British Journal for the History of Philosophy

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rbjh20

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To cite this article: Ellie Robson (16 Sep 2024): Mary Midgley's meta-ethics and Neo-Aristotelian naturalism, British Journal for the History of Philosophy, DOI: 10.1080/09608788.2024.2389863

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2024.2389863

Published online: 16 Sep 2024.

BRITISH JOURNAL FOR THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY
https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2024.2389863

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ARTICLE

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Mary Midgley's meta-ethics and Neo-Aristotelian naturalism

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ABSTRACT

This paper has two aims: First, to provide an elucidation of the kind of meta-ethical programme at work in Mary Midgley's (1919-2018) *Beast and Man*: *The Roots of Human Nature* (published in 1978). Second, to make the case for Midgley's placement within the philosophical and philosophical-historical canon, specifically, as an important figure within the meta-ethical movement of 'Neo-Aristotelian naturalism'. On historical and systematic grounds, I argue that Midgley should be classified as a neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalist notwithstanding the distinctive features of Midgley's specific brand of neo-Aristotelianism. In doing so, I suggest a more generally applicable family resemblance approach to the history of philosophy in order to classify and re-introduce into the canon figures in the history of philosophy that are in danger of falling into oblivion.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 3 January 2024; Revised 23 July 2024; Accepted 2 August 2024

KEYWORDS Mary Midgley; Aristotelian Naturalism; meta-ethics; twentieth-century history of philosophy

1. Introduction

The aims of this paper are twofold: First, to provide an elucidation of the kind of meta-ethical programme at work in Mary Midgley's (1919–2018) *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (published in 1978, henceforth, BM).[1] Second, to outline the most plausible and yet unexplored context in which Midgley's meta-ethics can be situated. More specifically, I trace a robust form of ethical naturalism at work in Midgley's BM and central to the philosophical programme pursued in her wider corpus which, in my view, can be situated within the tradition of 'Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism' (henceforth, AN).[2]

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[1]Midgley also formulates this naturalism in other works cited in this paper.

[2]I use AN to mean Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism and ANs to mean Neo-Aristotelian Naturalist.

Midgley is a figure notoriously difficult to situate within a clear philosophical context or tradition. This is for various reasons including the fact that she expressly resisted placement into any philosophical category or 'ism' whatsoever. Throughout her life, she avoided fixing herself into a tradition or self-identifying as a member of any group (she only ever described herself as a "pluralist").[3] Midgley's isolation may also be explained by her writing style which was clear and accessible to a public audience; Midgley resisted philosophical jargon and for this reason may not have been read as a 'serious' academic philosopher by her interlocutors. Evidence for this can be found in remarks from her interlocutors, such as Philippa Foot, who once stated, "[Mary's] mind doesn't quite work like most straight Oxford analytic philosophers […] she found her forte being witty and sane on television" (*Guardian*, 13 January, 2001). Midgley also had an interdisciplinary approach to philosophy, engaging in debates with scientists of many kinds. Again, her peers may not have considered this 'proper philosophy' – evidenced by the words of A. J Ayer written (rather boldly) on the back cover of Midgley's book *Wickedness,* that it ought to be considered "a piece of psychology, not a contribution to philosophy" (Midgley, *Wickedness*).

For reasons not exhausted by those listed above, Midgley is often isolated from association with a specific school or group of interlocutors – a trend extending to scholarship on meta-ethics.[4] Perhaps this is what Midgley intended (and thus not a problem), but, as I will argue, this intellectual isolation has negative consequences in terms of how Midgley is received and remembered within the history of philosophy. There is clear risk associated with this kind of intellectual isolation: if a figure is hard to locate in any historic movement, they run a higher risk of slipping out of our shared memory, or being written out of the period of which they were a part.[5] Indeed, Midgley's intellectual isolation has likely contributed to the general oversight of her work within both contemporary philosophy and the history of twentieth-century philosophy and to this day, there remains very little secondary literature or scholarly history on Midgley's philosophy.[6] Thus, for my current purposes, I will work on the methodological assumption that if Midgley can be or associated with an established tradition, there are

[3]Sourced from personal correspondence with Gregory McElwain and his interviews with Midgley (publication forthcoming with *Bloomsbury*). Midgley identified with a heavily qualified version of naturalism, depending on how it was defined. For example, Midgley writes that naturalistic reasoning can be "immensely rich and fertile" once we have done away with a reductive scientific formulation (Midgley, "Human Ideals and Needs", 91).

[4]See e.g. Lipscomb, *Women Up To Something* and Mac Cumhaill and Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals*.

[5]For instance, Susan Stebbing has only very recently received any sustained scholarly attention. Plausibly, one reason for this is that she is not seen as an important member of any specific philosophical tradition and did not have an expansive academic 'lineage' or 'family tree' (see Connell and Janssen-Lauret, "Lost Voices").

[6]See Kidd and McKinnell, *Science and the Self*, and various publications by Gregory McElwain e.g., *Mary Midgley: An Introduction* and 'Relationality in the Thought of Mary Midgley'.

reasons to do so. In providing such a contention, my paper will go some way in securing Midgley's place both within the history of philosophy and contemporary scholarship.

The success of my (second) aim to situate Midgley within a meta-ethical context will depend on how the concept 'AN' ought to be construed – something contemporary scholars disagree about. Some assume we ought to specify membership based on a sufficient likeness to certain paradigmatic members (e.g. Hursthouse, "Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism"; Halbig, "Aristotelian Naturalism as Metaethics"), while others assume a more exhaustive, stipulative definition according to certain criterion (e.g. Hacker-Wright, Hähnel and Lott, "Introduction: Aristotelian Naturalism"; Rapp, "Aristotle and Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism").[7] Before proceeding, it is worth noting which kind of claim I am making. There is a weaker and a stronger version of this claim: on the first, Midgley satisfies enough of the features of AN such that if we are going to associate her with any tradition, AN is the most plausible one. On the second, there is a full-blooded AN available in Midgley's BM, making it possible to argue that she was a AN and her philosophical commitments fit the necessary and sufficient criterion for AN. If the weaker (but not the stronger) claim is true, then we might think of Midgley as associated with AN. If the stronger claim is true, we might think of her as a member of AN. In this paper, I am primarily concerned with establishing the former claim, however, I also believe there are reasons to think the stronger claim is true.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 outlines Midgley's meta-ethics, evidencing a unique form of ethical naturalism in BM and other works. Section 3 considers how we ought best to characterize this meta-ethics, within which kind of programme, and why. In my view, the most plausible option is AN. After defining AN, I offer reasons for thinking that Midgley can be placed within the ongoing meta-ethical tradition of AN, including the fact that various commentators in the 1980s took her to be seriously contributing to its development.[8] Section 4 then addresses an important objection to my reading as, roughly put, that Midgley does not satisfy *enough* of the criteria that are necessary and sufficient to be a AN, and therefore should not be included.

In response to the objection levelled, I motivate an alternative approach to the way that we employ concepts to demark traditions in the history of philosophy. On this approach, the concept 'AN' is a Wittgensteinian family-resemble concept according to which members can be said to sufficiently resemble the concept AN insofar as they instantiate *enough* of the criterion such that they surpass a certain threshold – rather than a concept that is strictly defined via criteria which may be necessary and sufficient. In doing

[7]These thinkers do not use the language of necessary and sufficient conditions, something I address in Section 3.1.

[8]A trend first discussed by Robson ("Beast and Man: A Re-Appraisal").

so, I show that Midgley's naturalism sufficiently resembles the concept 'AN', such that it is possible to situate her work in relation to this tradition. My conclusion provides historical upshots which go beyond the recommendation that we *could* classify Midgley within AN, to suggest that we in fact *ought* to.

2. Midgley's meta-ethics

The meta-ethical framework at work in BM and other early works is rarely formulated explicitly by Midgley and requires some reconstruction. For instance, Midgley does not begin her inquiry with the typical meta-ethical question: 'what is the good?', but rather the empirical one: 'what kinds of creatures are we?' It is only by answering this latter question that Midgley thinks an answer to the former is intelligible. But Midgley does offer an answer – something thus far overlooked in scholarship. In this section, I bring forward both positive and negative components of Midgley's meta-ethics as a form of ethical naturalism. In the next section, I consider the best way of characterizing Midgley's meta-ethics within the context of AN.

2.1. A negative thesis

Much of Midgley's early work, including a 1980 paper "The Absence of a Gap between Facts and Values", is an analysis of the kind of meta-ethics popular pre – and post-World War II. Her critical remarks land most prominently on her Oxford cotemporaries such as A.J. Ayer, C.L. Stevenson, and R.M. Hare, and she draws out the influence of G.E. Moore and H.A. Prichard on these later philosophers. As Midgley sees it, all these meta-ethicists make a mistake in postulating a separation between facts and values. In broad terms, this separation draws a logical distinction between statements about *what is the case* (facts), and statements about *what ought to be the case* (values). The main difference between the two types of statement is that the latter kind are evaluative, prescriptive, and action-guiding, while the former are descriptive of an action or state of affairs. Hence, the two are distinct – or so it is claimed by Midgley's targets.

Midgley takes issue with the fact-value distinction. She rejects the construal of general concepts like 'good', as what she calls "universally contingent" properties (Midgley and Clark, "Facts and Values", 210). A property is universally contingent, says Midgley, when it has no necessary or internal connection with any descriptive feature or fact about the world. She sees this at work in Moore's claims that, "so far as the meaning of good goes, anything whatever may be good" (Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 21). Midgley sees Moore's axiom as retained, in a certain form, in the anti-naturalistic, non-cognitivisms of Ayer and Hare – translated into the claim that what is good is subjective with regard to whatever the agent feels (emotivism) or prescribes (prescriptivism) as right/wrong,

good/bad. In Midgley's words, these thinkers "accepted, and insisted on, the isolation of moral judgments from every kind of evidence" applying an "indirect relation of any general term [such as goodness] to its instances" (Midgley and Clark, "Facts and Values", 178, 217). This use of evaluative terms, argued Midgley, made it possible for moral language to attach itself to any proclamation whatsoever which, in her view, was absurd.

The mistake with universal contingency, on Midgley's view, is the suggestion that *anything* can be called good. If Moore and others are right, questions such as "what is a good stone, a good misery, a good molecule" would be perfectly intelligible (Midgley and Clark, "Facts and Values", 217). The anti-naturalist approach makes our moral language "idle and vacuous" by disconnecting it from any relevant facts about the world – an approach that makes moral judgement akin to "slinging general approval and disapproval to and fro" (BM, 183, 220). As Midgley sees it, we cannot understand concepts like 'goodness' as unattached from descriptive facts about the world. Doing so makes goodness akin to a "floating free, a kind of mysterious exotic pink balloon, a detached predicate, high above all possible attempts to entrap it and connect it with life by any conceptual scheme" (BM, 195). As such, "if you praise igneous rocks simply for being igneous, simply for being destructive, you get nowhere" – instead, on Midgley's view, you need some content, or background, against which these words make sense (Midgley and Clark, "Facts and Values", 220).

As I will outline in the next section, positive recommendations arise from Midgley's negative thesis on which this contingent relation of the good to its objects is rejected. Midgley argues that there must be some necessary connection between the 'good' and various facts about the world – namely the "wants and needs of living beings, particularly conscious beings, and more particularly human beings" (Midgley and Clark "Facts and Values", 220). In this, she defends the objectivity of morality against forms of non-cognitivism/anti-realism outlined above and her negative meta-ethical stance implies that moral judgements about the good which do not posit any necessary attachment to descriptive facts ought to be rejected.

2.2. A positive thesis

In response to the anti-naturalisms discussed above, Midgley asks, "what would be meant by calling something good that is not in any way wanted or needed by any living creature?" (BM, 182). She wants the anti-naturalist to provide some *reason* or *evidence* for the kinds of things that they are going to call 'good', beyond that of preference or emotion. We must ask "[in] what way is it good? What's good about it? What kind of goodness has it?" (BM, 184). Midgley's meta-ethics turn centrally on this idea that the good for a living individual can only be discovered in evidence or facts –

specifically, natural facts about our species. "If we say something is good or bad for human beings, we must take our species' actual needs and wants as facts, as something given" (BM, 182). Midgley starts with an empirical exploration of the kinds of creatures we are and works back from natural facts to discover our good. It is important to note that 'creatures' here relates to *all* kinds of animal; Midgley's account of normativity in species' nature is not exclusive to humans. As I discuss further below, this involves collapsing any in-principal distinction, found in much of the history of ethics, between humans and non-human animals. As Midgley sees it (and states it in the first line of BM), "we are not just rather like animals; we *are* animals" (BM, xii).

Midgley clearly endorses the kind of meta-ethical move that Moore (like Hume before him) rejects: the deriving of an ought from an is. For her, there are objective facts about living things that make them *good* as members of their species. But note, Midgley is not making a reductive move here; an individual creature's good is not identical with or reducible to facts about their wants and needs. It is for this reason that Midgley also rejects any theory of ethics which attempts to reduce the good down to some simple singular property or tendency. Egoism is rejected for the same reason as hedonistic theories of ethics (such as Utilitarianism) insofar as they both see good action as exhausted by one measure: an action that maximizes my own self-interest in the case of the egoist, and the act that generates the most pleasure, for the hedonist.[9] For this reason, Midgley is critical of deontological approaches to ethics. On her view, we ought to be wary of any attempt to build an entire moral framework on a single base (like rationality).[10] Instead, the 'good' for a particular individual according to Midgley can only be discovered within a complex cluster of traits that form its peculiar species' nature. "[The] the nature of a species" Midgley tells us, "consists in a certain range of powers and tendencies, inherited and forming a fairly firm characteristic pattern" (BM, 58). Within "powers and tendencies" here, Midgley includes things like needs, wants, instincts, motives, and drives, all of which come together to make up the cluster of a distinct species' nature. Any ethical theory which attempts to analyse the good according to only one 'power' or 'tendency' lacks connection with our entire human nature (particularly our social nature, as I outline below) thinks Midgley.

A species' nature is a descriptive and a normative concept for Midgley – it provides the guide to which each individual strives and from which each individual is judged. All animals, Midgley notes, "must live according to the values of [their]

[9]As Midgley puts it, "[t]o give meaning to life, we want to see what we do as an element in something that, as a whole, satisfies us. Naturally, this something does not have to be edifying […] This habit [to reduce good down to something singular] chronically infests and distorts certain philosophical controversies, particularly about such tough-seeming but confused positions as determinism, hedonism, egoism and behaviourism" (Midgley, BM 121–2).

[10]Midgley was critical of various elements of Kantian thinking including the harsh divorce of feeling from reason, treatment of nonhuman animals, and relatedly, the exclusive focus on rationality as the only source of moral value.

own species, not those of any other" (BM, 160). Elsewhere, she talks of the purpose of a given species as dictated upon an individual by its kind – by what sort of being it is. For example, in a later paper Midgley argues that,

> each kind of organism acts according to its own values, its own inner design, the characteristic pattern of needs and capacities which determines its direction […] [And the universe] is full of organisms, beings which all steadily pursue their own characteristic ways of life, beings that can only be understood by grasping the distinctive thing that each of them is trying to be and do.
>
> (Midgley, "The Idea of Purpose", 558)

It should now be clear that this "characteristic pattern" of natural capacities – what I am calling a species' nature – is a normatively laden one for Midgley. In other words, the concept of a 'nature' has baked into it certain normative notions about what constitutes 'living well', or living a 'good life', for that organism (and, inversely, living a bad, unnatural, or defective life). This is a clear endorsement of a kind of ethical naturalism, according to which moral terms and concepts must be defined in terms of facts about a species' nature. Hence, this concept of a 'nature' contains facts which have action guiding, normative force – collapsing the kind of fact-value divorce outlined in 1.1.

The naturalistic structure of Midgley's meta-ethics can be further derived from examples she provides in BM. Describing a wolf's nature, for example, Midgley notes that "[serious] neglect of cubs, or brutal treatment of them would be thoroughly unnatural among wolves. […] these things […] are not just unfortunate, they are out of character; they show something wrong" (BM, 279).[11] This evidences the above suggestion that for Midgley, a species' nature also provides a normative background *against which* individuals of

[11] At this point, an objection – known in contemporary perfectionism literature as the 'wrong properties objection' – could be raised (see e.g. Hurka 1993, 9; Bradford 2017, 351–353). Given that Midgley points out that sometimes animals treat their young with disturbing brutality (for example, rabbits and hamsters engage in maternal infanticides), are we to conclude that these are examples of natural goodness? In more general terms, this approach to ethical naturalism may lead to extremely counterintuitive results regarding what counts as morally good given a certain species' natural behaviour. Midgley herself seems to have been aware of such a worry. In an earlier paper, "The Concept of Beastliness", she imagines the perspective of an extra-terrestrial who has studied every war, massacre, and genocide ever committed in human history. They might, thinks Midgley, conclude that it is *natural* for humans to slaughter one another, generating the same objection as above (Midgley, *Beastliness* 131). How might Midgley respond to this objection? One avenue may be found in her concepts of balance and integration (see Section 3.3). For Midgley, an independent measure of a good life is one which evidences a kind of balance or harmony among the various conflicting parts. In humans, Midgley suggests that focusing solely on certain character traits or dispositions (above all others) will result in wicked or vicious actions (e.g. solely focusing on oneself might lead to narcissistic actions). Applied to non-human life, Midgley might argue that only close consideration of different animal species will reveal whether or not a given action is 'out of character' (and therefore bad), or in balance with the whole nature of the species (and therefore good). In doing so, she might have to bite the bullet and claim that certain animal behaviours might seem abhorrent given our notion of a balanced nature, but with reference to the animal in question, they are not wrong. The critic may still worry that this is simply kicking the can down the road: the question still remains, how we know that a balanced nature is good and a fragmented one bad? I would argue that the potential intractability of the problem raised is not unique to Midgleyan naturalism and therefore does not undermine the significance of my claim that a robust form of ethical naturalism is at work in Midgley's philosophy. That is not to say that the problem isn't deserving of further examination – although doing so is beyond the scope of my aims here.

that species are judged. Here the action or behaviour of a specific wolf is evaluated as 'wrong' against the background of its species' nature (or "character" as Midgley puts it here) which makes up the concept of a 'good wolf'. On Midgley's view, a natural defect (or, as she put it above, something "unnatural") occurs when an individual creature is neglecting or failing to cultivate one of the central needs of their species' nature. A defect, in this sense, does not arise as positive trait or tendency; it is instead something lacking, a privation – in Midgley's words, an instance in which a creature is "deprived altogether of the life proper to [them]" (BM, 154).

I will now develop how Midgley conceptualizes an individual as 'living well' – in other words, how an account of 'flourishing' might be located in her work.[12] To do so, it is helpful to look at her remarks on conflict and balance. Balance is a concept that crops up systematically across Midgley's corpus, defined in BM as "not just a negative matter […]; it is a positive one of attaining one's full growth" (BM, 161). Accordingly, each living creature is driven towards an internal harmony among its various parts, a harmony which is peculiar to its species' nature. Further evidence for a reading of 'balance' as a kind of 'living well' can be found in Midgley's many references to Bishop Butler.[13] In BM, she draws on Butler's idea, pertaining to humans, that

> if we reflect on our own nature, if we attend to our neglected outlying motives and relate them to the centre, we shall be able to judge them […] What rules us is our own centre. It is indeed a 'governor', but not an alien, colonial one. It is our own sense of how our nature works.
>
> (BM, 197)

This is a teleological idea of human beings operating according to what is, in Bishop's terms, our "centre". Midgley thinks that this internal harmony is not easy to ascertain. It is a natural fact about most animal species that they experience *conflict* – conflict, that is, between the various natural traits that make up their species' nature. Inner conflict between these parts threatens the natural harmony of a creature's nature and as creatures become more evolutionary complex, the volume and intensity of this conflict will increase.

The way a given creature overcomes this conflict and achieves a balance amongst its various parts is by integrating these conflicting parts into a consistent whole, on Midgley's view. Human animals need to integrate; in fact, we have "a deep need for unity which is luckily to be found at the centre […] people have a natural wish and capacity to integrate themselves" argues Midgley (BM, 189). In deciding between two conflicting needs, humans must recognize that "both are good in different ways, but this

[12]Midgley herself never uses this term.
[13]Joseph Butler (1692–1752) was a religious philosopher whose work on human nature was found primarily in his sermons.

good matters more than that one" (BM, 192). This is an idea Midgley takes from Aristotle, noting that, "as Aristotle remarked 'good things can be found in all the Categories"' (*NE* 1.6) (BM, 189). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle rejects a Platonic ethics according to which there is a single Form for all good things. For Aristotle, goodness can be found in many things (or what he calls "Categories") including for example a good place, a good relation, a good time.[14] In Midgley, integration for humans involves the ability to identify the good in various domains of life and develop a firm priority system which considers all these domains. This requires the ability to recognize *the good as good* not just in one instance, but as it arises in its various forms, in specific situations.

While many nonhuman animals are unable to articulate or rationally reflect on what their *good* is, they are always driven by a balance in their own nature, according to Midgley. For this reason, a capacity for integration is something common to all animal species; prior to any rational nature, the desire for a *balance* triggers the need for integration. As Midgley puts it, "[rational] reflection could not work if there were not, so to speak, some unevenness for it to get a grip on, some pre-existing balance and structure among the motives, for reflection to discover when it started reflecting" (BM, 273–4). Moreover, on Midgley's view, a necessary criterion for a good life in all kinds of life form is a kind of internal harmony of parts according to its species' nature.[15]

This section, taken with the former, has demonstrated how some of the meta-ethical commitments in Midgley operate within an ethically naturalistic framework. In particular, the concept of a species' nature introduces normativity – acting as a guide or background for assessing individuals and concepts like 'balance' to show how a good life for an individual might be tracked.

3. Characterizing Midgley's meta-ethics

I now turn to my second aim – to establish that the most plausible context within which to situate Midgley's meta-ethics is the contemporary meta-ethical programme AN. I will first outline the AN programme, before providing historical and philosophical reasons for thinking that AN is the most plausible meta-ethical context for Midgley's philosophy.

[14]Aristotle's discussion here presupposes his commitment to different *Categories* of being. Ethical naturalists tend to read Aristotle's critique here as generating the Geachen thought that the good depends on the kind of being (or thing) it relates to. See Berryman, "Aristotle's Metaethics".

[15]Harmony might not be *sufficient* for the good life in Midgley. She argues elsewhere, in line with Aristotle, that we also need the right circumstances to live a good life (for example, someone born into poverty may not be able to attain the same goods as someone born into affluence).

3.1. Characterizing AN

AN is a meta-ethical programme that developed in the second half of the twentieth century from an renewed interest in thinking about the foundations of ethics in Aristotelian terms. Commonly associated with the work of Philippa Foot, Elisabeth Anscombe, Rosalind Hursthouse, Alastair MacIntyre, and John McDowell (among others), AN can be broadly categorized as an attempt to ground an objective ethics on claims about human nature.[16] Advocating for a fundamental break from consequentialist or deontological moral theories, Anscombe's paper "Modern Moral Philosophy" is now largely regarded as seminal in the development of AN.[17]

In secondary literature, there has been a general lack of consensus about how best to define AN. This is for various reasons, including the fact that philosophers labelled as ANs did not come together to jointly envision or formally agree on any set of philosophical commitments or premises. Indeed, the programme was only labelled 'Neo- Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism' retrospectively.[18] Anscombe and Foot, for example, are considered paradigmatic in the development of AN but notably did not describe themselves as ANs at the time. Though there are historic links between many established ANs, these historic links have not been the sole basis for inclusion in that category. The development and application of this label is a contemporary phenomenon taking place within the secondary literature. Hence, it is the work of contemporary philosophers (some of whom identify as ANs) which has led AN to be considered a distinct meta-ethical theory. In this sense, AN involves the contemporary interpretation of historic philosophers and is for this reason a programme still working itself out, with many disagreements and technicalities yet to be resolved.

For the sake of clarity, I will use the most recent and sustained attempt to define a combined programme applicable to all the thinkers (past and present) currently thought of as part of the AN tradition. The following seven criteria are given by John Hacker-Wright, Micah Lott, and Martin Hähnel in their introduction to Hähnel's *Aristotelian Naturalism: A Research Companion* – the first companion of its kind on AN. They describe the following criterion as "characterising" AN,

i "AN intends to prove that moral subjectivism is false"
ii "AN rehabilitates the Aristotelian approach to human nature"

[16]See Frey, "Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism" and Hacker-Wright, Hähnel and Lott, "Introduction: Aristotelian Naturalism" for further discussion of this revival.
[17]Anscombe's paper is also credited with the development of virtue ethics. While both have their roots in the philosophy of Aristotle, an AN enquiry begins much further upstream than virtue ethics, concerning the *grounding* and *nature* of human ethical capacities. Virtue ethicists, by contrast, are focused on questions of moral character and how one ought to live with regards to stable character traits of thought, feeling, and action.
[18]Hursthouse's paper "Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism" coins this term.

iii "AN qualifies 'good' as primarily an attributive adjective, with predicative uses of 'good' implying a kind; leading to a species-relative justification of the (human) good"
iv "AN questions the autonomy of ethics"
v "AN gains practical relevance through the explicit reference to the virtues"
vi "AN emphasizes the transformative power of rationality with respect to other natural human powers"
vii "AN defends a relationship between natural teleology and moral normativity"

(Hacker-Wright, Hähnel and Lott, "Introduction: Aristotelian Naturalism", 5).

There are clear disagreements and divergent formulations amongst members of the AN programme, including different interpretations of the criteria offered. While Hacker-Wright, Hähnel, and Lott do not stipulate whether their criteria suffice as necessary and sufficient to qualify as a AN, their language of 'characterization' might suggest this approach. What's more, the criteria listed provide a direct and in-depth account of what AN intends, defends, questions, emphasizes etc. For the purposes of this paper, I will assume this as the definition Hacker-Wright, Hähnel, and Lott are using.

3.2. Midgley and Neo-Aristotelian naturalism

Having outlined a possible definition of AN, I will now provide my reasons for thinking that most plausible avenue the reception of Midgley's meta-ethics is AN. I will offer historical reasons to think that Midgley can be credited within the early development of AN as a branch of meta-ethics and philosophical reasons to think that she can be included in ongoing contemporary discussions of the programme insofar as she instantiates at least some of the criteria offered by Hacker-Wright, Hähnel, and Lott.

There are various examples of philosophers who once explicitly associated Midgley with the resurgence of AN during the 1980s – a significant date given the surge of interest in Aristotelian ethics during this time (Peters, *Contemporary Perspective*, 1). These examples, I will suggest, show at the very least that there is a historical claim to be made that Midgley ought to be associated with AN (the weaker version of my claim outlined in the Introduction). John Cottingham is the earliest instance of this, and his 1983 paper "Neo-Naturalism and its Pitfalls" describes Midgley as "one of the most eloquent spokespersons for the new naturalism" and discusses her work alongside that of Foot (Cottingham, "Pitfalls", 456). Two years later, Gordon Graham suggest, "[it] is well known, I suppose, that Aristotelian biology, or rather

the Aristotelian/biological approach to moral philosophy, is undergoing something of a revival. The best-known recent work of this sort is Mary Midgley's *Beast and Man*" (Graham "Progress", 339). Charles Pigden's paper "Geach on Good" is also of note. Though Pigden is highly critical of the Neo-Aristotelian programme, he does implicitly draw Midgley under its umbrella as an "adherent" (Pigden, "Geach on Good", 153).

Following Pigden's paper, Midgley's contribution to this tradition began to be overlooked with seemingly no citations or discussion of her as a kind of AN in the 1990s. Midgley's work gained traction in this debate again in the last decades of her life (when Midgley was in her late eighties). Published in 2008, for example, Caro and Macarthur's *Naturalism in Question* – an academic handbook on naturalism – includes a refence to Midgley within a clarificatory footnote on different types of ethical naturalism. "A few versions of ethical naturalism are not forms of scientific naturalism. They include […] neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism as defended by, for example, P.T Geach and Mary Midgley" (Caro and Macarthur, *Naturalism in Question*, 281). This is another clear case of Midgley being described as a defender of AN (in this instance, Caro and Macarthur seem to make the stronger claim that Midgley is a full-blooded AN), but again there is no substantial exegesis of her position.

There are further examples of Midgley being explicitly connected to AN. Papers emerging in the last decade are of note are: Christine Swanton's paper "The Notion of The Moral: The Relation Between Virtue Ethics and Virtue Epistemology" does not describe Midgley as a naturalist but emphasizes the Aristotelian dimensions of Midgley's moral thought. In a 2013 paper, David McPherson specifically placed Midgley into the Neo-Aristotelian programme with reference to certain teleological commitments of Neo-Aristotelianism (McPherson, "Re-Enchanting The World", 151). Like Swanton, Connell's paper "Aristotle for the Modern Ethicist" does not explicitly label Midgley as a naturalist but presents a comprehensive account of her grounding of ethics in Aristotelian philosophy.

The examples offered demonstrate that there is a clear precedent for thinking about Midgley's work in connection to AN. What's more, the fact that some commentators in the 1980s took it as seemingly obvious that Midgley was part of, if not central to, the development of AN, suggests there is a contemporary amnesia of her proper place within this tradition.

At this point, a critic may suggest that even if we are convinced of Midgley's place within the development of the AN tradition, this does not necessarily imply that Midgley ought to be included in contemporary literature.[19] I will

[19]E.g. there may be justifiable reasons for excluding her from contemporary debates. If, for example, it was the case that AN had developed significantly since the 1980s, this may deem Midgley's formulation outdated or irrelevant.

now give some philosophical reasons for thinking that Midgley's meta-ethics can be situated within contemporary AN by showing that Midgley clearly instantiates at least five of the seven criteria given by Hacker-Wright, Hähnel, and Lott – specifically criteria (i), (iii), (iv), (v), and (vii) – and in many cases, Midgley instantiates these criteria in much the same way as paradigmatic members of the tradition. I will deal with the two remaining criteria, – (ii) and (vi) – into which Midgley does not fit quite so obviously, in Section 4.

3.3. Midgley on (i), (iii), (iv), (v), and (vii)

Criterion (i) stipulates that AN aims to "prove that moral subjectivism is false". In other words, AN is an attempt to establish that there are objective criteria of truth for certain evaluative judgements – a view which denies claims that ethics can be grounded in the expression or reporting of subjective mental attitudes. Midgley's negative thesis, outlined in Section 2.2. is an attempt to do just this. She rejects moral subjectivist positions like non-cognitivism in favour of objectivism about moral facts. In doing so, Midgley draws directly on the work of established AN, Foot. Citing Foot's paper *Moral Arguments* (1959), for example, Midgley notes that common words like "Nature […] Importance, Dirt, Danger, Injury", have a necessary connection with their object (BM, 177). For instance, the word 'injury', for both Foot and Midgley, derives meaning from its relation to the harms of *living* creatures (as opposed to something like cars or fabrics). In this passage, Midgley praises Foot's rejection of a separation between facts and values and elsewhere describes their shared and pressing motivation for rejecting moral subjectivism in her work and Foot's.[20]

Criterion (iii) concerns the concept 'good' as employed by ANs. In his paper "Good and Evil", Geach proposes a grammatical distinction between uses of adjectives in a predicative and attributive sense – a move which has been highly influential on many formulations of AN. A predicative adjective comes after the noun and tell us about what the subject is like. Take for example the statement 'Mickey the mouse is black and white'. Analysed, we get two claims: 'Mickey is black and white', and 'Mickey is a mouse', both of which remain true once separated into two propositions. When an adjective is 'attributive' it precedes the noun and tell us something about its qualities. Now take the statement, 'Mickey is a small mouse'. Notice, in this case, some information is lost when we analyse the sentence into 'Mickey is a mouse' and 'Mickey is small'. In the latter statement, Mickey may be the biggest mouse on the planet, while remaining small compared to an elephant. Smallness must, in Geach's view, be an attribute adjective relative to the noun.

[20]Speaking of herself, Foot, Anscombe, and Murdoch, Midgley said, "[as] with many philosophical schools, the starting-point was a joint 'NO!' No (that is) at once to divorcing Facts from Values, and —after a bit more preparation—also No to splitting mind off from matter" (Midgley, "Then and Now").

So, what is really meant here is that Mickey is small *for a mouse*. He is being compared to the standard mouse and the adjective is relative rather than absolute (Mickey might be large compared to a flea). It is only by reference to the characteristic size of individuals of a particular species that assertions about their size make sense.

Many ANs, such as Foot and Thompson, put this Geachean move to use by arguing that 'good' is also an attributive adjective and hence, an individual cannot be *just good* – it must be good relative to the kind of thing it is; a human is good qua human (not qua mouse).[21] In short, Geach's move allows goodness to be situated "in relation to the nature of the organism that the goodness is being attributed to" (Hacker-Wright, Hähnel, and Lott, "Introduction: Aristotelian Naturalism", 4). In Midgley, we find the grammar of evaluative terms used in this Geachean way. As I outlined in Section 2.2. Midgley rejects uses of evaluative terms as 'universally contingent' and employs the concept of a species' nature to determine the content and meaning of such terms. A bad or defective life can only be spoken about in refence to something *lacking* from a proper instantiation or fulfilment of an individual of its kind (or species' nature). There are reasons to think that Geach's attributive theory of the good directly influenced Midgley's implicit commitment to Criterion (iii). While we do not have direct evidence that Geach and Midgley spoke about the concept of goodness, Midgley recalls Geach's work fondly (e.g. see Midgley, "Science and Religion", 33), and his paper appears in the bibliography of BM.

Criterion (iv) – to question the autonomy of ethics – is a typically naturalistic move. It suggests that ethics does not exist in a distinct metaphysical realm of its own and must be in some way situated in the natural world. For ANs, the natural and the normative are not separate realms and hence the autonomy of ethics should be questioned if a logical gap between reality and value has been supposed. Midgley's adherence to this criterion is clear from my discussion of her meta-ethics in Section 2. Like Foot and Anscombe, Midgley attempts to overcome the fact-value distinction to revive an Aristotelian conception of normativity as situated in nature.

In contemporary literature, AN is seen to gain practical relevance through an "explicit reference to the virtues" – a claim stated by *Criterion (v)*. Accordingly, humans need virtues (like patience, courage, and honesty) in order to flourish and attain their good. These virtues play a practical role in the lives of humans in guiding thought and action. Midgley's normative framework also has practical relevance through the explicit reference to the virtues.[22] She does, at times, use the terminology of virtue and vice. In *Wickedness,*

[21] See Foot, *Natural Goodness* and Thompson, "Life and Action".

[22] While she never defends a robust account of virtue ethics, Midgley's appeal to virtue and vice terminology is enough to satisfy a commitment to Criteria (v) insofar AN is concerned with providing a naturalistic account of the human good as the *foundation* of our character traits, rather than providing a robust normative theory.

for example, Midgley lists character traits such as "spite, resentment, envy, avarice, cruelty, meanness, hatred", claiming that they "would not develop if we were not prone to them […]"

> Emotionally, we are capable of these vices, because we are capable of those states opposite to them, namely the virtues, and these virtues would be unreal if we did not have an opposite alternative. The vices are the defects of our qualities. Our nature provides for both.
>
> (Midgley, *Wickedness*, 3)

Vice is here positioned as a kind of natural defect and virtue a positive (or 'real') trait. Humans are all born with a propensity for vice which occurs when we neglect elements of our species' nature that are "natural" (or good) as Midgley puts it above. When vices are habituated, in exclusion to the rest of our nature, the self becomes "unbalanced", and we become prone to vicious or wicked action. Midgley's notion of balance is here again helping her to derive 'oughts' from 'is's; our drive towards wholeness and unity is used as a criterion of the good life. Midgley argues, for example, that where someone has focused too heavily on one basic need at the expense of the rest, we tend to describe this as "an unnatural life […] meaning that its centre has been misplaced" (BM, 80).

According to *Criterion (vii),* AN defends a relationship between natural teleology and moral normativity – a move which involves endorsing a *telos* in terms of the function of the organism, and the function that the parts of the organism play, in the operation of the whole. This is inspired by Aristotle's function argument which connects an entity's characteristic function with its goodness: if the characteristic function of *X* is to φ, then a good *X* is one that φs well (*NE* 1097b – 1098a). AN, in this sense, resists a purely scientific notion of 'function' that we find in certain forms of evolutionary biology.

Midgley makes a similar move. She distinguishes between two types of purpose which she claims get wrongly conflated in "contemporary evolution-talk" (Midgley, "The Idea of Purpose", 545). First, a subjective kind, which concerns an individual's own purpose, displayed in its various everyday behaviours. The second is the purpose of the species *as a whole* – in evolutionary terms, its survival and evolution. As Midgley puts it, "[t]he butterfly's own subjective purpose concerns what it wants to do" and quite separately "the possible effect on the survival of its species is an evolutionary function, of which the butterfly knows nothing" (Midgley, "The Idea of Purpose", 545). A given individual is not, in its everyday action, functioning according to highly specific evolutionary goals of its species, according to Midgley. When the butterfly pollinates a plant, it is not *trying* to enable the continuation of its species.[23]

[23]This put Midgley (famously) at odds with the work of evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins. Midgley discusses this in a 2001 interview for the *Guardian* with Andrew Brown entitled "Mary, Mary Quite Contrary". It is worth noting, in *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins' was not claiming that an organism such as a butterfly consciously tries to continue the survival of its species, but rather that the genes of that organism were working towards this 'selfish' end.

As we have seen so far, for Midgley, individuals are guided by and strive towards their species nature, but this does not imply that individuals have *in mind* the genetic success and evolution of this species nature.

We can find an instantiation of Hacker-Wright, Hähnel, and Lott's criteria for AN in Midgley's BM and other publications which, in my view, suggest that her work has a clear philosophical contribution to make to both historic and contemporary scholarship on AN. Specifically, I have demonstrated her adherence to criteria (i), (iii), (iv), (v), and (vii). I will now consider an objection to my reading so far, before offering a solution which will address the two remaining criteria – (ii) and (vi).

4. An objection and a response

This section will consider an objection which emphasizes the fact that Midgley does not satisfy all seven of the criteria offered by Hacker-Wright, Hähnel, and Lott. My response to this objection will lead to a discussion with wider implications for our historical methodology when dealing with under-appreciated figures such as Midgley. The objection arises when we consider Midgley's possible inclusion into the programme of AN, and the potential methodological concerns about how we want to use our historic and contemporary concepts to carve out the philosophical landscape. It prompts us, for example, to consider who we should include in our philosophical programmes and on what basis. Such questions have been met with some disagreement in literature on AN.

Some scholars have suggested that the concept AN should be defined by appeal to paradigmatic members. Christoph Halbig lists Philippa Foot, Warren Quinn, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Michael Thompson, before defining the programme according to "a sufficient closeness to the paradigmatic case" (Halbig, "Aristotelian Naturalism as Metaethics", 82). Hursthouse herself takes a similar approach, stating that "[the] proponents of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism (…) include Foot (*Natural Goodness*), Geach ("Good and Evil", 1977), Hursthouse (*On Virtue Ethics*), McDowell ("Two Sorts of Naturalism"), MacIntyre (1999), Nussbaum (1993, 1995), and Thompson (1995); and also Anscombe because her work has influenced so many others" (Hursthouse, "Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism", 1). This might be described as a 'Historic Approach' to concept definition, resisting what Halbig calls "a stipulative definition of the term" according to necessary and sufficient criteria (Halbig, "Aristotelian Naturalism as Metaethics", 82). Halbig admits that his approach leaves things somewhat imprecise but notes that "this vagueness […] characterizes current debates [… and] therefore must be addressed explicitly" (Hlabig, "Aristotelian Naturalism as Metaethics", 82).

One way to overcome the "vagueness" Halbig refers to is to provide a set of philosophical criteria which a thinker must satisfy in order to qualify as a

AN. As outlined in Section 3, this strategy seems to be employed by Hacker-Wright, Hähnel, and Lott. Though the authors give no stipulation as to whether these are all *necessary/sufficient* conditions, if they are, one might worry – in line with Halbig – that this approach requires members to be too closely related philosophically, hence overlooking the diversity in their commitments we find between credited members. McDowell, for example, is not clearly influenced by Foot's work and differs from her in important ways. However, it is commonplace to include them both in the programme.[24] Additionally, stipulating necessary conditions, one might worry, is likely to encourage any historical considerations of lineage and influence between members to be overlooked – something one might think an important element of a philosophical programme or school.

Adherents of either of these strategies for defining AN will likely question my reading of Midgley as a AN. First, it might be argued that Midgley is not close enough to the theories of naturalism ventured by AN's pragmatic members to properly qualify as a AN and therefore she ought not to be included. Second, it could be argued that on my reading of Midgley so far, her naturalism does not clearly fit with all seven criteria AN and therefore it would be stretch to include her. I will respond to these criticisms by arguing that they only pose a problem under a given approach to the concept of AN. I offer another approach – a family resemblance approach – which overcomes the aforementioned issues and provides further independent advantages for tracing the contributions of underappreciated philosophers in our discipline's past.

4.1. AN and family resemblance

My suggestion is that the concept AN be understood as a family-resemble concept – thought of in a broadly Wittgensteinian way. Wittgenstein rejected the kind of process, critiqued by Halbig above, which demands that entities falling under a given concept must share a given set of necessary and sufficient features. Instead, he argued that entities falling under a given term tend to resemble each other, meaning that they share a networks of similarities and overlaps. Applied to AN, we might think of a family-resemblance approach as one which stipulates that a philosopher can be said to fall under this concept if they overlap with a sufficient number of the criteria – which, for simplicity's sake, I take from Hacker-Wright, Hähnel, and Lott – such that they get over a certain threshold. Though there can certainly be debate over exactly where that threshold lies, this approach has its own benefits. It preserves the contextual identity of AN, allowing for historical

[24]In the literature, they have been put into two sub-divisions 'first nature naturalism' (Foot, Hursthouse, MacIntyre) and 'second nature naturalism' (McDowell). See Frey, "Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism".

lines to be drawn from both direct relationships of influence, and members that are further afar historically. Additionally, it resists overwriting a 'vagueness' that current scholarship on AN carries by utilizing the idea of resemblance. This means that, even if two figures have divergent metaphysical views (for example), but are clearly motivated by the same concerns, they might be thought of as members of the same tradition.

The family-resemblance method also has theoretical benefits that align within ongoing scholarly attempts to develop new, more inclusive, narratives in the history of philosophy – narratives that encourage us to look beyond that paradigmatic lineage of members we have been taught to associate with a given time-period, programme, or philosophical position. A family resemblance approach encourages us to consider a web of different conversations and influences, perhaps going on *around* a group of central figures. In Section 3.2, I showed that Midgley satisfies at least five of the seven criteria for AN given by Hacker-Wright, Hähnel, and Lott. Thus, plausibly, family resemblance approach permits us to at the very least associate Midgley with this tradition.

A further theoretical virtue of the family-resemblance approach to defining concepts is that it allows us to appreciate distinct or unique elements of naturalists that do not fit the programme criterion perfectly. By avoiding any narrow stipulations for who does or does not count as a AN, we are able to think of the members of that tradition as a broad church – who might plausibly each bring something unique to the table. In the final section, I will demonstrate that Midgley, while being *close* enough to paradigmatic members of the tradition, also develops a unique form of AN. Specifically, I will outline Midgley's unique formulation of criteria (ii) and (vi). By adhering to a strict set of necessary and sufficient criteria for membership of AN (as Hacker-Wright, Hähnel and Lott may do) we may be encouraged to overlook these unique insights within the context of AN.

4.2. Midgley on (ii) and (vi)

In BM, Midgley is highly critical of a central element of Aristotle's mode of classifying human nature, as found in his *Metaphysics*. She objects to the idea that there is a single, central function of a given species which distinguishes it from others. According to Aristotle, the species 'human' is a complex of the *genus* 'animal' and the *differentia* 'rational'. For Aristotle, our *telos* is to act according to this rational element and hence, to function properly as a human being we need to cultivate this element that sets us apart from the other animals (*NE* I.13, 1098a7). Hence, argues Aristotle, the best life for a human is a life led in accordance with reason (*NE* I.13, 1098a12–16).

Midgley argues that those who have endorsed this Aristotelian process for classification have engaged in an overly simplistic methodology which

reduces "possibilities open to humanity" and "obscures our truly characteristic richness and versatility" (BM, xiii). This is because Midgley postulates no single capacity which constitutes a distinguishing feature or 'excellence' of a species. While a "triangle without three sides ceases to be a triangle […] a flightless bird does not cease to be a bird, nor a flying fish a fish" (BM, 206). On Midgley's view, biological organisms require a more complex process of classification that can be located elsewhere in Aristotle's corpus.

Midgley's criticism of Aristotle, one might argue, seems in clear contradiction to *Criteria (ii)* – that "AN rehabilitates the Aristotelian approach to human nature" (especially if we take this to mean his definition of the human being as a rational animal). But despite Midgley's rejection of Aristotle's methodology in the *Metaphysics*, she elsewhere claims to be explicitly working on what she takes to be his methodology in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

> [Aristotle] stands as the biologist among philosophers—indeed as the inventor of the biological attitude […] this is beyond praise [and] his method in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is exactly the one I am trying to follow here. He understands morality as the expression of natural human needs. This side of his work was largely ignored by the tradition, because biology itself was neglected.
>
> (BM, 262, footnote 1)

In this passage, Midgley suggests that one "side" of Aristotle's work has been neglected by the philosophical tradition of ethics – namely the biological side – which has tended to ignore or separate Aristotle's biological corpuses from all others. On my reading of Midgley, she endorses a process of species classification found in Aristotle's biological corpuses, in particular his zoological corpuses, largely neglected by other Neo-Aristotelians.[25]

In his zoological works (e.g. *History of Animals* and *Generation of Animals*),[26] Aristotle classifies each species of animal according to a whole package of essential features. Midgley draws from Aristotle the view that a given species' nature is made up of many different properties and "what is really characteristic [of a species' nature] is the shape of the whole cluster" (BM, 206). Properties inevitably interact and depend on one another and therefore cannot be separated from their entire species nature. This methodology must also be applied to the human animal according to Midgley, which will reveal that our 'characteristic excellence' is not just one thing (such as rationality), but a whole cluster. As Midgley puts it: "[h]uman needs are multiple. *Bonum est* multiplex" (BM, 190).

The idea of overlapping properties between different species is a distinctive one in Aristotle's zoological works. For example, he argues that many species of nonhuman animals display loving caring feelings for the young

[25]Other exceptions may include Nussbaum, *Justice for Animals* (Chapter 6) who endorses a similar process of Aristotelian classification I am here associating with Midgley.
[26]See translations by D. M. Balme; D. M. Balme and Gotthelf; Lennox.

and the desire to train them (*HA* VIII.7.612b18–32).[27] Many animals (other than humans) are social or "gregarious" according to Aristotle, including bees and cranes (*HA* I.1, 488a7). In the above example, sociality is expressed care of the young by nurturing, teaching, and training. This is a central part of human nature, and that of many other animals, according to Aristotle (*GA* III.2.753a7–13; *HA* VIII.1.588b31–589a3).[28]

Midgley also argues that certain properties overlap between species. She states this in clear terms, noting that "what is special about each creature is not a single, unique quality but a rich and complex arrangement of powers and qualities, some of which it will certainly share with its [animal] neighbours" (BM, 160). What is more, Midgley argues that the property of sociality, described in Aristotle above, overlaps between species.[29] For instance, she emphasizes the importance of care for the young in all kinds of animals. "[Wolves]" for instance "have, like all social animals, a fairly elaborate etiquette including subtly varied ceremonies of greeting and reassurance, by which friendship is strengthened, cooperation achieved, and the wheels of social life generally oiled" (Midgley, "Beastliness", 114). In line with the Aristotelian idea of training, Midgley argues that "insights from biology" include the fact that "[s]pecies survive […] by having ones who do something about the next generation" (BM, 92). We know that Midgley read the *Parts of Animals* and, hence, it likely that she drew this overlapping feature from Aristotle's text.[30]

I have shown that Midgley clearly takes herself to be following an Aristotelian characterization of morality and revives a distinct Aristotelian approach to classifying species natures. As such, Midgley's critique of Aristotle's definition of man as a rational animal does not prevent her from being 'distinctly Aristotelian' in the manner Hacker-Wright, Hähnel, and Lott have in mind.[31]

Criterion (viii) states that ANs tend to emphasize the "transformative power" of rationality in relation to other human powers such as reproduction, tool-usage, or language. Indeed, many ANs endorse Aristotle's classification of entities as found in the *Metaphysics,* as described above. Accordingly, rationality transforms our natural biological ends such that we share no perceptual and desiderative capacities with (nonhuman) animals (who are non-rational) (see also Boyle "Additive Theories of Rationality"). For example,

[27] In many nonhuman animals, this care extends beyond those young that are related to them (e.g. mares care for others' young, see *HA* VIII(IX).4.611a10).

[28] Sophia Connell notes how "Aristotelian ethics emphasises the developmental and intergenerational nature of ethics; all humans require and will have extensive care and nurture and all humans will also contribute to nurturing" (Connell, "Aristotle for the Modern Ethicist", 202).

[29] In "Aristotle for the Modern Ethicist", Connell highlights this element of Aristotle's thinking and tracks its presence in Midgley's view of humans as animals irretrievably interconnected and dependent on one another.

[30] Midgley references the *De Partibus Animalium* (*The Parts of Animals*) in a footnote in *Beast and Man* (BM, 205).

[31] Midgley herself thought that "Aristotle himself did not give this definition [man is rational], though his argument at *Ethics* 1.7 and elsewhere does suggest it" (BM, 204).

Hursthouse describes a "genuinely transforming effect of our rationality on our basic structure" which "registers the huge gap that exists between us and other animals" (Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 167). In other words, rationality does not provide us with additional ends to other social mammals (such as the life of contemplation) but instead brings *all* our natural ends under rational consideration.

Midgley, we have seen, is critical of attempts to overemphasize the rational capacities of humans and hence would presumably not buy into the idea that rationality 'transforms' all those natural ends we share with nonhuman animals. But this should not be taken to imply that Midgley outright denies the role of rationality in human life. According to Midgley, rationality has an essentially animal component, and any account of human nature ought to recognize the importance of rationality within the web of other nonrational human powers and capacities. In this sense, Midgley's explanation for human rationality *begins* in a different place to those of (e.g.) Foot, Hursthouse, and McDowell insofar as she is keen to stress the development and continued reliance of our rationality from within our animal condition.

For Midgley, the development of rational capacities in humans relies on a capacity we have in common with other animals: integration. On her view, rationality has "two distinct elements": cleverness and integration (BM, 262). "Cleverness", as Midgley understands it, is a kind of means to an end reasoning, enabling a creature to solve a problem; a kind of "calculating power, the sort of thing that can be measured by intelligence tests" (BM, 260). Integration, as I outlined it (in Section 2.2.), involves a wider perspective – it involves "having a character, acting as a whole, having a firm and effective priority system" (BM, 260).[32] To be rational, Midgley claims, a creature must exhibit both of these features. Thus, rationality is not something (human) species-specific for Midgley; rationality is in principle available to any creature with a capacity for both cleverness and integration.

In a rational creature, integration is a necessary condition of cleverness, according to Midgley. This is because an action that is purely clever lacks a connection to the whole life of the being in question, and hence, cannot tell us about the good for that being. An artificial intelligence can effectively work through premise-based arguments, or complete highly technical mathematical formulas, but (Midgley thinks) it wouldn't be described as 'rational' insofar as its action is isolated from a broader consideration of appropriate context, reasons, and character.[33] So, on Midgley's view, an action can only

[32]This is similar to Aristotle's distinction between phronesis and cleverness. Cleverness, for Aristotle is means to end reasoning (*EN* VI.13, 1144b24–9). But phronesis combines specifying the ends, including what the good life for the human consists in, while also working out what to do in this particular situation.

[33]According to Aristotle, but "we cannot be practically intelligent (*phronimos*) without being good (*agathos*)" (*EN* IV.13, 1144a36).

be rational if it arises from some coherent principle set out by a creature's nature and maintained by integration.

The ability to identify the good across many provinces of life does seem unique to our species (though this is not something Midgley ever explicitly asserts) and hence, humans use rationality in a distinctive way to shape their own lives. We have an abundance of *choice* in how we develop a flourishing life using our rationality, meaning that we must learn to use it well. In a sense, the fact that we have this ability to choose opens up the very possibility of going wrong, of neglecting our various goods and – as I outlined above – displaying vice.

We can find a naturalistic setting for rationality in Midgley's concept of integration. For Midgley, read correctly, animal integration is a capacity that is necessary for the development of rational capacities in the first place. Integration forms the biological basis of those capacities. Prior to our rational nature, the desire for a *balance* which triggers the need for integration is something that we share with nonhuman animals. Midgley argues that "reflection could not work if there were not, so to speak, some unevenness for it to get a grip on, some pre-existing balance and structure among the motives, for reflection to discover when it started reflecting" (BM, 273–4). This 'pre-existing balance', prior to reflection, contains some of the wants, goods, needs (etc.) that overlap with certain nonhuman animals.

Rationality, in this sense, is a product of our animality and our animality dictates *what* we reason about. It provides what Midgley calls the 'unevenness', that is, the starting point of reflection. Rationality, for Midgley, is a natural capacity among many that constitutes the clustered nature of the human animal. It is best understood as "growing out of and completing a natural balance of parts" (BM, 260). Midgley's formulation of Criterion (viii) is thus unique and distinct from the formulations we find in the work of credited ANs insofar as she does not endorse a transformative role for rationality in humans. But rather than excluding her from the tradition, the family-resemblance methodology I've endorsed allows for further fruitful research into how exactly the Midgleyan concept of rationality works within her broader AN.

5. Conclusion: placing Midgley in a tradition

I began this paper by noting Midgley's relative exclusion from the history of ethics and meta-ethics, and from contemporary discussions of these topics. I ventured one possible explanation of this neglect: a lack of association with a particular meta-ethical tradition.[34] Yet, I have shown that Midgley was, at one point, very much seen to be part of a tradition by commentators writing about AN in the 1980s. Given that Midgley is no longer considered a AN,

[34]This, it is worth noting, not need be thought of as the *only* reason for Midgley's neglect. Midgley also likely received implicit and explicit barriers erected by a sexist culture in philosophy.

there is an associated and present risk that she be forgotten – both from this tradition and more broadly. I considered several justifications for placing Midgley back into the AN tradition, including the *resemblance* her view shares with many of the features and criterion of contemporary AN in discussion today. I think there are at least five (and, indicated from my discussion in 3.2. possibly six) ways in which Midgley resembles a AN – and, more interestingly, the ways in which Midgley diverges from paradigmatic accounts she offers us something new: her own unique Neo-Aristotelianism.

I want to close by considering the various impacts of my paper for ongoing scholarly discussions of Midgley as a figure moving further into the history of philosophy (she only died in 2018). By tracking Midgley's contribution to meta-ethics, my paper provides a case study in how we can use our (hard to define) philosophical concepts in a pragmatic way to bring typically under-discussed and possibly isolated figures in the history of philosophy into the 'canon' – including women philosophers. The historiological methodology of family resemblance used in this paper has independent benefits for how we come to think about figures that have divergent commitments to canonical figures. In particular, the family resemblance method allows us to explore the unique elements of underappreciated theories, without the blurring of insightful overlap and differences between thinkers. For Midgley, this includes various unique elements of her naturalism in contrast to other thinkers – in particular, her rejection of any conceptual distinction between human nature and (nonhuman) animal nature, and her account of social and communal aspects of human nature as *overlapping* with certain aspects we find central to the lives of other social animals.

Acknowledgements

Thanks go to both anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on this paper, and to Nottingham's History of Philosophy Cluster for constructive feedback on a draft. Big thanks also go to those involved in my PhD (from which the central argument for this paper was drawn) including my supervisor Sophia Connell and examiners Benjamin Lipscomb and Evgenia Mylonaki. Many thanks also go to Peter West for countless conversations and to Clare Mac Cumhaill for taking me to meet Mary.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by British Society for the History of Philosophy.

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