John Hacker-Wright (ed.): *Philippa Foot on Goodness and Virtue.*

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Back in 2009, John Hacker-Wright wrote that "Philippa Foot's *Natural Goodness* is in the midst of a cool reception" (Hacker-Wright 2009: 308). Given that Foot's early critics tended to interpret her talk of natural goodness, species, and life-forms through the lens of scientific biology, they unsurprisingly found her views wanting. For thus construed, she had to appear to them a rather odd proponent of a scientistic naturalism that aims at establishing an empirical foundation for ethics by reducing it to a branch of biology—odd, because Foot's biology seemed naively 'metaphysical' and out of step with evolutionary theorizing. Much has been written since then to correct this initial misapprehension, albeit mostly in disparate papers that may not have received sufficiently broad attention. Hence, and despite an ongoing flurry of publications, the debate seems to have stalled. This is one reason why this new volume of papers represents an important contribution. It assembles eight original essays by some of the leading figures in neo-Aristotelian naturalism and by some of its promising younger scholars. While some of these papers address existing objections to Foot's view and, in response, sometimes modify it, others develop entirely new lines of criticism that fruitfully point at future directions for research. In both cases, this is done through careful and detailed exegesis that does much to clarify Foot's actual position and its potential pitfalls. It is no understatement to say that Hacker-Wright's collection lifts up critical engagement with Foot's naturalism to an entirely new level and therefore represents required reading for anyone who intends to work on it in the future.

To illustrate this, I will comment briefly on each of the papers. The collection opens with a substantial introduction by Hacker-Wright, in which he discusses how "Foot's work on natural goodness pertain[s] to substantive questions of right and wrong" (2). It is well-known that Foot, in her postscript to *Natural Goodness*, disclaimed any direct implications of her framework for settling substantive moral questions. In line with her Wittgensteinian methodology, she understood her work in meta-ethical terms, as a 'grammatical' investigation into the logical form of moral judgments. Thus, as Hacker-Wright contends, the natural goodness framework operates only negatively, by ruling out certain ethical theories, such as consequentialist accounts of value, as non-starters on purely meta-ethical grounds. For Foot, substantive moral norms are thus not deducible from the natural goodness framework; rather, on Hacker-Wright's interpretation, they belong to a specifiable moral code whose content is determined in part by the virtues and in part by 'contingent principles' embraced by a given society at a given time. While natural normativity requires us to develop and live by such a code, it does not dictate its exact specification. In order to arrive at such a specification, Hacker-Wright argues, we must move beyond Foot's grammatical methodology and engage in a wider metaphysical investigation into human nature and moral psychology. He finds a model for this in Aristotle and Aquinas, who understand the virtues as perfections of certain powers and appetites that mark us humans as the species we are.

In "The Grammar of Goodness in Foot's Ethical Naturalism", Rosalind Hursthouse also emphasizes the Wittgensteinian character of Foot's naturalism and traces the historical development of Foot's meta-ethical views from her 1958 paper "Moral Arguments" up to *Natural Goodness*. A crux in this development concerned the question how to account for both the objectivity and the practicality of moral judgments. While Foot had recognized their objectivity quite early on, she struggled to see how they could be reason-giving for anyone who was not already disposed to act morally by their subjective motivational set. Only when she noticed the essential relevance that life has to moral evaluation, did she begin to see a solution. On Foot's mature view, the evaluation of human practical

reason is itself subject to criteria of goodness supplied by our life-form, and hence anyone who fails to recognize virtuous reasons thereby exhibits a defect in practical rationality. In setting out this view, Hursthouse is careful to differentiate it from reductive naturalisms that seek an explanatory biological foundation for ethics. Instead, she aligns Foot's view with the hermeneutical naturalism recommended in John McDowell's "Two Sorts of Naturalism", which Hursthouse reads not as an attack on Foot, but as a friendly attempt at explicating her actual position. In doing so, Hursthouse helpfully illustrates the categorial break between humans and other animals by describing how survival and reproduction differ in us and them.

Jennifer Frey's "How to Be an Ethical Naturalist" takes up the problem of reconciling the objectivity of moral judgment with its practicality; a task that, for Frey, consists in unifying "the teleology of life and the teleology of rational action" (67). According to Frey, both Foot and Hursthouse overplay the former at the expense of the latter. On her interpretation, Foot's recognitional model of practical reason misconstrues moral judgment as theoretical and then mistakenly attempts to secure its practicality by reference to its special content rather than its special, practical form, while Hursthouse ultimately embraces a reductive, empirical, and theoretical account of human nature. As remedy, Frey recommends turning to Aquinas, who considers the human good the constitutive principle of human practical reason, as its figures in its form in the guise of certain very general ends, such as health, family, friendship, and virtue, which humans are naturally inclined to pursue. As first principles, these natural ends cannot be doubted without undercutting the very intelligibility of practical thought, which is therefore "practical self-knowledge of human form" (79). Aquinas thus embraces a foundationalist account of practical rationality. While I am overall very sympathetic to Frey's Thomism, I confess to some doubts whether her reading particularly of Hursthouse is entirely fair. Given her Wittgensteinian background, Hursthouse can be understood to propose a non-reductive, coherentist account of practical rationality, on which her four ends implicitly structure our first-personal practice of ethical reasoning and thus constitute its very form. Since they then act as intelligibility conditions of practical thought, Hursthouse's naturalism may be structurally more similar to Frey's than initial appearances suggest.

Matthias Haase's "Practically Self-Conscious Life" undertakes an investigation into the distinctive role of reason in human life. What differentiates us from other living things is that we stand in a self-conscious relationship to our life-form. Where they merely act in accordance with theirs, we act from an understanding or representation of ours. This categorial difference raises the question how the ethical goodness of humans can be *sui generis* in this way yet remain a genuine species of natural goodness. Haase considers three ways of modeling their relationship: the abstractive, the additive, and the transformative model, only the latter of which stands up to his scrutiny. While I again have reservations regarding his reading of Hursthouse as a proponent of the additive model, given that she herself emphasizes the transformative role of reason, Haase's discussion of the transformative model certainly figures among the most impressive parts of the book. He finds it in Aristotle, who denies the univocity of 'life' by introducing a hierarchy of three categorially different types of life: the nutritive, sentient, and rational. While the higher types do contain the lower ones, they radically transform the manner in which their lower powers operate by unfolding them into a more complex set of capacities. Haase concludes with some reflections on Marx's concept of *Gattungswesen*, which designates the general category of practically self-conscious life, of which humans possibly are just one species. Contrary to Thompson, Haase suggests that the distinctive shape self-maintenance and reproduction take in a *Gattungswesen* "constitutively excludes that the wills of its multiple exemplars are inevitably in contradiction with each other" (125). This opens up the intriguing thought that relations of justice will not only necessarily hold *within* any specific rational life-form but perhaps also between the members of *different* rational species. However, by placing the ground of justice not in any specific

life-form but in the category of rational life as such, it also raises the worry whether we might not have unwittingly begun to cross over into Kantian territory.

In "Traditional Naturalism", Kristina Gehrman assesses Foot's account of natural normativity against the background of a traditional conception of practical rationality, on which practical reason formally aims at the practicable good, which is considered objective. It is a weakness in Foot's account, on Gehrman's reading, that she grounds the objectivity of this good, i.e. of the virtues, in empirical facts about human needs, as this exposes her view to McDowell's well-known objections. Instead, Gehrman argues, we should ground the objectivity of morality not in something external to practical thought, but in human practical reason itself, which refigures the role that our knowledge of human natural norms and needs play. In describing this altered role, Gehrman argues for a more liberal account of how human individuals relate to the natural norms of their kind. In particular, the inherent pluralism of such norms entails (1) a certain amount of optionality in their instantiation, and (2) that deviations from such norms cannot automatically count as defects but must first be assessed as to their positive or negative effect on the deviating individual's flourishing given its particular circumstances. Although this allows Gehrman to intercept certain worries that have been raised from a disability ethics perspective, it also obscures an important distinction between a thing's function in human life and the accidental benefit it may yield in unusual circumstances. Thus, a high-tech prosthetic may indicate a genuine natural defect yet still yield an accidental benefit, by *overcompensating* that defect. Gehrman's critique rests on a reading of Foot on which our knowledge of human natural norms is essentially empirical. While it is a matter for debate whether Foot does not in fact conceive of this knowledge in terms of hermeneutical self-interpretation, Gehrman's modification of her account locates the human life-form and its norms in the *content* of practical thought, rather than in its form. In order to avoid having the naturalistic credentials of her view questioned on that basis, Gehrman places the formal object of rational agency in the context of that of living agency as such: successful interaction with the world. Yet, may the concept of 'interaction', similar to that of a 'state of affairs', not turn out too thin to act as a goodness-fixing kind?

Anselm W. Müller's "'Why Should I?' Can Foot Convince the Sceptic?" is a skillful and systematic exploration of the various kinds of moral skepticism one may direct at Foot's account of natural normativity. It turns out that this skepticism is far more multifaceted than Foot considers in her own rebuttal of it. After differentiating three types of ought and various ways of acknowledging them, which play an important role in his assessment of Foot, Müller in turn discusses theoretical, epistemic, and practical skepticism. The theoretical skeptic doubts Foot's claim that the teleology of acting morally is sufficient for grounding its rational necessity, and particularly that all moral requirements can be convincingly explained in terms of their supposed Aristotelian necessity for human flourishing. Some, such as the absolute prohibition on murder, may rather have what Anscombe calls a supra-utilitarian, mystical value. The epistemic skeptic holds that, even if Aristotelian necessity were sufficient for grounding moral requirements, we can never really demonstrate such necessity of any such requirement, given the sheer complexity and variety of human life. The practical skeptic, finally, argues that Foot only gives us evidential reasons for accepting theoretical judgments that *assert* moral requirements, but fails to establish genuinely practical judgments that would *express a commitment* to actually heed these requirements in action. Thus, for the practical skeptic, the heart of the problem resides not so much in Foot's move from is to ought, but rather in her move from theoretical to practical recognition of this ought. Although Foot, on Müller's account, may not succeed at rebutting moral skepticism, her distinctive failure allows the skeptic to express his doubts more clearly and thereby renders the issues we grapple with in answering him more precise. Müller, like Frey, turns to Aquinas in meeting this challenge, and specifically to his notion of *synderesis*, which is a natural disposition for the intuitive practical recognition of basic and otherwise indemonstrable moral

requirements or first principles. On Müller's view, this disposition is itself part of human nature; its unfolding is an aspect of normal human development and maturation.

Gavin Lawrence's "The Deep and the Shallow" is a rich and rewarding examination of Foot's account of happiness and its conceptual surroundings. In *Natural Goodness*, Foot holds that humans categorially differ from other species in that their good does not essentially consist in survival and reproduction but in a special sort of happiness that relates to what is deep or important rather than shallow, petty, or trivial in human life. She thus places, in Lawrence's words, a *content restriction* on the possible objects of deep happiness, defining it as the enjoyment of good things that are basic in human life, such as home, family, work, and friendship. Foot is worried, however, that such happiness may also be available to the wicked. In arguing that it is not, she defends the view that virtue is necessary but not sufficient for deep happiness, as unhappy circumstances may render it impossible even for the best of people. Lawrence questions this by claiming that Foot's view is susceptible to a variant of the old dilemma: If we resist identifying happiness with a life of virtue, so that happiness is specifiable independently of it and both are thus externally related, how can we still maintain that virtue is necessary? Yet, if they are related internally such that happiness is not independently specifiable, why is virtue then not sufficient? Lawrence carefully develops this line of thought to argue that Foot's worries about the wicked are overstated once we introduce her content restriction and its attendant criterialism regarding what can intelligibly count as deep in life, and that in consequence she should endorse something akin to McDowell's sufficiency thesis, on which even a life sacrificed for virtue still counts as (qualifiedly) *eudaimon*. Yet, I wonder whether Foot's worries may not be understood as related to the criterialism.

Foot's account of happiness ingeniously combines subjective and objective elements, in that she conceives of deep happiness not essentially as a state of affairs, but as a specific *emotion* that is differentiated from more shallow forms of enjoyment by its distinctive intentional objects. In the context of Foot's overall project, these 'good things that are basic in human life' are best interpreted as the Aristotelian necessities of our kind of life; as the general components that jointly constitute the human life-form. Hence, formally, deep happiness is felt toward an object when apprehended under a conception of it as exemplifying a constituent of our life-form; as an essential part of what makes our life truly good. And this sort of apprehension fundamentally engages, as Lawrence quotes Foot, all of an agent's "resources of experience and belief" (202). Her worry is that a certain type of wicked person might also be capable *of this very emotion*, namely the type that (falsely) considers their wicked ends to exemplify something good and basic in human life, such as Foot's concentration camp commander and his 'great cause' of 'purifying the Aryan race', for he might seem to have the relevant sort of intentional relation to the wrong items. Given this, the real problem is how to properly specify the criteria of depth associated with the content restriction, to rule out this sort of case as a *conceptual* impossibility. Foot's argument, which heavily relies on the concept of benefit, belongs in the context of her discussion of human deprivation in Chapter 3 of *Natural Goodness*. There, reflection on the ordinary use of this concept afforded us a first grasp of some Aristotelian necessities of human life and thereby provided an entryway into the hermeneutical circle of self-interpretation, which ultimately clarified that, *as part of our everyday self-understanding*, we do indeed consider virtue a necessary component of our life-form. This likewise seems to be Foot's strategy for explicating the extension of the content restriction, with the result that there is indeed a necessary connection between virtue and deep happiness, albeit not a sufficient one, since our life-form is marked by further Aristotelian necessities besides it.

In "Foot's Grammar of Goodness", Micah Lott contributes to the clarification of Foot's account of happiness by situating it in the wider context of her grammatical naturalism. After offering a

reconstruction of the natural goodness framework, Lott employs it to answer certain objections to the conceptual connection Foot draws between an organism's goodness and its good. In doing so, he pays particular attention to the role of circumstances, for it may seem that it is precisely an organism's goodness that may prevent it from realizing its good in unhappy circumstances, as when the swiftest deer falls into the hunter's trap or the just person is murdered by the Nazis. Lott attempts a more precise description of these cases by differentiating the goodness of an organism into first and second actuality, i.e. into (1) its well-formed vital capacities and (2) their successful exercise. Unlucky circumstances may affect both, in that they either impede successful exercise or damage the underlying capacity. They thus diminish the organism's goodness in either of these ways and thereby prevent it from attaining its good. This leaves Foot's conceptual connection intact, while plausibly accentuating the vulnerability to luck and chance that life is generally subject to. Lott then applies these insights to the connection between virtue and happiness, i.e. human goodness and human good, in order to vindicate Foot's claim that virtue is necessary but not sufficient for it. While the connection here is conceptual too, our life is equally vulnerable to luck and therefore requires at least a minimum of favorable circumstances.

The volume closes with Parisa Moosavi's "Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism and the Evolutionary Objection: Rethinking the Relevance of Empirical Science". Moosavi engages Foot's early critics and provides a helpful systematization of their objections. Both types of objection, which Moosavi calls the 'Pollyanna Problem' and the 'Selfish Gene Objection', are raised against the background of evolutionary biology and question whether an account of what is natural for humans, given the latest science, could plausibly have the same extension as our everyday understanding of morality, instead of yielding broadly immoralist results. Moosavi considers extant replies to these objections and argues that, while these may be able to secure extensional adequacy, they do so only at the price of isolating Aristotelian naturalism from empirical science and accepting its discrepancy from scientific results, which casts its naturalistic credentials into doubt. Usually, these credentials are defended in terms of Thompsonian idealism, which maintains that the life-form concept is prior to empirical science because it is a pure concept of the understanding that enables us to represent anything as alive in the first place and therefore forms the very possibility condition of empirical biology. Yet, Moosavi claims, it remains an open question whether empirical biology actually presupposes this concept, given its widespread rejection. She concludes that Aristotelian naturalists absolutely need to engage with empirical science if they want to give satisfactory replies to these problems. At the same time, she is optimistic that this can be done given the recent resurgence of the concept of organism in biological thought, which mirrors Thompson's life-form concept and thus promises to confirm natural normativity in a scientifically respectable manner.

Overall, these papers document that, almost 20 years after its publication and almost ten after its author's death, *Natural Goodness* remains fertile ground for philosophical reflection, regarding a deeper understanding of the specific views it advances and as a point of departure for the ongoing development of Aristotelian naturalism more generally.

References

Hacker-Wright, John. 2009. What is Natural About Foot's Ethical Naturalism? *Ratio* 22: 308-321.