natural goodness requires recognizing the difference between propositions that merely describe what a species *does* and teleological propositions that describe what a species does *that matters*. Traits and practices that matter are those that are Aristotelian necessities, those that are necessary for the life of the species in the sense that I described in the second chapter. This necessity is the root of normativity and is what makes Aristotelian categoricals distinct from mere inductive generalizations. In addition, this statement by Toner implies that Aristotelian categoricals are simply about propagation. However, as mentioned before, Foot recognizes that the human form of life is vastly more complicated than that of non-human organisms and that human good is not reducible to self-maintenance and reproduction.

6. Reason and the Problem of Incomplete Knowledge

The objections from Toner and McDowell are grounded in the worry that Foot's theory is unable to account for human rationality, because there is something about

reason that sets us apart from non-human organisms, and thus judgments regarding goodness for humans do not belong in the same category as judgments regarding goodness for non-human organisms. Although their objections are ultimately unconvincing, it is true that our capacity to reason has significant implications for how we must think about the life-form of the human species, and thus judgments regarding goodness for human beings. Reason is often identified as the capacity that sets humans apart from other organisms. In more recent times the legitimacy of this distinction has been questioned, and some degree of rational capacity has been attributed to other animals. Rather than a hard dichotomy between rational humans and non-rational non-humans, it might be more accurate to place humans on one end of a spectrum of rationality shared with at least some non-human animals. However, even if this is a better picture, there still seems to be a significant difference, even if quantitative rather than qualitative, between humans and even those non-human animals we might place closer to our end of the spectrum such as apes, dolphins, and octopus, for instance. Even if our uniqueness is a matter of degree, it seems clear that an understanding of the life-form of human beings, or we might say human nature, must account for the implications of our capacity for reason. The most apparent consequence of our rationality, when it comes to understanding human nature, is that we are complex. There at least appears to be more variety among human beings than any other species. We are spread across the globe, and embody a vast array of lifestyles, values, and beliefs.

Micah Lott and Rosalind Hursthouse both believe that this complexity poses a challenge for naturalistic accounts of goodness.[132,133] Lott and Hursthouse believe that we will not be able to construct an account of the human life-form for exactly this reason. As Hursthouse puts it, we "can't identify what is characteristic of human beings as a species in this way - there is too much variety."[134] There is a problem here, but it is not with naturalism, per se. To understand the problem we have to return to a distinction I made at the start of this project between a normative judgment and the process of normative evaluation. I claimed that Foot's project is about understanding the structure of normative judgment. That is, understanding what a judgment regarding goodness of this type is saying and what makes such a judgment true. On Foot's account, as I understand it, a normative judgment is describing the relationship between some particular feature of an individual and the form of life of this individual's species. Specifically, to judge that some feature of an individual is good is to claim that this feature is necessary, in the sense of Aristotelian necessity, to some aspect of of this individual's form of life, where the life-form is in reference to the individual's species, not the individual itself. That is to say that what makes something good is not a matter of whether or not it, in practice, contributes to the individual's flourishing, but rather that something is good if it plays a role in the life-form of this *kind* of organism. We might understand Foot's account of goodness as being 'one-way', like a deductive entailment. The truth of normative judgments just 'follows from' a set of natural facts. There is no reason to think that Foot's account would be better for simpler forms of life than

[132] Lott, "Why Be a Good Human Being? Natural Goodness, Reason, and the Authority of Nature."
[133] Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*.
[134] Ibid., 222.

complex ones. However, Hursthouse does seem to be onto something problematic about complexity. The problem lies, not with Foot's account of goodness, understood as a theory about the truth of normative judgments, but rather with the inferred account of justification. It is natural to look at an account like Foot's and conclude that before we are able to make justified normative judgments, we must first have a comprehensive account of the life-form human beings, of human nature. We might think that the process of normative evaluation also functions like deductive entailments. First we come to know facts about human nature, then we observe individual human beings, and finally draw normative conclusions based on these two data sets. On this account of normative evaluation the degree of complexity we find in human beings is a serious problem, since it seems very unreasonable to expect that we are in a position to construct a comprehensive account of human nature. This is what I call the problem of incomplete knowledge. If human nature is too complex, and we cannot formulate a comprehensive account of the human species' form of life, then we cannot make judgments regarding goodness in this 'deductive' fashion. We do not have access to all the information that we need. Normative judgments are certainly true or false, but what good is that if we are not in a position to know the difference? The solution, which I will expound upon in chapter four, is to recognize that this is not how we should approach normative evaluation in Foot's naturalistic theory. Rather than a 'one-way', entailment account of evaluation, I propose an account of evaluation that could be described as reciprocal. I will discuss the problem of incomplete knowledge and my solution to it in

the next chapter, but first we need to consider some of the ways that our capacity for reason makes the human case more complex.

I've presented the major challenge facing Foot's account as the problem of incomplete knowledge, so I should be clear about what I am and am not trying to do with this discussion of human rationality and the life-form of human beings. All I want to do is outline a number of features of the human life-form which exist in virtue of our capacity for reason and which illustrate the scope of the incompleteness of our knowledge. This is not meant to be an exhaustive account either of human nature or human rationality. Nothing I am proposing here is unfamiliar in discussions of human nature, but these are features which illustrate the challenge we face in regards to understanding our own form of life, and thus, have implications for normative evaluation. Finally, these features are not all unique to human beings. Many we share to a greater or lesser degree with other organisms.

7. Reason and Human Nature

One straightforward way the capacity for reason makes the life-form of human beings more complex is the same way that the addition of any capacity makes an organism more complex. Consider an earthworm and a hawk. It doesn't make sense to evaluate an earthworm in terms of visual capacity, as they do not possess the capacity for sight. On the other hand the hawk, possessing the capacity for vision, and with this capacity playing an important role in its life-form, is subject to more complex

evaluations. There are more ways to fail at being a good hawk than a good earthworm. Likewise, the rational capacity entails new criteria for evaluation, adding an extra level of complexity to our life-form compared to other organisms.

Another way the capacity for reason adds to the complexity of human nature, relative to other organisms, is by allowing us to transcend the determinism of self-maintenance and reproduction. Foot recognizes this when she says that, "The bearing and rearing of children is not an ultimate good in human life, because other elements of good such as the demands of work to be done may give a man or woman reason to renounce family life."[135] As I pointed out, when responding to McDowell and Toner, the capacity for reason frees us from being determined by our biology. While we generally take animals to be determined by instinctual drives, humans are able to weigh these biological imperatives against other ends, or values, and thus the life-form of human beings cannot be understood merely in terms of self-maintenance and reproduction. We are capable of choosing not only between the ends of self-maintenance and reproduction, but also other ends, like work, love, family, or the pursuit of justice, truth, or beauty. Self-maintenance and reproduction become just two of innumerable ends, the pursuit of which can shape a human life. In addition to becoming just two of many possible ends, self-maintenance and reproduction are not merely biological considerations for humans. Rather, as Foot recognizes, they become inseparable from other value-laden considerations such as family, community, and all the values, obligations, and expectations involved with these.[136] It is clear, then, why the

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[135] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 42.
[136] Ibid.

life-form of human beings, on the natural goodness account, will be vastly more complicated than that of other organisms. For humans, because we are free, in virtue of our rationality, to weigh and choose between ends in this way, there are innumerable shapes a good human life might take.[137] Our freedom, however, is not absolute. Not every possible aspect of a human life can be pursued by any individual. The pursuit of some ends precludes the pursuit of others, both practically and conceptually. No two people's lives will take the exactly the same shape. Different choices and different material conditions lead to the pursuit of different ends, as well as the adoption of different strategies in pursuit of those ends. In addition to not being absolute, our freedom is not optional. Not only is it the case that we are capable of weighing and choosing from many different ends, and as I will discuss presently, strategies for pursuing those ends, we *must* make these choices. As Sartre recognizes, we are condemned to be free.[138] The meaning of this freedom and the implications it holds regarding our responsibilities must be, as it was for Sartre, an integral aspect of normative evaluation.

Reason also involves problem solving and creativity, allowing us to become extremely adaptable. I've discussed the adaptability of coyotes, their ability to adopt a variety of strategies for survival and to exist in very diverse environments. This adaptability influences the way we must understand the life-form of the coyote. It adds a layer of complexity to our evaluations, since we have to recognize different strategies

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[137] A discussion of the nature of human free will is beyond the scope of this project. I have in mind here only the degree of freedom which is necessary for moral responsibility. If this degree of freedom does not obtain, then this fact will certainly have implications for the content, though not the structure, of normative evaluation.
[138] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (Yale University Press, 1946), 29.

for survival as actualizations of this capacity for adaptability. We have to evaluate

individual coyotes not only in terms of whether or not they are successful at

self-maintenance and reproduction, but also whether they exhibit the degree of

adaptability we have come to expect from coyotes. For humans this is even more

extensive. As a species we have spread across the globe, we have exercised

incomparable creativity in the pursuit of our goals. Just as we had to recognize that two

coyotes which exhibited distinct strategies for survival might both be considered good

coyotes, we have to approach humans in a similar way. Just as there can be many

appropriate ends that can shape a life, there can be many appropriate strategies for

pursuing the same end. For instance, having a family can come about in many different

ways, such as traditional procreation, artificial insemination, adoption, etc. This is not to

say that *any* method of achieving an end is good. For instance, an end could be

achieved accidentally. When an oak tree's roots fail, yet the tree stays upright by

leaning on something else, we would not say that the oak tree is healthy as its success

is accidental. Likewise, we can recognize a normative difference between someone who

prevails despite their ineptitude and someone who prevails due to their commitment or

practiced skill. Similarly an end might be achieved because an individual actualizes

some bad trait. Consider one of Foot's standard examples, that it is good for deer to be

swift. We can imagine a situation in which a slow deer is able to avoid a hunter precisely

because the deer is slow. One hunting strategy employed by many predators is to flush

out the prey. As the prey run away from a perceived threat, they inadvertently run

towards a hidden threat. In a case like this it may well be the swiftest deer which gets

killed and a slow deer, in virtue of this slowness, is able to escape while the predator is engaged. This doesn't entail that being slow is good for deer, or that the slow deer in this example was good in virtue of its being slow. Remember that goodness on Foot's account isn't dependent on success, it is about what strategies are available to the type of organism being evaluated. What this means for the human case is that the variety of strategies open to us does not undermine Foot's account of goodness, but it does mean that an account of our form of life would have to consider this variation. We also have to consider this variation when we engage in the process of normative evaluation, which I will discuss in more detail in chapter four. For now it should suffice to recognize that the fact that there are many diverse ways of realizing human ends does not entail that *any* method of achieving those ends is good.

The same must be said about the variety of human ends we must choose from. The fact that the human life-form consists of more than just self-maintenance and reproduction does not entail that any end whatsoever can be a constituent part of a good human life. There must be, on Foot's naturalistic account, a fact of the matter regarding what ends, in addition to self-maintenance and reproduction, can legitimately be considered good. That there is a fact of the matter, however, does not entail that there is only one set of ends worthy of pursuit, nor does it entail that it is unchanging. Foot makes clear that her account only requires a level of stability, but that species can change over time.

8. Knowledge of Human Nature

What I have attempted to do in the preceding discussion is to outline some features of the life-form of human beings, or what we might refer to as human nature, which would make it very difficult to construct an account of those facts which ground normative judgments. I've claimed that the human life-form is complex, in that it consists of more than just self-maintenance and reproduction. But what other ends might we rightly pursue? In various places Foot mentions examples like meaningful work or the pursuit of truth, but she avoids attempting to construct a comprehensive, or even extensive list, let alone explain how these ends are to be pursued or weighted against each other when a choice between them must be made. This is the strongest reason for being skeptical when it comes to applying the concept of natural goodness to human cases. In the non-human cases we could clearly see the role that some feature of an organism played in the life-form of its species. It was clear what function strong, deep roots play for oak trees. But how are we to make normative judgments regarding human features and practices if we cannot fill in the content of the human life-form in the way we can for oak or deer? I will discuss this problem and present my solution in the following chapter. I will also show that though the complexity of the human case makes it seem unique, my proposed solution not only solves that problem, but also better accounts for normative judgments in the non-human cases.

Chapter 4: Normative Evaluation

1. Introduction

The problem of incomplete knowledge, I have argued, arises when we assume that the structure of justification for normative judgments in Foot's theory mirrors the structure of truth for these same normative claims. Foot has offered us an account of goodness on which the truth of a normative judgment depends on empirical facts about a particular organism and a description of the life-form of the species to which that organism belongs. Given the complexity of human nature, it is difficult to see how we can make justified normative judgments, given that it doesn't seem likely that we can construct a reasonably comprehensive account of our own life-form. It is important to note that I have been referring to this as the problem of incomplete knowledge because our lack of access to foundational facts about our own nature seems to pose a problem for naturalistic theories like Foot's. I don't mean to imply, however, that our incomplete knowledge is a deficiency, as this term is understood in the context of natural goodness. Incomplete knowledge is no more a deficiency than our physical embodiment or our mortality. At worst it is simply a feature of the context in which we find ourselves. More optimistically it is an opportunity and source of meaning. It is part of our facticity that we are not in a position to make the apparently straightforward deductions about human goodness that seem to present themselves when we think about deer and oaks. I say

'seem to present themselves' here because, as I will argue in the next section, the normative judgments we make about deer and oak are not different in kind from the normative judgments we make about humans, even though they appear to be more straightforward. The process of normative evaluation that I am proposing as a solution to the problem of incomplete knowledge applies, likewise, to both human and non-human cases. The fact of incomplete knowledge, as a feature of our epistemic condition, and therefore a relevant aspect of our 'way of getting by' will itself shape what is good for us.

2. *Justification Through a Process of Normative Evaluation*

This problem of incomplete knowledge can be solved if we change the way we think about the process of justifying normative judgments and recognize that the structure of justification need not mirror the structure of truth. I propose that normative judgments can be justified through a process of normative evaluation, or normative inquiry, which does not rely on a direct deduction from species level natural facts and empirical observations of an individual to normative judgments. To understand what this process looks like, we need to reconsider the non-human cases of judgment we've discussed thus far. While the difficulty of understanding the complexities human nature, or the human life-form, points a spotlight on this apparent problem, the fact of incomplete knowledge is not unique to the human case. After all, how do we actually come to know what we know about what is good for other species? We do not begin

with knowledge of their life processes, understanding a priori how their parts, characteristics, and operations function to make possible their forms of life. Neither do we learn through mere inductive generalization, else we would not recognize the difference between deep roots and rustling leaves. Rather, we engage in a process of observation and inquiry, searching for exactly that relationship of Aristotelian necessity which grounds judgments of natural goodness. We observe the features and operations of organisms and attempt to discern what role, if any, those features and operations play in the life processes of a particular type of organism. This process of observation and inquiry is precisely how we should approach the process of normative evaluation and it is this process of normative evaluation which we should appeal to as justification for normative judgments. Rather than the deductive model of justification, which intuitively falls out of Foot's foundationalism, I propose that we adopt an understanding of normative judgment as justified by an experimentalist process of observation and inquiry which can complement Foot's foundationalism. Without rejecting Foot's account of goodness, that is, her naturalistic account of what makes normative judgments true, we can recognize that the process of coming to a normative judgment is not a simple deduction from given facts.

When we evaluate non-human organisms we do not begin with complete knowledge of the life-form of a species, but neither do we begin with *no* information about the species in question. Our understanding of an organism can begin with observation, study, testimony, etc. In addition, the conclusions we reach in one instance of inquiry may well inform future evaluations. Once we recognize that some trait is

important to an organism we can begin to see how other features of an organism relate

to this good trait. This is all to say that the process of normative evaluation is reflexive.

Each instance of discovery helps inform future inquiry. Following from this recognition of

reflexivity, it is also important to note that discussing discrete instances of normative

evaluation is a bit of an abstraction. In order to explain the structure of the process and

the role that it plays in justifying normative judgment I will discuss specific instances of

evaluation. To talk of 'specific instances', is somewhat misleading, however, as this

process does not happen in a vacuum and the discussion, for instance of promise

keeping which follows, is best taken as a model for understanding the ongoing process

of normative inquiry.

In essence the process of normative evaluation is an attempt to understand what

role, if any, some feature of an organism plays in the life-form of that type of organism. It

is a search for Aristotelian necessity, that teleological relationship which is the source of

natural goodness. As Foot says, "What is crucial to all teleological propositions is the

expectation of an answer to the question: 'What part does it play in the life cycle of

things of the species S?' In other words, 'What is its function?' or 'What good does it

do?'"[139] This is the question which I am proposing is fundamental to normative

evaluation and the justification of normative judgment. Foot finds what she takes to be a

paradigmatic example of thinking about natural goodness in an argument Anscombe

presents about promise keeping. As I pointed out in chapter two, Anscombe argues that

"much human good hangs on the possibility of one person being able to bind another's

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[139] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 31, 32.

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will by something in the nature of a promise or other contract."[140] Anscombe's argument

does fit the structure of natural goodness, insofar as she argues that promise keeping is

an Aristotelian necessity, by defining promise keeping as a way to 'bind another's will'

and making the case that 'much human good' hangs on our ability to so bind another

person's will in the future. I think that this notion of 'binding' is not the best way to

understand the practice of promise keeping, and that more can be said about what

kinds of human good are teleologically connected to promise keeping. So I will use the

practice of promise keeping as an object of normative evaluation in order to illustrate

some ways we might approach the question of what function a practice plays in human

life.

3. Normative Evaluation of Promise Keeping

So, how might we engage in the process of normative evaluation of the practice

of promise keeping? What normative judgments can be justified through this

evaluation? As I've presented it, the process of normative evaluation is fundamentally

concerned with answering one specific question, that is: What function, if any, does

promise keeping play in human lives? In attempting to answer this question, we are

looking for a teleological relationship between the practice of promise keeping and

some aspect of the human life form. Specifically, we are trying to determine whether

promise keeping is an Aristotelian necessity for humans. Recall that Aristotelian

necessity is a very specific conception of necessity referring to a teleological

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[140] Foot, *Natural Goodness.*, p. 45

relationship between some feature or operation of an organism and the actualization of some aspect of the life-form of the species. So, to say that the swiftness of a deer is good, is to indicate that swiftness is an Aristotelian necessity. It is necessary in this sense, because it is the way deer avoid predators. This *does not* mean that the specific deer in question would die if it were not swift. There are plenty of reasons why a slow deer might not be killed by a predator. Perhaps the deer finds itself in an environment without predators or perhaps there is such a glut of other prey that the deer happens to never be hunted by a predator. In these cases, swiftness is not 'necessary' in the more conventional sense, for this individual. However, we can see that these accidental conditions are different in kind from the trait of swiftness. Being able to avoid predators by being swift is part of what it is to *be* a deer. This is why 'deer are swift' is an Aristotelian categorical. It is this relationship between swiftness and the life-form of deer that constitutes Aristotelian necessity.

What we must ask about promise keeping is if it bears an analogous relationship to the human life-form. Does it serve a function, in this sense, for humans? Illustrating the importance of swiftness for the deer seems simple, because we begin already aware of the end it serves, avoiding predators. However, we could imagine never having seen a deer before and observing its activities. We might quickly notice that deer are capable of moving quite fast, but this would not be enough to ground a normative judgment that it is good for them to have this capacity. We might imagine cases in which this would be useful, and this theorizing could give us some reason to expect that swiftness is an Aristotelian necessity. Observing deer escape from predators would be

even better evidence. The human case involves a similar process. We do have a practice of promise keeping, and even if we didn't we can see that we have the capacity to make and keep promises. But is this practice an Aristotelian necessity?

I think there are a number of reasonable arguments to be made to the conclusion that the practice of promise keeping is an Aristotelian necessity. The primary strategy I adopt here is to consider the relationship between promise keeping and cooperation, in particular the unique way in which human beings are capable of cooperating, and then to consider the role that cooperation plays in human life. So the goodness of promise keeping will be understood in terms of its relationship to cooperation which will be connected to some very basic, yet important, aspects of the human life-form. This need not be, and very likely is not, the only way of making the case that the practice of promise keeping is an Aristotelian necessity, but it will exemplify the process, or method, I am proposing.

One function the practice of promise keeping serves is to support cooperation. Any instance of cooperation that extends beyond a moment requires trust that the person one is cooperating with will do what has been agreed upon in the future. The practice of making and keeping promises is one way of grounding this trust. When a promise has been made this, very generally speaking, gives us reason to believe that it will be fulfilled. The practice of promise keeping is a strategy for grounding the trust required for cooperation. This doesn't mean that 'grounding trust' is or should be the motive for individual acts of promise keeping, but rather that promise keeping is teleologically related to cooperation in that the practice grounds the trust which is so

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often required for cooperation. There are of course other grounds on which we might trust someone enough to engage in cooperative activities with them. For instance, if an instance of cooperation is contractually guaranteed in a society that enforces such contracts, then the trust can be grounded in the fact that the obliged parties may be coerced, by the state for instance, into compliance with the agreement or punished for failure to fulfill the agreed upon obligations. In other cases, when for example, the cooperative enterprise is fulfilled immediately, trust is a non-issue. It is clear, however, that many of our interactions with people do not fall under these or similar categories. Often times we engage with people in cooperative endeavors in which we simply must trust that each party will recognize the fact that a promise was made as binding and that it will serve as motivation for fulfillment in the future. This is of course a simplification. When I say that we 'simply must trust', I'm not saying that we have no choice. Certainly whether we should trust someone or not will depend on the specifics of the context, including considerations such as the person's track record, or the incentive for breaking the promise in this case.

However, in so far as there is to be cooperation in these common cases where there are no other grounds for trust, the practice of promise keeping is necessary. Again, this is to say that the practice is necessary in the sense of Aristotelian necessity. The practice serves a function, allowing people to cooperate in these situations. If promise keeping were not a practice open to human beings, it is not clear that we would be able to cooperate in situations where trust was not grounded in some other way, through external coercion for instance, yet was required for the cooperative endeavor.

That we are able to make and keep promises allows us to engage in these types of cooperative endeavors. However, our investigation into promise keeping is not complete, for we have to ask what role cooperation plays in human life. If cooperation for humans is like the rustling of leaves for an oak, then we have not established the kind of teleological relationship necessary for goodness. It is evident, however, that cooperation, unlike the rustling of leaves, *is* an important aspect of human life.

There are some very readily apparent reasons for thinking that cooperation is necessary for the human life form. We can begin with our physical vulnerabilities. We are not as strong, or as fast as many other animals. We have not natural camouflage or particularly tough exterior to protect us. Yet, we are able to survive in dangerous environments by forming communities. So just considering something as simple as survival, we can see that cooperation plays a role in human life at the most basic levels. Beyond considerations of mere survival, there are many other reasons why cooperation is necessary.

In virtue of our rationality, our ability to conceptualize and consider abstractions, we have the capacity to contemplate our interests in temporal terms. We can think about the future, including a future beyond our own individual lifespans, and act towards the security of future goods. Often, as individuals we are unable to secure these goods by ourselves. However, thanks to our capacity for language we are able to communicate and make plans for the future with others. In this uniquely human way, and likely in other ways, we are able to cooperate. It seems fairly uncontroversial to claim that humans often *need* to cooperate in order to achieve their ends, and thus to

see that 'much good' hangs on our being able to cooperate. One fundamental aspect of

human existence, again in virtue of our rational capacity, is the setting and pursuit of

ends. Often these ends cannot be attained, or even pursued in many cases, without the

cooperation of others. Thus, it is clear that cooperation is a strategy which is open to

humans and which is necessary for any of the multitude of ends which cannot be

pursued or achieved independently. Furthermore, as we saw above, promise keeping is

a strategy which is necessary, in the sense of Aristotelian necessity, for many instances

of cooperation. In other words, we can say that cooperation is necessary for the pursuit

of ends in many common contexts and that promise keeping is necessary for

cooperation. So we have found the teleological relationship we were looking for, we

have illustrated at least *a* function of promise keeping, and there may well be others.

Given that we have found convincing reasons to believe that cooperation, and thus

promise keeping, are Aristotelian necessities, we are justified in concluding that promise

keeping is good for human beings as swiftness is good for deer. If we are correct in our

account of the relationship between promise keeping and human life, then promise

keeping is in fact good for humans. Given what has been said about natural goodness

up to this point, it should be clear that the goodness of promise keeping, given these

arguments, is not contingent on the effects for the individual. This understanding of

promise keeping as an Aristotelian necessity perfectly fits the structure we've seen with

the swift deer. If I engage in the practice of promise keeping, reliably adhering to the

promises made, this does not guarantee that I will be seen as trustworthy. Perhaps

someone just doesn't trust bearded men, or perhaps my reliability goes unnoticed. In

addition, despite what has been said above about the commonality and importance of cooperative endeavors, it is perhaps possible that I never find myself in a position where I need to be seen as trustworthy. Nonetheless, such situations do not undermine the function that the practice of promise keeping plays for human beings any more than the analogous situations did with the deer.

It is worth noting that the evaluation of promise keeping and cooperation did not require a commitment to a particular human end for which these practices are necessary. It is sufficient to see that there are many ends that require cooperation and that at least some of these would plausibly be constitutive of a well lived human life.

4. Normative Evaluation as a Process of Inquiry

The discussion of the goodness of promise keeping can serve as a model for normative evaluation, as an illustration of how normative judgments can be justified even in a state of incomplete knowledge. Certainly this is a simplification of the evaluation of promise keeping. For instance, it has only focused on promises made to others without consideration of the promises we make to ourselves. It hasn't touched on the relationship between other important concepts like honesty, or respect, which likely should play a role in a more complete understanding of the goodness of promise keeping. What it does, however, is illustrate the form that the process of evaluation takes, that is, as an inquiry into the teleological relationship between the practice and the human mode of living. Given the degree of complexity found in the human life form,

which we've already discussed, it seems plausible to think that a more comprehensive account of promise keeping would be appropriate. We need not, however, to begin from scratch in developing this account. Much has been written about promise keeping. Although some of it very likely takes a form which is incompatible with this conception of natural goodness, some of it certainly fits this structure, exploring the role which promise keeping can play in a successful human life. Foot herself uses this example, not by developing her own account of the goodness of promise keeping, but through reference to work already done by Anscombe which, it turns out, fits this normative structure. Anscombe's consideration of promise keeping, whether we ultimately find it convincing or not, appeals to just that feature which Foot takes to be paramount, that is, the role that the practice of promise keeping plays in human life.

Furthermore, despite the simplicity of the example I've used, we should not think of the process of normative evaluation as constituted by discrete instances of investigation. If we feel satisfied that there is reason to recognize that the practice of promise keeping is good, then this can inform future evaluations. We might ask how to teach the importance of promise keeping, or what other capacities are necessary for this practice. However, at the same time, we should not treat our past conclusions as normative 'givens'. It is very possible that further investigation, even into apparently unrelated normative questions might be relevant to our understanding of promise keeping. This is not a deductive process and the conclusions must be recognized as defeasible and be kept open to revision. Finally, I believe that this process of normative

inquiry is often best undertaken, not as a solitary endeavor, but as a social project of dialogue and cooperation in pursuit of a richer normative understanding.

5. An Insufficient Account of Justification

One might object that the process of normative evaluation I am presenting is insufficient as an account of justification. Insofar as we are supposed to take Foot's naturalism seriously, the idea that goodness is grounded in natural, preexisting facts, it might seem that being justified in holding a specific normative judgment would require a stronger case connecting the particular judgment to the relevant facts, since it is those facts which grounds the truth of the judgment.

Foot's view does assume that there is an external world and that the truth of normative judgments are grounded in natural facts. The process I am proposing is grounding the way natural goodness orients, or directs us in a project of understanding the normative landscape, so to speak. It is fine if we want to separate the process of seeking understanding from an account of particular instances of logical justification. The degree to which we have access to the natural facts and the degree to which we are capable of justifying specific normative judgments are open questions. These questions, and coming to understand the degree to which we can do these things plays an important role in understanding goodness.

The issue of justification is a matter of arguments. The degree to which we are justified in holding some belief is a function of the strength of our arguments. The

process of constructing an account of the strength of arguments is an epistemological undertaking, which is separate, though not unrelated to what I am attempting to do here. The process I am proposing should be understood as directing us towards the questions, which are relevant to normative evaluation. The particular examples I give, the argument for promise keeping for instance, should be taken merely as examples of how to approach the questions. I'm trying to illustrate, not that there is a unitary way of approaching the questions, but rather that informative insights can be gained through an investigation directed towards these kinds of questions regarding Aristotelian necessity. Perhaps there are other types of arguments that can help us to understand what it is for an organism to function well, but those arguments must, on the theory of natural goodness, be directed towards Aristotelian necessity. Though Wilfrid Sellars is more of a skeptic regarding the existence of foundations than I am, the following quote does capture very well the problem with pursuing understanding *from* a foundationalist grounding: "For empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a *foundation* but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once."[141] The attempt to construct a 'self-correcting enterprise' is exactly the right response when confronted with the problem of incomplete knowledge. If goodness were not grounded in facts, however, it is not clear to me what sense correcting could have. Thus, we have to be willing to challenge any normative assumption or particular normative judgment, but we do so in the pursuit of increased understanding.

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[141] Wilfrid Sellars, Richard Rorty, and Robert Brandom, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Harvard University Press, 1997). p. 78, 79

6. Virtues of Inquiry

Given the kind of incomplete knowledge I have described, one might object that the foundation of natural facts on which Foot builds her theory are irrelevant. The objectivity of the theory is just an illusion and the project fails to do what Foot originally intended, which was to respond to the relativist and subjectivist turn in ethics. I mentioned earlier the idea that the fact that we exist in a state of incomplete knowledge regarding human nature, along with the life form of many if not all non-human organisms, should not be seen as a deficiency, but as an opportunity for meaning. Einstein once said, "The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of true art and true science."[142] This is equally true of the art and science of living well, that is, of moral development. We are faced with the unknown, which in this case includes ourselves. We should embrace this unknown and approach the project of normative inquiry with the kind of passion with which Einstein, and others of his ilk, confronted their own subjects of inquiry.

Fundamentally ethics is a response to the question of how we should live. One approach, the approach often associated with objective forms of ethics, is to deny that there is a question by offering a singular answer. My suggestion is that we embrace the fact of the question and structure our moral thinking in such a way as to guide us in existing within this question. This is what I mean by natural goodness offering a framework, or an orientation, as I mentioned in the introduction. The conjunction of Foot's theory of natural goodness with the context of incomplete knowledge in which we

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[142] Albert Einstein, *The World As I See It* (Book Tree, 2007).

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find ourselves gives us a reason to value humility, curiosity, and open-mindedness. This conjunction, including the objectivity of natural goodness has concrete implications for how we should approach normative inquiry.

Humility is key to this process since the status of the conclusions must always be recognized as defeasible. The humble investigator will not put undue weight on prior commitments and long-held beliefs, be they unchallenged assumptions, or rationally considered conclusions. Overconfidence is antithetical to this process as it is with any inquiry, shutting us off to unexpected insights and making us prone to confirmation biases.

Curiosity involves both a desire for increased understanding and the hope that such understanding is possible. It motivates the investigation into the subject matter, in this case goodness. The process I have described is consistent with Foot's objectivity, and though we may be confronted by the unknown, there is reason to think that answers are possible.

Finally open-mindedness, which in this context I am using to refer to an attitude paramount to the communal nature of normative inquiry. Open-mindedness involves the willingness to find insight in the positions and arguments of others. It certainly involves humility, in that we must be open to revising our prior beliefs, but also motivates engagement with others, particularly those who disagree with, or would challenge our assumptions. These, and likely others, are attitudes that will promote the process of inquiry that I am proposing.

I don't take any of this to be particularly novel when considering the role of virtues in intellectual pursuits. Rather, I hope that indicating what an agent who is engaged in the process of normative evaluation could look like might help to illustrate the nature of the process I have in mind.

Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* makes the following claim about the proper function of ethics:

> What must be done, practically? Which action is good? Which is bad? To ask such a question is also to fall into a naive abstraction. We don't ask the physicist, 'Which hypotheses are true?' Nor the artist, 'By what procedures does one produce a work whose beauty is guaranteed?' Ethics does not furnish recipes any more than do science or art. One can merely propose methods.[143]

Proposing a method is precisely what I am attempting to do here, but the method is informed by Foot's conception of goodness as grounded in facts about how organisms live. This objectivity determines the direction of inquiry. It is because of the features of Foot's theory that normative inquiry is directed at coming to better understand our natures and in particular towards the search for Aristotelian necessity.

7. Conclusion

In the Postscript to *Natural Goodness* Foot considers the implications of her theory. She says:

> I have been asked the very pertinent question as to where all this leaves disputes about substantial moral questions. Do I really believe that I have described a method for settling them all? The proper reply is that in a way nothing is settled,

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[143] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Citadel Press, 1948). p. 134

but everything is left as it was. The account of vice as natural defect merely gives a framework within which disputes are said to take place, and tries to get rid of some intruding philosophical theories and abstractions that tend to trip us up.[144]

I think that Foot is absolutely correct about what she has accomplished. She has given us the framework from which we can consider questions of morality and normativity more generally. The framework is her account of natural, that is autonomous, goodness. This is an account of goodness on which life makes goodness possible and the form of life embodied by a particular species generates the conditions, or the criteria, for goodness. What I have attempted to do is to offer an account of how, within this structure, and in the face of incomplete knowledge of these criteria, we might still pursue an increased understanding of what is good.

In the following chapter I discuss the role that human ends play in the theory of natural goodness. Humans are often considered unique in their capacity to set and pursue ends. It seems reasonable to expect this feature to inform our understanding of our nature, and thus to have implications for normative evaluation and judgment. However, particular ends are also appropriate objects of normative evaluation. I argue that Foot's theory of natural goodness and my account of normative evaluation are capable of accounting for ends in both of these ways.

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[144] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 116.

Chapter 5: The Evaluation of Ends

1. Introduction

The process of normative evaluation presented in the previous chapter is aimed at evaluating traits and practices. So far in the discussion of natural goodness and normative evaluation the ability to set and pursue ends has been taken to be a feature of human life which arises from our rational capacity. This ability to set and pursue ends was seen as an important aspect of the argument for the goodness of promise keeping because it is easy to see that many of the ends that humans set cannot be pursued or achieved without cooperation. We've also seen that specific ends, like survival, can be the objects of the teleological relationship of Aristotelian necessity. The fact that some practice or feature is necessary for the survival of an organism can be taken as grounds for judging that the practice or feature is good.

In this chapter I will unpack the concept of ends as it relates to Foot's theory of natural goodness and normative evaluation. What I intend to show is that Foot's account of natural goodness does not, and should not, preclude particular vicious ends at the meta-ethical level However, her theory, along with my account of normative evaluation, does have the tools needed to account for judgments regarding the evaluation of ends. That is to say, the account of natural goodness and normative evaluation I have defended thus far does have the theoretical foundation required to

ground moral arguments which can explain the impermissibility of particular vicious ends.

I will begin by considering the scope of Foot's theory of natural goodness, arguing that since her account is best understood as a theory of meta-ethics, it would be inappropriate for it to preclude specific ends or types of ends at the structural level. Instead, what needs to be show is that the theory is capable of grounding reasonable arguments, at the level of practical ethics, which preclude vicious ends. I will begin to make this case by first considering the role that ends play in the structure of natural goodness. That is, I will consider those aspects of organisms' lives which function as the end of the teleological relationship of Aristotelian necessity, self-maintenance and reproduction, for example, and the role they play in natural goodness. I will then argue that there are actually three categories of ends at work in Foot's theory of natural goodness. I label these categories: 'general', 'practices', and 'particular'. I will define these categories, explain the ways they relate and the roles they play in natural goodness. Finally I will show that understanding these three categories is key to understanding the way Foot's theory of natural goodness guides inquiry into the evaluation of ends.

I will conclude by quickly returning to an objection raised by Levy which I discussed in the second chapter. He claims that "preying on other people serves major functions in the lives of individuals,"[145] and thus that Foot's account of natural goodness will be unable to preclude the life of the mafioso. Although I have already sufficiently

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[145] Levy, "Philippa Foot's Theory of Natural Goodness.", p. 12

responded to this criticism, it is useful as a way of illustrating the kinds of arguments that can arise within the framework entailed by Foot's account of natural goodness.

2. The Scope of Natural Goodness

One possible response to the question of whether Foot's theory of natural goodness is capable of precluding vicious ends is that the theory need not, and should not, do so at this structural level. After all, Foot's account of natural goodness is a theory of meta-ethics. It would be inappropriate for a meta-ethical theory to imply particular moral judgments. Consequentialism, in its most general form, understood as the proposition that the moral status of an action is determined by aspect of its consequences, is incapable of promoting or precluding any particular acts. Hedonic utilitarianism, a version of consequentialism which includes a commitment regarding what types of consequences are good, can ground particular moral judgments. Likewise, Foot's theory of of natural goodness is an account that holds that what matters, normatively speaking, is the life-form of an organism. Since the theory is not explicitly committed to an account of, for instance, the human life-form, or human nature, it might seem natural to think that this meta-ethical theory, like consequentialism, should be mute on questions of particular judgments. However, the theory of natural goodness *is* committed to a specific account of human nature, that is, the one which actually (empirically) obtains. Of course I've argued that that we are not in a position to know, at least not directly, or a priori, what our nature is. However, it is

part of Foot's account of natural goodness that the standard for goodness is internal to the organism, the standard is concrete and actually embodied in the structure of the living organism. So, the scope of natural goodness, in regards to what types of judgments the theory ought to be capable of grounding is less clear. At the most general level, which I believe is what Foot offers in *Natural Goodness*, the theory is about the structure, not the content, of normative judgment. It implies a strategy of inquiry, which I have attempted to elucidate, which guides our investigation into our own nature, as well as the nature of other organisms, and which therefore grounds particular normative judgments. To see how this account guides inquiry into particular ends I will begin by considering the role that ends play in the non-human cases.

3. Natural Goodness and Non-human Ends

For Foot natural goodness is autonomous goodness. When she uses the term 'natural' she intends to describe a type of goodness which is intrinsic to an organism, which is not grounded on something outside the organism. Our internal structures determine what it is for us to live well as the kind of organisms we are. 'Life' is an independent criterion, not pursued for the sake of something else. The process of normative evaluation gives us normative, action guiding conclusions. If promise keeping is found to be good for human beings, the way that swiftness is good for deer, then I should recognize that the fact that I made a promise is a relevant consideration when confronted with a choice that involves either keeping or breaking that promise, even if it

is not an overriding reason all things considered. We might have a picture of natural goodness and normative evaluation on which the process of evaluation gives rise to the descriptive propositions discussed in the second chapter, the Aristotelian categoricals, and that it is from these descriptive propositions that we derive our normative conclusions, or ground our normative judgments. Aristotelian categoricals, remember, are propositions of the form 'S is F', such as 'Deer are swift'. It might seem that the truth of the proposition: 'Deer are swift' gives us reason to conclude that it is good for deer to be swift. However, it is important to see that the normative claims are baked into the apparently descriptive 'S is F' claim. As we saw before, the power of these propositions comes from the teleology which defines them. This teleology is what distinguishes Aristotelian categoricals from mere descriptions. It is the connection between 'F' and the life of 'S' which makes 'S' the distinct type of organism it is and which makes 'F' good.

'S' refers to a species, in this case a deer, and 'F' refers to a feature, that is some practice or trait that this species has which 'plays a role' in the life of this kind of organism, in this case swiftness. The Aristotelian categorical is not claiming that there is some complete 'S' that is a concept that can be fully understood in itself separate from 'F' and that there is some independent 'F' that bears a relationship to 'S'. The two concepts are not fully distinct. There is no 'S' which is independent of 'F'. The species referred to by 'S' is partially defined by the feature referred to by 'F'. Without the property of swiftness, the concept of deer is incomplete. One, though certainly not the most common, way of distinguishing a deer from a field mouse is that the deer is not the kind of creature that can burrow underground to avoid predators. That feature belongs

to the field mouse and is a feature that a good field mouse must be capable of actualizing. In a way the Aristotelian categorical is a statement of identity which claims that it is in the nature of 'S' to have 'F'. The feature 'F' is an Aristotelian necessity for the life of organisms of the species 'S'. For Foot a species is defined in terms of its life form, which is just the 'way of getting by' available to this species. More specifically the life form of an organism is the collection of practices and traits, the 'Fs', which are necessary for this type of organism to live. For non-human organisms the features which determine, or constitute, an organism's good, according to Foot, are those that are needed for self-maintenance, and reproduction.[146] Note, however, that the life form of a species can't be *constituted* by self-maintenance and reproduction, since then all non-human organisms would belong to the same species. Rather, a non-human organism's *life* is constituted by self-maintenance and reproduction and it's life *form* is constituted by the practices and strategies which are necessary for self-maintenance and reproduction, that is, for its life.

On this picture it might be natural to refer to self-maintenance and reproduction as ends for non-human organisms. After all, the teleological relationship which is the foundation of natural goodness is oriented in this direction. Practices and traits must be teleologically related to self-maintenance and reproduction in order to count as aspects of an organism's life form, in order to be good. Of course the way non-human organisms relate to ends is different from the way humans relate to ends. This is due to our rationality, which allows us to ask of any end whether it should be pursued. This

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[146] Foot, *Natural Goodness.*, p. 32

question can be understood in two ways. First, is the end good, or worthy of pursuit? Second, even if it is good, why should it be pursued?. Foot offers an answer to the second question by reconceiving the relationship between rationality and goodness. As I argued in the introduction, she takes the goodness of an end to be a condition for its rationality. The first question is the crux of the current challenge: Is the theory of natural goodness capable of evaluating ends? This question is not unique to humans, however. The challenge is how the theory can, without begging the question, ground normative judgments about things like self-maintenance and reproduction, while at the same time taking those things to be the ground for all normative judgments. That humans are capable of recognizing this challenge does not make the problem unique to the human cases. We can ask, of non-human organisms, whether we are correct in defining their lives in terms of self-maintenance and reproduction. The fact that this question about the role of life and the ends which constitute it persists in the non-human cases indicates that this challenge facing the theory of natural goodness is not unique to its account of rational beings. Thus, if the theory can answer the challenge in the case of non-human organisms, this should at least be informative regarding an answer for human beings.

So, where can we look for reasons to accept that life is constituted by self-maintenance and reproduction for non-human organisms? Do the reasons come from inside the theory of natural goodness, or do they come from outside, from biology for instance? Perhaps we can get an insight into the kinds of reasons available by considering a line of argument which challenges the conclusion that life, for non-human

organisms, is simply constituted by self-maintenance and reproduction. To begin this argument I want to propose that the distinction between human and non-human organisms is not as sharp as it is sometimes presented. Some non-human organisms seem to have more robust lives, constituted by more than merely self-maintenance and reproduction. For example, some non-human organisms' lives can be enriched by play and companionship.

The assumption that the life of non-human organisms is reducible to self-maintenance and reproduction grows out of, or at least mirrors, the shift in biology from a study of organisms in natural history to a focus on genetics in evolutionary biology. If we conceive of organisms as merely the actualizations of genetic potentialities and the field of biology as primarily concerned with the development and propagation of genotypes rather than phenotypes, then of course the features of an organism will be understood in relation to self-maintenance and reproduction, as there are the tools for genetic propagation. However, Foot's theory of natural goodness need not be limited to a genetic conception of life and is therefore capable of adopting a more robust notion of organism and consequently what it means for an organism to flourish than that generally found in evolutionary biology.

Without a more robust conception of flourishing it is not clear how we would convincingly explain the harm done, for example, by dog breeders who isolate the dogs, denying them social interaction beyond what is necessary for breeding. After all, the dogs are given the nutrition needed to continue living and they are allow to successfully reproduce. Most of us would be hard pressed, I believe, to see this as a healthy way for

the dogs to live, given that they have a more complex psychology, which includes a need for social interaction and play. This is not to deny the genetic explanations for why dogs evolved in such a way as to have these social needs. The point is that what is good for dogs is determined by what kind of creatures they are, and that there seems to be good reason to think that their well-being involves socialization and play.

So what does this argument for a more robust conception of life for some non-human organisms illustrate about the source of reasons which ground judgments about the kinds of ends which constitute the life of an organism? Natural goodness is a theory explaining the structure of normative judgment. Foot takes self-maintenance, she actually uses the term survival, and reproduction to play the role they play in the theory because they allow us to make the kinds of distinctions we need to make. Specifically between Aristotelian categoricals and mere generalisations. If we took the life of organisms to be constituted by their typical motions, then we wouldn't be able to make a relevant distinction between the transportation of nutrients by an oak tree's roots and the rustling of its leaves. We see a relevant distinction between these two motions as the transportation of nutrients serves a function unique to living organisms while the rustling of leaves does not. I don't mean to imply by this, that teleology is a property that we can observe directly. We don't simply see the function of moving nitrates from the soil, but neither is the nutritive function of this motion simply an arbitrary fiction. Our understanding of the function of these kinds of processes is a part of a larger conception of the world.

I argued for a more robust picture of life for some non-human organisms on the grounds that there were way of harming these organisms where the harm could not be explained in reference to self-maintenance and reproduction. Foot makes similar arguments in the fourth chapter of *Natural Goodness* when she says that, "it is possible to give some quite general account of human necessities, that is, of what is quite generally needed for human good, if only by starting from the negative idea of human deprivation."[147] But isn't this circular? We are drawing conclusions about what constitutes life on the grounds that a certain account is capable of grounding judgments about goodness while the theory of natural goodness hold that judgments about goodness are grounded in facts about what constitutes the life of an organism. It seems that we have to begin already committed to certain normative judgments in order to make a case for the structure of goodness being proposed. But the explicit purpose of the theory of natural goodness is to offer an account of the ground for normative judgments. This is only viciously circular if we treat any particular conception of life, or any set of intuitive normative judgments, as given. The fact that natural goodness is compatible with a more robust conception of life for non-human organisms, in light of argument, is a virtue.

The content, 'self-maintenance and reproduction,' in the context of Foot's argument is only used to illustrate the structure of natural goodness, that is, to show the relationship between life and normative judgments and to show that there is a kind of autonomous normativity that is entailed by the existence of living beings which is

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[147] Ibid. p. 43

intrinsic to the nature of those organisms. The selection of 'self-maintenance and reproduction' is not a given, handed to philosophy by biology, but neither is it arbitrary. We are in a position of feeling like we have good reason for certain judgments and then we attempt to discern what those reasons are. It is very possible that we will fail to construct an account on which our preconceived notions are justified, or we may find that there is inconsistency among our widely held beliefs. Even if the structure of natural goodness is convincing, the content is not given. But this does not leave us rudderless. The insight of the theory is in explaining the role of Aristotelian necessity to normative judgment. The theory orients us in a particular direction for normative inquiry. If we must begin this inquiry with some intuitive or widely held judgments, this is only problematic if we take the judgments as indefeasible givens. The idea that there is a beginning of moral inquiry is misleading. There is always something that comes before, we can never begin the process of judgment with a blank slate, nor chip away until we find an immutable foundation. It is precisely this lack of a given foundation that motivated the account of normative evaluation and the importance of certain ways of engaging with this inquiry that I proposed in the fourth chapter. So the evaluation of those ends which we take to constitute life are appropriate objects of normative evaluation. In evaluating these ends we are considering the fitness of a conception of life to play the role in judgment that the theory of natural goodness takes it to play. With my argument regarding the psychological complexity of dogs, I have offered one example of what these evaluations might look like, but there may be other approaches that respect the role of life in normative judgment. In order to evaluate the fitness of different

conceptions of life we still have to understand what role these kinds of ends play in the theory of natural goodness. To this end we can put aside the issue of more robust conceptions of non-human life, since presumably it is the content of the concept of life that will change under further scrutiny, not the role that the concept of life plays in the structure of natural goodness, that is, as the end for which the features which constitute the life form of organisms are necessary. For simplicity's sake we can continue to refer to self-maintenance and reproduction as constituting the life of non-human organisms, as long as we recognize that this is an overly simple picture.

If we take self-maintenance and reproduction to be ends for non-human organisms, it might be natural to interpret the teleological relationship of Aristotelian necessity in terms of means and ends. That is, we might want to say that the teleological claim that 'deer are swift', or its equivalent, that 'swiftness is an Aristotelian necessity for the survival of the deer', should be interpreted as claiming that swiftness is the means by which deer achieve the end of survival, or more generally self-maintenance. In one sense this is a reasonable interpretation of the proposition. The teleological claim does imply a directionality similar to the means-end relationship. However, it would be incorrect to ground the normative content of the claim 'deer are swift' in this means-end relationship. If the achievement of some end was the ground of the normativity, then it would not be the case that swiftness is good for the deer in captivity. There would be a different standard for goodness. With means-ends reasoning the goodness of the means is contingent on its efficacy and efficacy becomes the standard for normativity. This is a criteria which is outside the structure of an

organism. This type of reasoning can ground a type of normative claim. We might say, for instance, that it would be good, or better, for the deer if it were able to fly away to escape terrestrial predators. There is a sense in which this is true, and we can imagine for any organism powers that would be beneficial which are not actually available to that species. These are not judgments about natural goodness, however. This type of reasoning cannot be the ground for natural goodness as it does not speak to the health of an organism. The deer isn't sick, or deficient because it cannot fly. This is because the means-end reasoning appeals to a criteria outside the organism, efficacy. Natural goodness can speak to the flourishing of an organism precisely because the normativity is internal to the organism. Swiftness, as a feature of deer, is autonomously good. It is not contingent as a means to an end, but is, for the deer, intrinsically good. So far this discussion of ends has focused just on ends like self-maintenance and reproduction, but there are also more particular ends. For animals we can see this in a dog's choosing to play with one toy over another, or the predator going after one specific target over other potential targets. These particular ends also call for explanation, and we can perhaps give an account of the reasons an animal chooses one thing over another, even if we might not want to say that the animal relates to these reasons in the way a person would. The extent of these more particular reasons is most clearly seen by considering human cases.

4. Categories of Ends

Even if it is appropriate to recognize general ends like self-maintenance and reproduction, this is insufficient as an accounting of ends since the activities of organisms seem to aim at specific objects and objectives in the world. I also think it would be overly simplistic to categorize ends into general and particular. Instead, I want to propose that there is a spectrum of ends, ranging from the general to the particular. Along this spectrum we can see three categories. At the 'general' end of the spectrum are what I call general, or life constituting, ends. This category includes things like self-maintenance and reproduction, but also, for humans, cooperation and communication. These are ends in the sense that they serve as the end of the teleological relationship of Aristotelian necessity. Less general than these life constituting ends are practices, which would include things like promise keeping. It might seem odd at first glance to classify this as a type of end, but it is the kind of thing at which we can aim. I can decide that I need to be better about keeping my promises and considering what promises I'm going to make, with an eye towards becoming more consistent. This category could also include things like being a better friend, becoming a better listener, or developing intellectual humility. These are things which we can understand as practices, but also as objects of pursuit that shape our more particular decisions. At the less general, more specific, end of the spectrum are particular ends. This is itself a large and diverse category, including things that range from deciding to go to a specific school, to deciding to fill out the application for this school tomorrow afternoon.

I put these all on the same spectrum because they are all objects of pursuit, even if they are pursued in different ways, they shape and define particular lives. However, they are broken into categories because they are distinct not just in virtue of being more or less general, but in the role they play within the theory of natural goodness. One way to distinguish these categories is in reference to the way we can evaluate them, that is, the ends in each of these categories are the appropriate objects of specific questions, and these questions are determined by the role the ends play in natural goodness.

I've already touched on the kind of question we can ask regarding general, life constituting ends, in my argument that we should include ends like socialization in our conception of the life some non-human organisms. I made the argument for this broader conception of life for dogs on the grounds that there were intuitively plausible judgments that could not be grounded on the narrower conception of life. This argument only works because a conception of a life, defined in terms of these general ends, plays the role it does in natural goodness, that is as the teleological end which grounds judgments about Aristotelian necessities. Since we believe that dogs suffer if they are not allowed to play with, or be around other dogs, we have reason to see one conception of the life of dogs as insufficient. So the question we can ask about these general ends would be, 'Is it reasonable to think that this end, or collection of ends, are constitutive of the life of the kind of organism under consideration?' There may be many ways of attempting to answer this question, depending on the end in question, the organism under consideration, etc.

I have also discussed the way we should evaluate the second category of ends, practices. Practices include strategies and features which constitute the life form of an organism, and are appropriate objects of the process of normative evaluation I proposed in chapter four. The question at hand for potential members of this category is 'Is it an Aristotelian necessity for the life of the organism under consideration?' To answer this question we have to be working from some conception of life, though of course it will not be a complete account. In the promise keeping example, for example, I took it to be pretty uncontroversial that human life involves cooperation, or at least that cooperation was necessary for life constituting ends. I don't need to commit myself to a particular set of life constituting ends for the argument to be plausible. It is sufficient to recognize the sheer breadth of human endeavors that involve cooperation and then to make the connection between the practice of promise keeping and cooperation. Answering the question of whether some practice is an Aristotelian necessity for life in the affirmative is to conclude that this practice is good. This process defines the scope of normatively relevant considerations. That is to say, for instance, that the conclusion that the practice of promise keeping is good gives me reason to recognize the fact of a promise as a relevant consideration when acting. This leads to the final category, particular ends.

Particular ends are those that motivate and partially define particular actions. These ends rarely, if ever, exist in isolation in regards to action, but are rather members of a cluster of concerns. For example, assume I promised to help my friend move. When the day comes, however, I am running a fever and decide to break that promise

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out of a concern for my own health. It would be too simplistic to assume that there was

only the one consideration playing a role in that decision. More likely I am not only

considering my own well-being, how getting out of the house will affect the speed of my

recovery. I may also be thinking about how much help I could really be in this condition.

I may end up making the process go slower with my presence. I should also be

recognizing that I made a promise. The situation presents itself to me as a choice

precisely because I experience a conflict between at least the fact of the promise and

my own well-being. I could also consider the expectations of my friend. Is this the kind

of person who would really expect me to keep this promise in this context? What I can

expect my friend's attitude to be regarding the situation might be relevant. Now, I'm not

saying that all of these considerations will always go through the mind of an agent

whenever confronted with this kind of situation. I'm just using these examples to

illustrate that it seems like an oversimplification to simply define an action in reference

to the end, or consideration, which 'won out'. This simplistic view wouldn't allow us to

make the distinction between the action done by a person for whom the only

consideration that crossed their mind was self-concern and the person who is frustrated,

though not necessarily feeling guilty, by having to break the promise. There seem to be

at least three ways an agent could relate to these particular ends, this cluster of

concerns. First, the agent could fail to recognize all the relevant considerations, and

thus act wrongly. Even if the right thing to do in the situation described above is to stay

home, you could act wrongly in virtue of not even recognizing that the fact that you

made a promise was a relevant consideration. Second, the agent could recognize all

the relevant considerations, but misjudge the importance of some aspect or aspects of the situation. This could come, for example, in the form of excessive or insufficient self-concern. Third, the agent recognizes all the relevant considerations and makes a reasonable judgment. It need not be the case that there is only one reasonable judgment to be made in any particular case.

It is important to consider the ways an agent can relate to ends, but I don't want to reduce the agent's relationship to reasons to 'recognizing' and 'weighing'. In part this is because it would be too intellectualist an account, and in general just an oversimplification, to require agents to engage in a kind of explicit enumeration and prioritization. We can still do quite a bit to investigate the nature of agents' relationships to their ends by considering hypothetical situations. How would they act if things were slightly different? This can shed light on what considerations are operating, even if subconsciously. That being said, I am less concerned with specific instances of evaluating agents' actions than with offering an account which agents can use to orient themselves towards relevant considerations. For the purposes of describing the theoretical structure of natural goodness I will talk in terms of recognizing and weighing. Specific moral theories might offer varying accounts of how agents should be relating to their ends, be it implicitly or explicitly, for instance. The insight of natural goodness is to offer a theoretical orientation, that is, to recognize that the normative relevance of particular ends is connected to the relationship between practices and the life of the organism. How this recognition of relevance should 'play out' in particular cases is a matter of practical wisdom. It is important that practical wisdom, on this account, is not

mere means-ends reasoning. The particular ends are also ends in themselves. Keeping a promise is always good, even if it is not always appropriate, all things considered.

Of course, given our state of incomplete knowledge, the content of the categories is not a given. This is why the three categories I have presented are defined in terms of questions we can ask about their members, or potential members. This places the question of what counts as end, and ends of a particular kind, within the context of the ongoing process of moral inquiry. Our questions about ends are part of our attempt to better understand our nature. Particular conclusions about ends falls within the realm of moral theory, not at the metaethical level of the theory of natural goodness, though natural goodness offers the criteria for counting as an end of a specific kind. Furthermore, membership in a category might be fluid, since the criteria is relative to moral inquiry and the functional role in the structure of natural goodness. We could ask questions about cooperation, for instance, which treat it as a practice. For instance, this could be the precursor to discussing particular cooperative practices, like social movements, government or corporate action, etc. When we treat cooperation as a practice, the theory of natural goodness would orient us towards a discussion of how cooperative endeavors, in general, relate to life-constituting ends. But we might also wonder if cooperation is itself a life-constituting end. Then the nature of the inquiry changes and we have to consider the implications of including this into a theory of human life.

5. Conclusion

Looking in more detail at the different ways we can consider ends on the theory of natural goodness hopefully clarifies the scope of what the theory can say about ends. Rather than grounding particular judgments, which should happen at the level of moral theory, natural goodness provides an orientation for moral theorizing. Without precluding vicious ends outright, which would be beyond the scope of a metaethical account, natural goodness proposes a number of directions from which to evaluate ends. For instance, in response to Levy's specific claim that "preying on other people serves major functions in the lives of individuals,"[148] we need to understand what is going on with 'serves major functions'. The most plausible interpretation of this phrase would be that people prey on others to get what they want, or to achieve their goals. However, natural goodness does not ground the goodness of a practice in this kind of means-ends relationship.The proposition is much less straightforward if we try to understand the relationship as one of Aristotelian necessity. This is in part because the lives 'of individuals' are not precisely what is relevant to natural goodness. Life is a species level concept, and even though the concept of a life for human beings is multiply realizable, it is not the case that any collection of ends will be equally plausible as constituents of an account of human life. Furthermore, there are reasons to think the mafioso, even when engaging in an apparently good practice would not be doing so in the right way. The mafia boss may keep his promises, but it will not be from a recognition that keeping promises is good. Perhaps he keeps his promises because it

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[148] Levy, "Philippa Foot's Theory of Natural Goodness.", p. 126

gives him a sense of moral superiority which helps him to rationalize his other actions. Perhaps he keeps his promises because his threats hold more weight when he has a history of following through. Things which are really good practices are seen as means to further ends, rather than good in themselves. Another strategy would be to show that the life of the mafioso is incompatible with other goods for which we can give convincing, independent arguments. Finally, the apparent success of the mafioso can't be taken as evidence for the goodness of his life. The life of the mafioso is presented as 'a way of getting by' which is available to human beings, but we have been given no reason to think that this 'way of getting by' is analogous to the healthy oak, rather than the oak with rotting roots that 'gets on' by leaning against a nearby wall. The tree may 'get on' by leaning on a structure, but it is still diseased. There is no reason to think the mafioso 'gets by' because he preys on people rather than despite this fact, or that he can plausibly be said to succeed on a reasonable account of human life.

Chapter 6: Implications of Natural Goodness and Normative Evaluation

1. Introduction

As I've mentioned, Foot claims that, though her arguments in *Natural Goodness* do not solve disputes about substantial moral questions, what she has done is offered a framework from which these questions can be considered. She is right to understand her metaethical project in this way, and I see my own project as an extension of that. Recognizing that we are in a state of incomplete knowledge regarding our own nature, as well as that of other organisms, has significant implications for the structure of any framework which natural goodness might entail. With my account of normative evaluation, as a project of inquiry guided both by Foot's account of natural goodness and the fats I see about our epistemic situation, I have given some degree of substance to this framework, offering a strategy by which we can approach substantial moral questions. I do not mean by this that I have provided some principle, or decision making procedure which will generate solutions to particular moral dilemmas. It is a method to guide inquiry, not a decision making procedure.

Although Foot is not offering a theory of virtue in *Natural Goodness*, she does use considerations of virtue throughout to illustrate the account of goodness she is providing. It seems appropriate then, to end this project by considering some implications, both of natural goodness and my account of normative evaluation, for how

we might understand virtue and with some thoughts about where this project leaves us in regards to practical moral issues. To that end I first describe the way that Foot's account of natural goodness and my process of normative evaluation can ground particular virtues. I consider the virtues of inquiry I introduced in chapter four, some traditional virtues, and the different aspects of practical rationality that Foot discusses in the first chapter of *Natural Goodness*. Next I consider virtuous activity, addressing what virtuous activity might look like on a natural goodness account and how it connects with the concepts of happiness and human flourishing. I end by explaining where I think this project leaves us, what the framework offered by natural goodness looks like after we recognize and respond to the problem of incomplete knowledge.

2. Grounding Virtues

In chapter four I briefly discussed some virtues I referred to as 'virtues of inquiry'. These were the virtues of humility, curiosity, and open-mindedness, which I argued were necessary for properly engaging in the process of normative evaluation I had just introduced. All three of these virtues are ways of responding to the problem of incomplete knowledge in a way that is potentially fruitful when it comes to justifying judgments in this epistemic context. So this is one way that natural goodness, as I've described the theory in the context of incomplete knowledge, can ground specific virtues.

In addition to these virtues, which would often be classified as epistemic virtues, natural goodness can ground traditional virtues and can justify the judgments that they are good through the process of normative evaluation I have proposed. Take, for instance, temperance, which, understood as self-restraint, is not always classified as a moral virtue. Nonetheless, we can imagine a straightforward argument, fitting the model of normative evaluation, which could point out, for instance, the connection between temperance and health.

Another example, one which Foot herself considers, is charity. Foot argues that:

> by the criteria of natural normativity, charity is a prime candidate as a virtue, because love and other forms of kindness are needed by every one of us when misfortune strikes, and may be a sign of strength rather than weakness in those who are sorry for us. We may reasonably think, moreover, that charity makes for happiness in the one who has it, as hardness does not.[149]

There are three arguments at work here, all of which fit the method of evaluation I have proposed. The first argument is that charity belongs to a class of 'forms of kindness' which includes love and presumably other attitudes and types of actions. The practice of being kind, in any of the multitude of forms this could take, plays a role in human life insofar as everyone can be the target of misfortune. Specific examples of kindness at work could involve anything from survival to accomplishing some concrete end we may be pursuing. The second argument is that charity 'may be a sign of strength rather than weakness'. This seems to be a preemptive response to an implicit argument that charity is not good on the grounds that it indicates weakness on the part of the charitable party.

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[149] Foot, *Natural Goodness.*, p. 108

I don't see the force of this argument myself. It seems to grow out of a, largely discarded, notion that sympathy, or other-regard indicates a weakness in respect to the ideal of perfect independence. Either way, what is relevant to my current point is that Foot's argument fits the structure of normative evaluation I propose and illustrates a way that natural goodness can ground this fairly traditional virtue. This is true of her third argument as well, which connects charity to happiness in the one who has it. It seems relatively uncontroversial that a part of human life involves the pursuit of some version of happiness. I discuss in more detail the relationship between virtue and happiness in the next section, but for now I will just point out that recognizing that happiness is a common, or perhaps universal, end pursued by human beings and claiming that charity, or any other virtue, is good at least in part due to its contributing to happiness does not imply that virtue is constitutive of happiness, or that happiness is *the* criteria by which we should judge goodness. I mention this because these are both views which some have held, but Foot's theory of natural goodness does not entail either view.

One more straightforward example of a traditional virtue is bravery and we can give arguments of this same form to illustrate that bravery is good. Perhaps one of the simplest arguments is to point out that many, if not the vast majority, of ends which humans might pursue involve risk. This can range from the risk involved in opposing tyranny, to that entailed in allowing one's work to be critiqued by others.

In addition to these epistemic and more traditional virtues, Foot's account of natural goodness can ground the goodness of the two different aspects of practical

rationality she describes. This includes self-preserving actions, along with the 'careful

and cognizant pursuit of the maximum satisfaction of present desires. That it is

appropriate to recognize the goodness of self-preserving actions can be seen, again, by

connecting self-preservation with survival. This simple, evolutionary style argument is

that our survival depends on engaging in self-preserving actions. Additionally we could

connect these actions to any number of other previously established goods which could

not be pursued without, at least a degree, of self-preservation.

An argument that this 'desire satisfaction' aspect of practical reason is good

could refer to our rational nature which allows us to be setters and pursuers of ends. In

order to *be* this, we *need* to be capable of this kind of careful and cognizant pursuit of

our ends.

So, the point here is that these kinds of arguments, which fit the method of

normative evaluation I have proposed, are available on Foot's account of natural

goodness and serve the function of grounding particular virtues. This illustrates one way

in which the conjunction of Foot's theory of natural goodness and my account of

normative evaluation can orient moral discourse.

3. Virtuous Activity

Accounts of virtue often involve describing what virtuous activity 'looks like', or

what it is like to be a virtuous agent. I think that natural goodness has implications for

how we might understand this as well. First, given the fact that we must work with an

ever evolving conception of human nature, should we assume that there is only one form that virtuous activity can take? Justifying this assumption would be very demanding. Furthermore, Foot defines virtue in terms of an agent's recognition of reasons, and it is compatible with natural goodness that the recognition of reasons could be actualized in a number of ways.

Perhaps one way to act virtuously is to explicitly consider the individual relevant considerations and consciously weigh them and some situations may call for this kind of explicit, conscious engagement. This is a very intellectualist, or rationalist, account of virtue. It could also be, however, that someone might recognize relevant reasons as the result of some internalized, subconscious orientation towards the good. On this account 'recognition' would happen at the subconscious level, and decision making for this agent would look quite different when compared to the 'intellectualist' account. A third option could hold that our emotional response, when functioning properly, when we are psychologically healthy, can be indicative of, or could constitute, authentic normative reasons.

It may be that there are reasons to prefer one of these accounts over the others, or perhaps the different modes of virtue are appropriate in different contexts. The point is that the theory of natural goodness seems compatible with a range of accounts of what it is like to engage in virtuous activity. However, there are limits implied by natural goodness. Not just any account of virtuous activity will be compatible.

For example, virtue, on a natural goodness account, cannot be Pavlovian, the result of mere habituation. This is because virtue, for natural goodness, is not merely about tendencies to react in certain ways to different inputs. Virtue requires recognition of, which I understand as involving *some* kind of active engagement with, the goodness of practices, pursuits, etc. For Foot, that something counts as a reason for action follows from its being good. The recognition that some X is a reason for action is the recognition of the goodness of that X.

Whatever form virtue might take, it is clear that natural goodness requires that we take a broad view of virtue. The species level criteria undercuts a purely egoistic account of what makes something virtuous. Neither virtue nor goodness is defined relative to an individual's flourishing, but neither are they understood fully independent of a conception of flourishing.

As a member of the species, judgments of natural goodness are informative when it comes to the health of an individual. A swift deer is, at least in that respect, a healthy deer. What natural goodness recognizes is that an individual might find himself in a position where acting virtuously will not guarantee his health or happiness and that virtue could at times put these things at risk. This fact, however, does not undercut the goodness of virtuous activity.

That is not to say that virtue is not sensitive to the features of a situation. Virtue, on this account, is not about following absolute principles, such as 'don't kill'. It isn't even about applying some general principle, like the golden mean, and generating good action. Virtue is the recognition of reason. When I say that the fact that a virtuous action

might put someone's health or happiness at risk, this doesn't mean that these considerations are irrelevant. Foot recognizes that moral considerations are not always overriding, and even when they are, they rarely, if ever, constitute the only relevant considerations for acting. She says,

> As I see it, the rationality of, say, telling the truth, keeping promises, or helping a neighbour is *on par* with the rationality of self-preserving action, and of the careful and cognizant pursuit of other innocent ends; each being a part or aspect of practical rationality. The different considerations are on par, moreover, in that a judgement about what is required by practical rationality must take account of their interaction: of the weight of the ones we call non-moral as well as those we call moral.[150]

 The natural question is how we are to figure these weights? What principle, or procedure, can we apply to reveal the right action? But natural goodness does not offer this type of decision making procedure, and it is not clear, at least to me, how one could be generated from the theory of natural goodness.

But what do we lose by not having an answer to this question? Not having *an* answer does not imply that we cannot say *anything* about tough cases. The process of normative evaluation I described directs the inquiry and the discourse by focusing our attention on questions regarding the way the practice being considered, self-preserving actions, for instance, are related to a reasonable, working conception of human life. Is self-preserving action good? If so, in relation to what aspect of human life? Coming to better understand the answers to these questions can allow us to ask, in a particular situation, whether self-preserving action is actually serving this function better than following some other relevant consideration.

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[150] Ibid., p. 11

One might object that this line of reasoning is inconsistent with what has been said before, specifically, that the goodness of a practice should not be dependent on whether it fulfills the function, or achieves the end for which it is an Aristotelian necessity, in a particular case. After all, Foot and I have said many times that swiftness is good for deer even in the case where the swift deer is first into the hunter's trap. This still holds true, but the fact that the deer is good in virtue of its swiftness does not mean that it is not deficient in some other regard. Perhaps it was through no fault of the deer that it was caught, the hunter was just too clever. But another possibility is that the deer was deficient relative to its visual or auditory awareness. Perhaps the deer was swift, but could not see well, and this may explain why it fell prey to the hunter's trap. On Foot's account of natural goodness there is no situation in which swiftness becomes not good for the deer. It is also not that case that the deer's failure to survive *must* be explained in terms of some deficiency, though it *may* be. It is perfectly possible that an ideal deer specimen could fall prey to a hunter.

Following this line of reasoning through to human cases, natural goodness implies that if something is a virtue, then it is always a virtue. Promise keeping is a good, even in those cases where, all things considered, I should not keep my promise. Since virtue involves the recognition of reason, this means that I should always take the fact of a promise as a relevant consideration when acting. It also follows that natural goodness connects virtue to flourishing. Practices are good because of their connection to a reasonable conception of a well-lived life. However, virtue is not constitutive of

happiness, or flourishing. It is perfectly possible to be virtuous, but not achieve the

goods which we might take to be a part of a flourishing life.

Foot consider a group of prisoners who are to be executed after a trial in Nazi

Germany. We know of these people, Foot explains, through the letters they wrote while

imprisoned.

> Letters written to their wives, or parents, or sweethearts, which, because of that, give a very poignant sense of what it was that they were losing in laying down their lives. At the time when the letters were written, the die was already cast: probably no one of them could have escaped death whatever might have been said or done. But earlier, as when, for instance, a pastor among them had refused to stop preaching against the ill-treatment of the Jewish people, they must have had a choice between the life they could have had with their families, and the death that awaited them in prison.[151]

Foot argues that these 'Letter Writers', as she refers to them, could, in a very real

sense, not achieve happiness in this social context. To fight injustice meant being

separated from their families and ultimately executed, but avoiding this fate would

involve ignoring, or sublimating their recognition of the horrors which were being

perpetrated around them. Insofar as a virtuous person is unable to achieve happiness

as a result of the features of their political or social environment, this is indicative of an

unjust society. It was through no fault of the Letter Writers that their virtue was

incompatible with the pursuit of other legitimate goods.

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[151] Ibid., p. 94

4. The Framework of Natural Goodness and Normative Evaluation

So where does this project leave us in respect to practical moral questions? Foot's theory of natural goodness offered a framework for moral arguments. The problem facing Foot's theory, is that we are not in a position to construct a reasonably comprehensive account of our own nature. But it is precisely facts about the structure and content of human life which serves as the source of goodness, moral and nonmoral, for human beings. This would be devastating for her account. Since natural goodness is grounded in precisely these foundational facts, what good could the 'natural goodness' framework for moral discourse be?

I have argued that this fact of our incomplete knowledge need not undermine Foot's attempt to ground a framework for moral discourse, provided we adopt, as I argue we should, a mode of normative evaluation which is sensitive to both the nature of goodness, as Foot has described it, and the epistemic condition in which we find ourselves. This mode of normative evaluation takes the form of an inquiry into the relationship between human practices and features and an evolving conception of human life, of human nature. Taking together the insight of Foot's account of natural goodness, along with the implications of our incomplete knowledge of our own natures, requires that we approach normative evaluation, and moral discourse, with humility, curiosity, and open-mindedness. This account of normative evaluation offers a new framework which, as illustrated by the prior considerations of virtue and virtuous activity, is capable of orienting moral discourse within this context of incomplete knowledge.

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