Michael Winter

Rethinking Virtue Ethics

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Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1
Introduction

It is encouraging to see the high level of enthusiasm generated by work on Aristotelian virtue theory in recent decades. Much of this work, carried out by scholars of Aristotle and by ethical theorists without classical training, has helped place virtue theory among the prominent ethical theories on the table in the English-speaking world today. One significant advantage of an Aristotelian virtue-based theory is the flexibility its focus on character traits allows, which helps account for the variety and complexity of the moral life. Many who find rule-focused versions of Kantianism, utilitarianism, divine command, natural law or other rule-based ethical theories to be too restrictive might see virtue theory as an attractive, flexible alternative. Some have taken Aristotle's virtue theory to offer a promising model for moral particularism, versions of which could reasonably be taken to offer extreme flexibility (Dancy 1993; McDowell 1988; Nussbaum 1990).

On the other hand, what many rule-based moral theories sacrifice in flexibility, they gain back in stability. Kantianism in its purest forms is a paradigm of such a rule-based theory. Some scholars find room for the flexibility a virtue-based approach affords even within Kant's theory (Sherman 1997), but it is difficult to get beyond the unyielding nature of the categorical imperative in its various formulations. Many regard the rigidity of Kant's ethics as a strong sign that its prospects for success are quite dim as a comprehensive moral theory.

Consequentialism presents another option that many contemporary philosophers find appealing. The commonly drawn distinction between act and rule consequentialism reflects the division between the two types of approaches to ethical theory just outlined. Act consequentialism can be understood to offer more flexibility than its rule-based counterpart. We shall see in Chapter 2 that there has been at least one attempt made to develop a consequentialist virtue ethics (Driver 2001). Although this book does not offer any decisive refutation of consequentialism, the theory presented in these pages gives us good reason to hesitate before embracing some form of consequentialism.

It is my impression that an ideal ethical theory would offer enough flexibility to account for the complexities and contingencies of the moral life, but would contain enough stability to allow for the objectivity of moral judgments. I think such a view can be constructed from the ethical theory of Aristotle. Since Aristotle's theory is not neatly and cleanly laid out in his treatises on conduct, it is a scholarly project to

construct an account that has these features. Part of this constructive project depends, at least to some extent, on some degree of textual analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 3 contains an attempt to sketch in rough outline how an Aristotelian science of ethics might get underway. In providing this sketch, we will need to attend to some proposals about the relationship between Aristotelian science and ethics offered in the philosophical literature. We shall see that how we understand the relationship between Aristotelian science and ethics depends on how we understand key passages within Aristotle. Even though some of Chapter 3 depends on exegetical considerations within Aristotle's corpus, it should be emphasized that this book is not simply an exercise in Aristotelian exegesis. Passages from the Aristotelian corpus are introduced where it is judged that such passages are necessary or helpful for understanding an important part of the model of Aristotle's ethics developed in these pages. There already exists a rich body of work devoted to analysis of Aristotle's texts, particularly his ethical treatises. This book can offer insight into how to construct a deductive paradigm of ethics inspired primarily by Aristotle. Students of Aristotle with an interest in ethical theory should find this project particularly valuable.

This book has its origins in my curiosity about how to construct a plausible ethical theory. The work done in this book builds on what I take to be a very solid foundation in Aristotle's ethical works. Even though the model developed in these pages is not worked out in all detail, it gestures toward a picture of virtue ethics that offers an attractive basis for a powerful, robust ethical theory. It is fair to say that the theory that emerges in these pages is thoroughly Aristotelian in character even though there are features of the model not found in Aristotle. This book will have served its purpose if it succeeds in offering the basis for an attractive ethical theory (whether the model offered is completely Aristotelian or not).

This book is divided into four chapters. Chapter 2 is focused on motivating the project of constructing a deductive paradigm of Aristotle's virtue ethics. To help get things underway, several different types of objections are considered and three are highlighted. The first group of objections relate to moral foundationalism in general. Some of these objections are considered and addressed in a preliminary way in Section 2.1.1. A thorough response to these initial objections requires developing the deductive model of virtue ethics in Chapters 3 and 4.

The first of the featured objections in Chapter 2 comes from within Aristotle's ethics. Many think that Aristotle's remarks about the lack of precision in ethics have implications that undermine the deductive approach developed in this book. An attempt is made to identify and bring forward initial worries to be found within Aristotle's ethics, and to deal with these concerns. Aristotle's remarks about seeking more precision than the subject matter allows must be considered. We shall see that many of the remarks made early in the *Nicomachean Ethics* do not decisively rule out considering Aristotelian virtue ethics in a formal way.

Next, a much more general concern about virtue ethics is taken up, the view that character-based ethics is wrong-headed from the point of view of social science. John Doris launches a powerful assault on the tradition of virtue ethics by

considering some of the findings of behavioral psychology. Doris contends that examining human behavior shows that "robust character traits," or virtues, do not play a significant role in explaining a substantial range of human behavior. Doris is right to insist that it is irresponsible for ethicists to fail to pay attention to the relevant empirical data. If he is right about what the data shows, however, then the project of constructing any type of virtue-based theory is undermined. For this reason, it is important to explain why the empirical data gathered to date does not show that robust character traits fail to play a significant role in explaining human behavior. We shall see that there are resources within virtue theory that can explain much of the relevant behavior.

The next objection comes from ethical theory. A long-standing tenet of virtue theory is that moral virtue and knowledge are connected in some important way. Aristotle's theory has it that the intellectual virtue *phronēsis* is a necessary condition for having the moral virtues. So, having virtue requires having knowledge. But does moral virtue always depend on knowledge? Might there be moral virtue in the absence of knowledge? Is acting from intention required for virtue? We consider an attack on the traditional assumption that virtue requires knowledge by considering the possibility that there are virtues of ignorance. We shall see that the examples of virtues of ignorance offered are not compelling, and the argument for the claim that acting from intention is not necessary for virtue is flawed. The idea that knowledge is required for virtue has been taken to be foundational for virtue theory for good reason, and we shall see why as we proceed.

The last featured challenge in Chapter 2 comes from the area of philosophy of biology. Aristotle's ethics is based on a teleological conception of human nature, which some take to be problematic. But we shall see that Darwin was himself a teleologist. Once this point is understood, it is possible to see Darwinian theory as being consistent with the sort of teleology needed for Aristotle's ethical theory.

Chapter 3 gets into the details of the components of the deductive paradigm. The first part of the chapter takes a look at Book III of Aristotle's *Topics* to get insight into how we might think about framing ethical axioms. In *Topics* III Aristotle asks which is the more desirable, or the better, of two or more things. If there is a close connection between the concept of human flourishing and concepts about desirability, then, since happiness (*eudaimonia*) is a first principle of ethics in some important sense, it is plausible to think that the concept of desirability would be closely connected to it. The next part of Chapter 3 proposes an analysis of for-the-most-part relationships in Aristotle. The success of constructing a realist model of virtue ethics deductively rests in part on providing an interpretation of for-the-most-part relations allowing for their demonstrability. Aristotle maintains that what holds for the most part is demonstrable and suggests that ethical subject matter is largely composed of relations that hold for the most part. If an analysis of for-the-most-part relationships could be offered that fits with the type of ethical subject matter he characterizes while being demonstrable, then such an analysis would go a long way toward filling out the model. More specifically, Aristotle seems to leave room for the demonstrability of relationships that hold for the most part. This possibility provides an opportunity to understand Aristotelian ethics as an Aristotelian science.

After considering the extent to which ethics can fit within the strict standards of Aristotelian science in a general way, two very different proposals for working out the connection are examined. The first suggests that Aristotle has two conceptions of science, pure and plain science, and that ethics can be properly classified as a plain Aristotelian science. The second maintains that there is only one type of Aristotelian science, but that it includes two forms of demonstration; some demonstrations are strict and others are soft. Aristotelian science is possibly broad enough to include the subject matter of ethics, according to this second proposal, as long as we remember that ethical subject matter can fit within softer demonstrations. Both of these proposals offer an analysis of for-the-most-part relations in Aristotle, and the success of either proposal depends, to a considerable extent, on how well the respective analysis works.

We shall see that both proposals have problems and that neither analysis of holding for the most part is ideal. An alternative analysis is proposed that fits with what Aristotle says about such relations and that explains how one conception of Aristotelian science is broad enough to include ethical subject matter. Using this analysis, we can see the promise in constructing an Aristotelian science of ethics, which would provide the type of deductive framework needed to derive action-guiding moral principles from more general principles about human beings, their dispositions, and features of their actions.

After this general case for a deductive science of ethics is made, we consider some specific scientific syllogisms with ethical subject matter. Using the alternative analysis of holding for the most part, we shall see what types of syllogisms can be constructed. This work is merely a gesture in the direction of constructing a full-fledged deductive science of ethics, but it does represent a promising start.

There are two distinct levels considered: what might be called "second-order" considerations about the natures of the essences of the basic components involved in matters of conduct (inquiry into such concepts is primarily cognitive in character and only secondarily practical) and "first-order" practical questions and concepts about how such concepts specifically relate to one's own moral situation (these are immediately practical and cognitive incidentally.) Ethics has both cognitive and practical goals and its ultimate goal is practical–this is why ethics as a discipline should be properly classified as a practical science. There is no obvious reason for thinking that cognitive goals drop out of the picture in a practical science whether it be medicine or ethics. Does it make sense to think of ethics as a practical science and as a theoretical science?

Chapter 4 attends to epistemic issues. The chapter begins by considering the prospects of a priori or armchair ethics. What role, if any, do empirical considerations play in ethics generally and in ethical theory specifically? After presenting the views of some contemporary ethical theorists who champion the idea of armchair ethics, a case is made that although much of ethics can be done on the basis of conceptual analysis, there is a significant part of the subject matter that rests on empirical considerations. So it is not plausible to characterize ethics as a thoroughly a priori discipline. With this point in mind, we turn to the nature of inductive reasoning and to the role induction plays in ethics. Once a general picture of inductive

reasoning is presented, more specific issues about the role of inductive reasoning in the moral life are considered. The first has to do with self-assessment in morality. How do we know what kind of character we have? There are two points in Aristotle's ethics that are helpful in providing a basis for seeing how we might make accurate assessments about our own actions and character: (1) we have natural virtues, and (2) we are naturally capable of recognizing virtuous acts in others. Using these two points, we can sketch a rough outline of moral self-assessment. Chekhov's short story *The Bet* provides a helpful illustration about how some points from virtue theory provide a solid basis for accurate self-assessment.

The examination of inductive reasoning in Chapter 4 continues with an attempt to see how some work in contemporary epistemology connects with some themes in Aristotle. These connections help us see how the classic problem of induction raised by Hume is not a particularly pressing problem for Aristotelians. Aristotle's theory of induction is more sophisticated than it is usually taken to be. After some general discussion of the different types of induction in Aristotle's work, we see that one specific type, what has been called "intuitive induction" by some is helpful in describing how we come to know basic moral principles.

The final sections of Chapter 4 focus on Aristotle's foundationalism. After sketching how it is possible to defend a foundationalist epistemology against the alternatives, we consider Aristotle's specific form of foundationalism, which includes an account of how we know foundational principles. Once that framework is in place, we look to ethics. How do we know fundamental ethical principles? Chapter 4 ends with an attempt to offer a rough account.

Chapter 5 takes up further challenges to the deductive model of virtue ethics developed in the three previous chapters. The first is the particularist challenge to a model of virtue ethics grounded in ethical principles. John McDowell offers the most focused particularist challenge to the model of virtue ethics offered in this book. McDowell endorses an Aristotelian virtue theory, but thinks that Aristotle's theory of practical wisdom implies that ethical principles are uncodifiable. McDowell uses for-the-most-part relations in ethics to buttress his case, which presents an excellent opportunity to apply the interpretation of for-the-most-part relations developed in Chapter 3 to see whether the analysis can provide a tenable portrait of practical reasoning underpinned by codified ethical principles. A case is made that the deductive model of virtue ethics developed in this book is consistent with practical reason playing an essential role in our moral lives.

The next challenge comes in the form of questions about the scope of the type of realist virtue ethics developed in the previous chapters. Some have argued that although the Aristotelian model of practical reasoning is powerful, it is not broad enough to generate the kinds of principles needed for a robust ethical theory. More specifically, it does not seem to some that Aristotle's virtue theory is broad enough to mandate self-sacrificial or altruistic actions. Examining the virtue of courage puts us in a position to see how a response to this objection might be developed. After an initial case is made that Aristotelian virtue ethics leaves room for altruistic actions, a more general argument for altruistic actions within the context of virtue theory is

offered. In light of this argument, we can say that the scope of Aristotelian virtue ethics is sufficiently broad to merit close examination as a viable ethical theory.

Another challenge arises when we wonder whether it is possible to justify exceptionless moral precepts or inalienable rights solely on the basis of Aristotelian virtue theory. An attempt is made to see how this justification might go. It turns out that Aristotle's theory is not robust enough to make this case, but there are principles that can be borrowed from the Kantian tradition to help make the case for inalienable rights. The issue of suicide is at the core of this discussion. What one says about the moral permissibility of suicide and forced suicide has significant implications for the success of the case for inalienable rights.

Finally, the Appendix considers how we might provide a set of axioms to justify one of Aristotle's apparent unconditional moral prohibitions, i.e., that adultery has no mean. Many who wish to highlight the flexibility of Aristotelian virtue ethics seem to either ignore or dismiss Aristotle's claim that theft, adultery, and murder have no mean. It is plausible to think that such acts are being characterized as acts that should never be done, so it is helpful to consider what a justification for such prohibitions might look like. Since Aristotle does not construct an axiomatized system for his ethics, most of this project is constructive. There is much to be learned by working this out. It is a minority view among ethical theorists that it is possible to provide a plausible, non-theistic justification for unconditional moral principles that have any direct relevance to action, so this part of the model is controversial. Although nothing substantial about the deductive model of Aristotelian virtue ethics is at stake if the case for unconditional moral prohibitions in Aristotle's ethics fails, some of the lessons learned in this case are helpful in coming to understand the relationships between fundamental concepts in Aristotelian virtue ethics.

Chapter 2
Moral Realism and Virtue Ethics

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is focused on motivating the idea that a specific model of Aristotelian virtue ethics presents a basis for a rich and plausible ethical theory. Some objections to this general type of project are considered in Section 2.1.1. Section 2.1.2 presents and responds to challenges to a deductive model of virtue ethics from within Aristotle's ethics. Many think that Aristotle's remarks about the lack of precision in ethics have implications that undermine the deductive approach developed in this book. An attempt is made to identify and bring forward initial worries to be found within Aristotle's ethics, and to deal with these concerns. Aristotle's notorious remarks about seeking more precision than the subject matter allows must be considered. We shall see that many of the remarks made early in the *Nicomachean Ethics* do not decisively rule out treating Aristotelian virtue ethics in a formal way. Section 2.1.3 takes up a much more general worry about virtue ethics, the view that character-based ethics is wrong-headed from the point of view of social science. John Doris launches a powerful assault on the tradition of virtue ethics by appealing to some of the findings of behavioral psychology in the recent decades. If he is right about what the data shows, however, then the project of constructing any type of virtue-based theory is undermined. For this reason, it is important to explain why the empirical data gathered to date does not show that robust character traits fail to play a significant role in explaining human behavior. We shall see that there are resources within virtue theory that can explain much of the relevant behavior.

Section 2.1.4 attends to objections that an ethical theorist might raise. As was noted in the introduction, a long-standing tenet of virtue theory is that moral virtue and knowledge are connected in some important way; having virtue seems to require having knowledge. Does moral virtue always depend on knowledge? Section 2.1.4 addresses a challenge to the traditional assumption that virtue requires knowledge by considering the possibility that there are virtues of ignorance.

An additional challenge in Section 2.1.5 comes from the philosophy of biology. Some have taken the idea that Aristotle's ethics is based on a teleological conception of human nature to be a serious reason to dismiss the theory. If it is true that teleology has no place within biological explanations, then it would follow that

Aristotle's ethics would be dead in the water given the dependence of his ethical theory on human biology. We shall see that contrary to some popular characterizations, there is good reason to think that Darwin was himself a teleologist in an important sense, and that Darwinian theory is consistent with the sort of teleology needed for Aristotle's ethical theory. There is much to be learned from this objection from the Darwinian camp carefully, but the objection does not prove to be fatal to the Aristotelian enterprise. In fact, Darwinism and a certain kind of Aristotelianism are not only consistent but complementary in some important ways.

2.2 Challenges Facing Moral Foundationalism

If Aristotle's ethics could be understood according to a deductive paradigm, then this model of ethics would provide one way of understanding moral realism—the view that moral propositions are capable of being objectively true. An examination of such a model of Aristotle's ethics could provide a specific way of determining whether a justifiable realist foundation for ethics is possible. We might make some progress arguing at the meta-ethical level about the nature of moral discourse and practice by defending moral realism, but this is not the approach taken in this book. Instead, an attempt is made to construct a specific kind of realist theory with the hope that the explanatory power it offers gives us good reason for endorsing moral realism.

Before attempting to develop such an account, it is helpful to consider a couple of ways one might offer challenges to the project. The most radical challenge comes in the form of expressivist versions of non-cognitivism whose advocates might claim that moral utterances simply express feelings or sentiments. Although there are many specific responses to this type of challenge in the literature, a solid strategy for responding to the expressivist challenge comes in the form of a developed model of moral realism. This book attempts to make a significant step in that direction.

A less radical but still powerful challenge to moral realism is found in J.L. Mackie's argument from disagreement (Mackie 1977). Mackie presents a powerful non-cognitivist challenge in the form of an error theory, which alleges that there are no objective moral facts that are capable of making our moral utterances true. More specifically, the conclusion of Mackie's "Argument from Disagreement" is that "Disagreement about moral codes seems to reflect people's adherence to and participation in different ways of life. The causal connection seems to be mainly that way round." (Mackie 1977: 36) Mackie focuses on the observed variation between moral codes and alleges that the variation is better explained by diverse ways of life than it would be by the hypothesis that there is a single objective morality that a significant number of human beings are unable to correctly discern (Mackie 1977: 37). Since Mackie's argument implies that the truth of moral beliefs does not apply to people independently of beliefs and attitudes they happen to have, his argument is a straightforward denial of moral realism.

Those sympathetic with some kind of realist position about the status of moral principles should think some sort of response to Mackie's formulation of the non-cognitivist challenge is necessary. David Brink, for example, discusses various alternative defenses of moral realism, but his own defense of moral realism is based on a coherentist approach to moral justification (Brink 1989). Concerning alternative accounts of justification in general, and moral justification in particular, it looks as though one must opt for one of three alternatives: foundationalism,[1] coherentism, or skepticism. Each of these positions gains force from the apparent inadequacies of the alternatives. As Brink sees it, foundationalism in any of its forms is untenable because all beliefs, including any purported foundational beliefs, are inferentially justified: "The role of second-order beliefs in justification demonstrates the inferential character of justification and so undermines any form of foundationalism" (Brink 1989). Brink treats skepticism as a last resort, arguing that coherentism can avoid the insurmountable problems facing the foundationalist while avoiding the grip of the skeptic's alternative.[2] Because of the serious problems with coherentism,[3] it seems that a careful look at alternative accounts of justification is still in order.

Moral foundationalism deserves careful attention. Let us provisionally treat moral foundationalism as the view that a moral belief is justified just in case it is either foundational in the sense that is non-inferentially justified or based on an appropriate inference from foundational moral beliefs. Some sort of intuitionism is often taken as an epistemological counterpart to this doctrine.[4] Since foundational moral or non-moral beliefs hold a privileged status in foundationalist moral systems, there has to be some special account of how it is that we come to know foundational moral principles. We cannot come to know them deductively, for this leads to a regress (probably an infinite, vicious one). Induction does not seem as if it is strong enough to yield unshakeable foundational principles. Do human beings have the ability to directly understand foundational principles by some intuitive power?

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[1] Some have drawn a distinction between strong and weak foundationalism. A strong foundationalist holds that foundational beliefs are self-justifying or self-certifying while a weak foundationalist claims that foundational beliefs are initially credible but subject to future revision. The picture of justification Aristotle presents in the *Posterior Analytics* is one the strong foundationalist would probably find appealing. If, however, dialectic provides justification for certain beliefs, then it is not so clear that Aristotle does not espouse a weaker version of foundationalism. BonJour's (1998) moderate rationalism presents a contemporary defense of a type of weak foundationalism.

[2] An example of another approach is (Dancy 1985). Dancy first considers and subsequently rejects foundationalism for reasons similar to Brink's. He favors a coherentist perspective but thinks that this position breaks down under the skeptic's challenge.

[3] This issue will be addressed more thoroughly in Chapter 4.

[4] This is especially true with the stronger versions of foundationalism since subjective versions hold that foundational beliefs are indubitable while objective versions claim the foundational principles are infallible. There are ways of understanding Aristotelian *nous* that render it thoroughly empirical in nature (Lesher 1973). This empiricist approach is quite compatible with the weaker subjective and objective versions of foundationalism. It is not easy to see how the empiricist account of *nous* could be compatible with stronger versions of foundationalism.

This approach has its share of advocates (Reid 1969; Sidgwick 1907; Moore 1903; Chisholm 1966). We shall see that the answer to this question depends upon what one means by "intuition." The work of some of the moral intuitionists leaves many with the impression that "intuition" is used to denote little more than a hunch or a gut feeling. Even if it is possible to develop a response to an anti-realist challenge on the basis of a notion of this sort, we should expect ethics to be founded on something more substantive than a hunch. If it is possible to offer a reasonable account of Aristotelian *nous* as the faculty that allows us to grasp or understand first principles, and this account would render *nous* stronger than a gut feeling or a hunch, we might still be left with worries about whether Aristotelian *nous* would not be better understood along more empiricist lines (Lesher 1973).

It is not unreasonable to hope that an account based on Aristotle's views about justification in general could avoid some of these problems, particularly as they relate to ethical theory. If Aristotle's foundationalist theory of knowledge is internally consistent, plausible and is compatible with the ethical theory presented in his ethical works, then a picture of Aristotelian ethics from this perspective might provide a way of understanding and defending moral realism.

One initial concern about this type of undertaking is that Aristotle himself never explicitly attempts to fit his ethics into this type of deductive model. In fact, we need not look hard in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to find several remarks that could be taken to speak directly against the project proposed here. We shall soon consider why these remarks do not stop the project before it gets underway.

2.3 Objections from Aristotle's Own Work

Compelling evidence against the thesis that Aristotle's conception of ethics can rightly be considered according to a deductive paradigm comes from Aristotle himself. Several remarks made in the *Nicomachean Ethics* are made in the spirit of this passage:

> Since, then, the present inquiry does not aim at theoretical knowledge like the others (for we are inquiring not in order to know what excellence is, but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use), we must examine the nature of actions, namely how we ought to do them; for these determine also the nature of the states that are produced, as we have said... But this must be agreed upon beforehand, that the whole account of matters of conduct must be given in outline and not precisely, as we said at the very beginning that the accounts we demand must be in accordance with the subject matter; matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than matters of health. The general account being of this nature, the account of particular cases is yet more lacking in exactness; for they do not fall under any art or set of precepts, but the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine or of navigation (1103b27–1104a9).

Although these remarks and others offer *prima facie* evidence against the thesis that will be developed in this book, there are reasonable ways of interpreting some of the key remarks contained in this passage that leave the main issue open. Examination

of other crucial ideas in the Aristotelian corpus presents quite a different perspective than the one apparently presented here.

The phrase "present inquiry" in the first line is significant. It may well be that the remarks that follow it are intended to characterize the sort of inquiry that Aristotle intends to carry out in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but not the only sort of inquiry for which the subject matter leaves room. In connection with this point, it is interesting to keep in mind that by comparison the *Eudemian Ethics* is a more formal treatise. Remarks about imprecision in ethics almost never arise in the *Eudemian Ethics*.

Moreover, in the third line of the passage, Aristotle says that if the present inquiry were to be theoretical it would be useless. It may indeed be useless with respect to some purposes, i.e. the ones that Aristotle presently wishes to pursue, and not for others. Underlying these remarks is the aim of enabling students to "become good," and a theoretical or scientific treatment of the subject matter would likely not be well suited for attaining this end. It might be helpful to distinguish between the immediate and ultimate goals of ethical inquiry (Anagnostopoulos 1994). To say that ethics is a practical discipline might be taken to mean that its ultimate goals are practical—making its students better people. But to say that ethics has an ultimate goal that is non-cognitive in character says nothing about the nature of subordinate goals a student may have in taking up the study of ethics. It is conceivable that there are cognitive goals that are pursued for the sake of non-cognitive ones. Further, there is nothing unreasonable about thinking that some significant portion of the subject matter could be studied for its own sake. For that matter, there is nothing preventing someone from understanding ethics as having two goals, one cognitive and the other non-cognitive, neither of which may be more ultimate than the other.

To elaborate on this point, consider the comparison between ethics and medicine made toward the end of the passage. Given that the ultimate goal of medicine is to make people healthy, medical science could be rightly classified as a practical discipline. But does an ultimate practical goal of medicine entail that there are not any other goals within the disciple, some of which may be cognitive goals? Not obviously. So if there is a parallel between ethics and medicine, then we could expect that the character and relation between goals within each discipline would be similar. Both ethics and medicine have ultimate goals that are non-cognitive and practical, but both have other goals that are cognitive and not necessarily practical. In both medicine and ethics it is conceivable that cognitive goals are pursued for their own sake.[5]

Later in the passage Aristotle mentions that the nature of actions is one of the objects of examination. We would want to examine how we ought to act if we are primarily interested in becoming better persons; more thorough and detailed investigation of the nature of actions would be a distraction with this goal in mind. But actions do admit of more detailed examination, and it is reasonable to entertain the

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[5] Early in *Nicomachean Ethics* I Aristotle clearly allows for some things to be pursued for their own sake and for the sake of other things, so that even if cognitive goals are subordinate to practical ones in the case of medicine and ethics, this does not mean that these disciplines don't have cognitive goals that are also pursued for their own sake.

idea that we could study the nature of actions themselves for the sake of knowledge itself. Moreover, an examination of this sort could potentially have positive effects on a person's character.

Aristotle goes on to claim that the presentation must be given in the form of an outline because "matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity." If this remark is taken at face value, then it looks as if it rules out the possibility of treating ethics deductively since a deductive paradigm of science, at least one modeled on Aristotle's conception of science, requires necessary principles. How reasonable is it to take this remark at face value? Could Aristotle really be saying that fluctuation is ever-present in matters of conduct? It is hard to see how this could be the claim given Aristotle's discussion of the human function and the role it plays in determining the good for human beings. Moreover, the way Aristotle presents and characterizes the nature of happiness (*eudaimonia*) speaks strongly against the idea that everything in matters of conduct fluctuates. Given that the human function consists in performing activities that accord with a rational nature, there are as a matter of fact certain activities that are beneficial for human beings and others that are detrimental. The former are to be pursued while the latter are to be avoided (*NE* 1107a10). In addition, how could we possibly make sense of Aristotle's unity of virtues thesis, for example, in light of the initial interpretation?

That Aristotle could not be claiming that everything in matters of conduct lacks fixity is confirmed by the comparison with health immediately following the remark just cited. Although the right amount of food or drink or exercise may vary from individual to individual, there are certain activities that are conducive to health—taking in nourishment and getting exercise—and other that are clearly detrimental to health—jumping off tall buildings, drinking poison et cetera. When the comparison being addressed is thought of in the way suggested here, we have a way of understanding an important part of this passage that leaves the question about a deductive model of ethics open.

The passage ends with reflections about the nature of particular cases and actions in light of the characterization of general cases and actions. Since the interpretation of the passage that attributes lack of fixity to the general cases and action is not decisive, there is reason to be hesitant about making this application to the particular cases. However, it is clear that Aristotle has in mind the role of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) near the end of the passage. Since practical wisdom aims toward particular actions appearing in the minor premises of practical syllogisms, it is clear that a deductive model of ethics would not be concerned with practical wisdom insofar as it plays this role. Practical wisdom falls outside the scope of the deductive paradigm insofar as it is concerned with particulars.[6]

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[6] Although the sort of method Aristotle employs in the *Nicomachean Ethics* might be called a "practical science," the sense in which it would be a science under this construal would be loose and analogical at best. However, having made this acknowledgement, Aristotle's elaborate and detailed discussion of criteria of preferability or desirability in *Topics* III indicates that Aristotle thought that there is more precision to be had in even this portion of ethics than many wish to acknowledge. More will be said about this in Chapter 3.

2.4 Objections from Social Science[7]

In *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*, John Doris attempts to undermine the thesis that robust character traits, or virtues, provide an adequate basis for a normative account of human action. Doris argues that the character-based understanding of human behavior, which originated with the Greeks, is overturned by results furnished by experimental social psychology. More specifically, Doris argues against globalism, the view that character traits are reliably manifested, stable, and integrated. He contends that the failure of globalism leads to an endorsement of situationism. As the name of the position suggests, situationism expresses a commitment to the view that alleged character traits are a function of situations, not firmly established inner dispositions. Data gathered from a variety of situations and experiments over the last several decades make it possible to maintain that seemingly incidental features of situations can shake allegedly stable character traits.

If Doris is correct, then virtue theory as it is understood in this book is dealt a serious blow by the results of empirical research. For this reason alone, it is worth carefully examining the argument that Doris advances. An additional reason for being interested in this particular line of inquiry is that it brings us face-to-face with important findings from social psychology. Anyone with a view that ethics should be done from the armchair may think that the social sciences have little or nothing to offer the ethical theorist. However, scrutiny of the types of cases Doris examines reveals that significant issues are brought to the fore, issues whose resolutions may have profound implications for the nature of ethical inquiry. In fact, the field of psychology emerged in part from the desire to empirically test theoretical statements made by philosophers. It seems only fitting then to integrate the strengths of these disciplines to better understand human behavior.

2.4.1 What Is a Virtue?

It might be helpful to start by establishing an operative concept of virtue since much of this issue hangs on it, and we need to be sure that this dispute does not boil down to a quibble about definitions. Thinking of virtue as a type of excellence, it makes sense to speak, as Plato and Aristotle did, of the virtue or excellence of an inanimate object like a knife. The function of a knife is cutting, and the virtue of a knife is cutting well. A good knife will be a sharp knife that cuts well. Building on Plato's idea, Aristotle attempts to establish what the human good is from the function of being human. Since the function of being human is rooted in the capacity for rational activity, human excellence or virtue consists of a life of reasoning well. Aristotle's conception of reasoning well gets spelled out in terms of different kinds

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[7] This section is based largely on Winter and Tauer (2006).

of intellectual virtues. Human flourishing can only result from a life incorporating some combination of intellectual virtues. Moral virtues are excellences of different appetitive powers. *Phronēsis* is the particular intellectual virtue that directs actions to their appropriate ends. A paragon of virtue, the *phronimos* or practically wise person, has all of the moral virtues. All of the appetites of the *phronimos* are aimed toward their proper end. Here lies the basis for the idea that we do not have one virtue unless we have them all, a thesis closely related to one aspect of the globalist position.

In the context of a discussion of virtue epistemology, Robert Audi offers a careful formulation of a definition of virtue that captures the idea the Greeks were pointing toward. Audi says that "a virtue is a feature of character that has a significant tendency to influence conduct and supplies its possessor both with a normative reason indicating what sort of thing should be done in a wide range of contexts and with motivation to do such things for an appropriate kind of reason" (Audi 2001: 82). According to this conception, virtue need not always produce the most ideal action in a situation, but there will be a tendency in this direction for the agent who possesses it. Doris concurs that virtue need not always be successful, but expects there to be high statistical correlations between virtuous dispositions and virtuous actions if virtue theory offers a plausible explanation of a significant range of human behavior. The notion of character Doris attacks is constituted at least partially by "robust character traits." The idea is that possession of a robust trait is sufficient to bring about the expectation that a person who possesses it will manifest behavior caused by the trait in situations where it is appropriate to do so, even if such situations are not ideally suited for doing so (Doris 2002: 18). Our attitude, personality, and virtues should powerfully predict our behavior. The central question is whether such robust character traits or virtues exist. If they do, then it seems reasonable to think that character could be composed of such traits. If not, then there is a reasonable basis for doubting that character exists.

2.4.2 The Argument Doris Advances

Doris does not offer a formal argument supporting his overall conclusion, but it will be helpful to have a formally valid central argument before us so that it is clear what central issues are at stake. Doris does offer a key conditional which, together with another premise he supports, give us a valid argument representing his central inference. The conditional is that "if a person has a robust trait (virtue), they can be confidently expected to display trait-relevant behavior across a wide variety of trait-relevant situations, even where some or all of these situations are not optimally conducive to such behavior" (Doris 2002:18). Although this conditional refers to a singular person in the antecedent, it is clear that Doris takes it to apply to human agents more generally. Only when understood in this more general way can the conditional lead to the conclusion he wishes to get. So understood, we get the following formulation of the main argument:

1) If robust character traits or virtues provide an adequate basis for a normative account of human action, then, for the most part, human agents should display trait-relevant behavior across a wide variety of trait-relevant situations, even where some or all of these situations are not optimally conducive to such behavior.
2) For the most part, human agents do not display trait-relevant behavior across a wide variety of trait-relevant situations.
3) Therefore, robust character traits or virtues do not provide an adequate basis for a normative account of human action.

The first premise is supported largely by conceptual considerations about what robust character traits or virtues are. To have a robust character trait requires having the disposition to act in a certain sort of way in the circumstances relevant to the trait. But having the disposition is not enough; acting on it is required as well. This implies that we should expect certain kinds of behavior from individuals who possess the relevant trait in the appropriate types of circumstances. For example, if someone is generous, we would expect such a person to be willing to offer her resources to others when it would be good to do so. A generous person would be the kind of person who, for instance, would offer to pick up the tab at a lunch, would be happy to loan money to people in need, or can be expected to lend a hand to a neighbor who requires help. It is too much to say that we could always expect such behavior from a generous person because powerful situational factors might impede the character trait from being manifested. This is why the phrase "for the most part" is part of the consequent of the first premise. Furthermore, part of what it means to have a robust character trait is that a person who possesses it acts from a stable disposition even in circumstances where it might be difficult to do so, and not just in situations where the conditions are ideal. A generous person offers to pick up a lunch tab even when his financial situation is a bit tight, or helps a neighbor even when there are other commitments to which he could be attending.

The second premise is supported by the empirical data Doris considers. Let us briefly summarize a few of the examples he discusses. One case involves an experiment in which a caller leaves a phone booth to find a woman dropping a folder full of papers to the ground. Does the caller stop to help the woman? Alice Isen and Paula Levin found that placing a dime in the change slot of the phone had a dramatic and unpredicted effect on the caller's behavior (Isen and Levin 1972: 384–88). Only four percent of callers who did not find a dime helped; eighty-four percent who found a dime did help. If robust character traits like compassion are stable, we would not expect an event as insignificant as finding a dime would have such a significant impact on compassionate behavior.

A second case concerned college seminarians who were asked to fill out questionnaires in a study of religious education and vocations (Darley and Batson 1973: 100–08). After completing the questionnaires, seminarians were told either they were running late, were right on time, or were early for the second phase of the test in the next building. In the doorway of the second building an actor was placed, dressed poorly and slumped over, pretending to be in distress. Only ten percent of seminarians who believed they were in a hurry stopped to assist the person who appeared to

need help, compared to sixty-three percent who thought they were early and had a few minutes to spare. We may ask how something as seemingly insignificant as time pressure can have such a dramatic effect on helping behavior. In fact, time pressure has been shown to be a powerful situational variable that affects behaviors across a wide range of contexts and cultures (Levine 1998).

Doris also makes much of the famous experiments of Stanley Milgram in which participants display destructive behavior with very little inducement. In the early 1960s Milgram gathered approximately one thousand participants from a wide range of socioeconomic groups for what they were told was a study of the effects of punishment on learning. The test was set up so that a confederate learner received simulated shocks from the participant who played the role of a teacher. An ostensible experimenter oversaw the test and gave guidance when needed. Supposedly, electrical shocks were administered by a device under the control of the participant playing the role of the teacher to the confederate, but the shocks were only believed by the participant to be real. The confederate was simulating the effect of being shocked. As he responded incorrectly to a word association test, the participant was instructed to administer simulated shocks of increasing severity. If the participant was reluctant to deliver more severe shocks as the test went on, the experimenter responded with a set of standardized verbal prods such as "Please continue," "The experiment requires that you continue," "It is absolutely essential that you continue," and "You have no choice, you must go on." The experimenter proceeded from the weakest to the strongest prod if the participant refused to cooperate. If the participant refused after the sharpest prod, the experiment stopped. Milgram found that a majority of participants were willing to administer torturous levels of pain with only the polite insistence of an experimenter. Among other things, this experiment shows the dramatic impact of an authority figure on a person's behavior. We might ask why ordinary people were willing to mete out extreme punishment under these conditions or why the robust character traits that would presumably block such outcomes are not apparent.

These cases are brought forward by Doris as evidence to support the situationist thesis. This evidence does provide some reason for thinking that the second premise of the main argument is true. For the most part, human agents cannot be confidently expected to display trait-relevant or virtuous behavior across a wide variety of trait-relevant situations. Relatively minor features of situations can have a profound impact on human behavior.

2.4.3 A Critique of Doris' Argument

Although there is much to be learned from these specific cases and from paying careful attention to the data that social psychology provides, there is good reason to doubt the soundness of the main argument that Doris advances. The desired conclusion is drawn hastily from the data. There are resources within virtue theory that can explain much of the behavior observed in the experiments.

There is an ambiguity in the argument, and how the ambiguity is understood has implications for what should be said about each of the premises. We may ask how the phrase "human agents" is supposed to be understood in the argument. If the phrase is understood to refer to agents who allegedly possess a robust character trait or virtue, then it is doubtful that Doris has established the truth of the second premise. If, alternatively, the phrase "human agents" is understood as referring to agents who are not supposed to possess robust traits or virtues in the first place, then it is doubtful that the first premise is true.

The task of showing the first premise to be false would seem to be as straightforward as showing that robust character traits or virtues could have real explanatory power even though, for the most part, human agents cannot be confidently expected to display trait relevant behavior in circumstances where such behavior is appropriate. If the human agents studied are people randomly selected from the general population, then there is good reason to think that such people will not display behavior consistent with robust character traits for the reason that we should not expect to find robust traits or virtues in their fully developed states widely spread among the general populace. Virtue theorists consistently maintain that the full-fledged virtues are difficult to acquire, so they should be somewhat unusual to find in their developed form. But if "human agents" in the first premise is taken to refer to people who have robust traits or virtues in the first place, then the first premise may be a conceptual truth since displaying the behavior appropriate to a virtue in a wide range of circumstances is part of what it means to have a virtue.

We may ask if the experiments from social psychology support the second premise. If there are resources within virtue theory to explain why it is that we get the sorts of results we get in the studies Doris reviews, then the resources should be carefully considered. Unless no plausible explanation for the observed behavior in these experiments is available, there is good reason to take seriously the idea that robust character traits or virtues play an important explanatory role in a significant range of human behavior. Such an explanation is available, and this explanation together with the ample evidence supporting the attribution of robust character traits or virtues, provides the best overall explanation of the relevant behavior.

There are presumptive reasons for thinking that robust character traits exist and that such traits provide a good explanation of much of human conduct. In fact, the field of personality psychology rests on the assumption that our personalities do allow us to predict behavior. Thus, people who are generally regarded as being honest or kind can be expected to manifest behavior that is substantially different from the behavior expected from people who are dishonest or unkind. Military generals do not pick their most cowardly soldiers to lead a unit into battle. Seminaries are careful to try to screen out candidates who have a history of sexual indulgence. Failure to be fair-minded is a definite strike against a judicial candidate for the United States Supreme Court. All of these situations involve judgments that depend on the attribution of robust character traits. It is possible that such thinking is wrong-headed, and that people who make judgments are engaged in a form

of self-deception, but we should adopt this explanation only if there are convincing reasons for thinking that the attribution of robust character traits simply fails to explain a broad range of human behavior.

Furthermore, without appeal to virtues or robust character traits it is difficult to explain behavior in some situations. Consider a Wisconsin couple who in April of 2005 found a folder on the street with more than $42,000 in it:

> He and his wife "almost simultaneously" looked at each other and said they had to get the accordion-style folder to the police, he said, and they never considered keeping the money. "We were not brought up that way," he said. He dropped his wife off at the clinic and took the folder straight to the police (Associated Press April 22, 2005).

Doris would likely say that occasional cases of seemingly honest behavior do not establish the existence of honesty. He might remind us that the second premise says that for the most part, human agents cannot be confidently expected to display trait-relevant behavior across a wide variety of trait-relevant situations. Doris might insist that isolated cases of apparently virtuous behavior do not undermine this claim. In doing so, he would fail to notice the importance of gathering participants who genuinely possess the virtue in question for the experiment. We can expect results to closely align with what Doris points to in the experiments he relies on if a group of participants is not carefully screened. What this shows is that many people lack the relevant virtue. It does not show that honesty fails to explain an important class of human behavior.

A virtue theorist may point out that it is not clear that participants involved in such cases possess full-fledged virtues in the first place. If participants possess character traits that fall short of full virtues, then it may not be surprising to see these results. Aristotle's account of the matter has two intermediate states between full virtue and full vice, strength of will and weakness of will, and both are relatively unstable. By Aristotle's account of the matter, strength and weakness of will are prevalent in the general populace. Hence, we should ask whether weakness can be used to explain the results we find in such cases. The behavior of participants in the Milgram experiments does seem to fit the pattern of weakness of will. It is plausible to think that a large majority of the participants think that it is abhorrent to inflict pain on others gratuitously, but that the pressures of the situation make it difficult to act on this knowledge.

Weakness may also be used to explain why the college seminarians fail to help someone who appears to be in need. Time pressures and the strong desire to perform well on the test may cloud a person's ability to see the more important good. It is hard to know for sure whether weakness of will is the appropriate explanation of the behavior in this case, but it does not seem unlikely that it is.

The phone booth scenario presents a different type of phenomenon. In this case it is likely that there is some desire that overpowers a person's knowledge of the right thing to do. The distinction between automatic and controlled processing is helpful here, where automatic processing describes immediate, snap decisions while controlled processing describes more deliberate or planned out behaviors. Given how the phone booth experiment is set up, it is much more probable that individuals

in the experiment are engaged in automatic processing, a fact that would explain their snap decisions. In other words, it is not likely that participants involved in these situations are engaged in the thoughtful, planned behaviors usually associated with controlled processing. From the phone booth scenario we learn that a person's mood has a dramatic effect on his behavior—much more than introspection would seem to reveal. The fact that finding a dime has a significant influence on mood is another interesting discovery, but this by itself does not show anything significant about robust character traits. It suggests that the reactions observed may not be completely in the control of the participants, at least in the way reactions would be if such powerful subconscious drives were not operative.

What seems to be needed is an additional test to determine what participants do once they become aware of the powerful force of such drives. Once a person has experienced how finding some change affects mood and is fully aware of it, we may ask how the person would act when encountering someone in need. Once someone becomes fully aware of the profound effects that being in a group has on behavior, how does the person act in the future? If individuals had such knowledge, it is not clear that we would get the same results we observe. But even if we did get the same results in the face of such knowledge, weakness of will would still be a possible explanation. Learning the results of Doris's examples would likely affect the future conduct of the virtuous person. In fact, some work in social psychology has been done to explore ways to increase the correlation between attitudes and behavior. For example, asking participants to carefully think about their attitudes generally strengthens the link between attitude and behavior. In addition, strong attitudes are generally better predictors of behavior than weak attitudes. Taken together, such examples illustrate that although attitudes and behavior are not perfectly correlated, there are certain people, and certain types of attitudes, that may be quite predictive of behavior, supporting the claim that virtues can and do exist.

There is a type of test we can use to see whether certain types of behavior undercut a character-based understanding. If a phenomenon is alleged to be a counterexample to an analysis, stipulate the analysis to be correct and ask whether the phenomenon would still arise. If it does, then the phenomenon does not show that the analysis is not correct (Kripke 1991: 85). We may say then that robust character traits or virtues provide an adequate basis for a normative account of human action, while seemingly insignificant facts dramatically influence action. We should expect this outcome because of several factors including the possible absence of robust character traits in people tested, weakness of will as a possible explanation of observed behavior, and the likely prevalence of automatic processing in these scenarios. Further testing of the same participants may give us information that could be used to determine whether or not the character-based analysis has to be abandoned, but it is not clear that the tests that Doris highlights show that the character-based analysis should be given up.

Another peculiarity of the argument that Doris advances is that the very claim that insubstantial factors have a substantial influence on behavior seems to be a conceptual claim. This is peculiar because Doris insists on doing away with a priori reasoning in ethics. It seems to be an empirical matter to determine which factors

of situations are insubstantial. If repeated experiments show that mood dramatically affects helping behavior, there is an important lesson to be learned from this discovery. The lesson is that we ought to attend to our mood and our values more carefully than it may initially seem. We might also learn that environment influences our actions more than we expect, that the effect of peers on our behavior is dramatic, or that authority figures have a profound impact on how we act in a situation. If robust character traits exist, then we would expect that coming to know these types of principles through experience is part of what it takes to develop robust character traits.

The examples Doris provides do not establish the conclusion he draws. At best, they show that character is more fragile than a priori considerations would suggest. Indeed, behavior is complex, resulting from a dynamic combination of numerous personality and situational variables. Most social psychologists agree that our two basic social needs are to feel good about ourselves, and to form an accurate view of the world. When these two needs conflict, often we choose to satisfy the need to feel good over the need to form an accurate view. This seems similar to our choosing to behave in accord with the immediate situational demands rather than our virtues. However, there are certainly cases where individuals will choose to form an accurate impression of the world, even at the expense of their feelings, in the same way that there are people who choose to behave according to their virtues, ignoring subtle or strong situational forces.

The main argument that Doris advances trades on an important ambiguity in the phrase "human agents." If the phrase is understood to mean human agents who possess the relevant virtues, then the second premise has not been established. If the phrase is taken to mean human agents who might lack the virtues, then the first premise is vulnerable.

2.5 Objections from Ethical Theory

A long-standing tenet of virtue theory is that moral virtue and knowledge are connected in some important way. Plato famously held that virtue and knowledge are simply the same thing. Aristotle had a more complex view of the matter, distinguishing between moral and intellectual virtue, and arguing that one specific intellectual virtue, *phronēsis*, was a necessary condition for having the moral virtues. Aristotle's idea, roughly, was that moral virtues are perfections of different appetites. But perfection of an appetite consists of aiming at and reliably hitting the mean. *Phronēsis* is the perfection or excellence of the part of the intellect that does the aiming. So, for example, courage is concerned with actions in the face of fears and danger. Aristotle's idea is that the sort of reliability in choosing what to do in the face of danger in an array of circumstances requires a stable disposition that enables a person to act immediately if necessary without having to think the action through. But this stable disposition is acquired by having experience, either first-hand or observed, with dangerous situations, which enables a person to make good judgments about

how to react in the face of danger. The good judgment that results is capable of shaping one's own actions, hopefully resulting in habits with lots of repetition. Having knowledge to guide the appetites is a key element of this story.

But does moral virtue always depend on knowledge? Might there be moral virtue in the absence of knowledge? Surely we can think of cases of people who act virtuously with little or no formal education. What about the idea of virtues that require ignorance, such as modesty or humility? Don't these virtues involve underestimating one's own abilities or accomplishments?

Julia Driver attacks the traditional assumption that virtue requires knowledge (Driver 2001). Overturning this long-held presupposition is an important part of the case she makes for a consequentialist theory of virtue. Although her presentation of a consequentialist virtue theory is intriguing and sophisticated, we will focus on her attack on traditional virtue theory in this section. We shall see that the examples of virtues of ignorance that she offers are not compelling, and that her argument for the claim that acting from intention is not necessary for virtue is flawed. As a result, her attempt to sever virtue from knowledge, as interesting and provocative as it is, should not lead us to abandon the principle that virtue requires knowledge. On the contrary, the idea that knowledge is required for virtue has been taken to be foundational for virtue theory for good reason, and we shall see why as we proceed.

2.5.1 Virtues of Ignorance?

Why think that at least some virtues depend on ignorance? Consider modesty, blind charity, trust, and forgiveness (Driver 2001: chap. 2). Modesty might be taken to involve underestimating one's own worth. Blind charity is thinking well of others in spite of their flaws. It is compelling to say that modesty, when understood this way, and blind charity involve ignorance in some important way—the modest make an underestimation while the blindly charitable fail to recognize character flaws in others. Doesn't trust involve believing in someone even against the evidence? The old adage "forgive and forget" indicates that a forgiving person is one who willfully ignores important information about someone by whom they may have been wronged. Of course, we might wonder whether any of the aforementioned character traits are genuine virtues. The fact they involve ignorance has been taken by some to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of that claim that they are virtues (Flanagan 1990: 426). But this type of response begs the more general question posed here. If we wonder whether some virtues could require ignorance, we need to consider the candidate virtues that seem to require ignorance to see whether they in fact do. It might turn out that some or all of the proposed virtues of ignorance are not virtues at all, but we cannot simply claim this up front without assuming what needs to be shown. Julia Driver takes modesty to be a "paradigm case of this type of virtue" (Driver 2001: 16). Since modesty has been discussed in recent literature, let us focus on it to see whether it does turn out to be a virtue of ignorance or not.

2.5.2 Driver's Argument

Let us step back for a moment and consider the nature of the argument Driver makes for the conclusion that knowledge is not necessary for virtue. We might represent it along the following lines:

1) If there are virtues that require ignorance, then there are virtues based on an epistemic defect.
2) If there are virtues based on an epistemic defect, then knowledge is not necessary for virtue.
3) There are virtues that require ignorance.
4) So, knowledge is not necessary for virtue.

Premise (1) seems correct to the extent that we think of ignorance as an epistemic defect. As long as we think of a defect broadly, as some type of deficiency, then this claim is uncontroversial. (2) is more ambitious, but looks right. If there is even one case where a character trait that we would identify as a virtue but which is also based on or requires some type of epistemic deficiency, wouldn't we have to give up on the idea that virtue requires knowledge? It is important to keep in mind that Driver only needs one good example of a virtue of ignorance to establish (3), and she features modesty as her best specimen. (3) is the dubious claim. We should doubt that modesty when properly understood requires ignorance. What is needed is a better account of modesty – one that better explains cases of what we would ordinarily identify as exemplars of modesty – than the one Driver offers. If this alternative account has at least as much explanatory power as the alternative proposed, then there is not good reason for accepting (3).

2.5.3 What Is Modesty?

It might be helpful to begin with some idea of how modesty is usually understood so that we are in a good position to see problems and obstacles that any other proposal might have to overcome. Let us start with the theological conception of modesty, which involves thinking that any value in one's own accomplishments is attributable to God, but any defects in one's own deeds are not attributable to God (Schueler 1997). If we take this view seriously, then a Nobel Prize winner who defers praise is modest because her winning the prize is due to gifts she has been given by God. As impressive as the faith of such individuals might be, one serious problem with this conception of modesty is, as G.F. Schuler points out, "it makes the low-opinion account of modesty (or humility) plausible only at the cost of holding that no one ever genuinely deserves credit for any of her successes" (Schueler 1997: 471). In other words, the theological account of modesty that makes all of our accomplishments attributable to God has the implication that nobody ever really deserves to be praised. But it does seem that people do deserve praise in at least some cases. Furthermore, this proposal requires accepting some sort of belief in God, which will be problematic for many.

Schueler offers an alternative proposal, which involves having made significant accomplishments but not caring whether others value these accomplishments highly (Schueler 1997: 479). So, by this account, the Nobel Prize winner is modest because he is indifferent to the praise bestowed on him by others. Notice that according to both this account and the theological account, modesty involves knowledge of one's abilities. The theological account makes God responsible for these abilities, and thereby deserving of any praise. Schueler's account makes the individual knowledgeable of his accomplishments and the appropriate object of praise. What is distinctive about Schueler's account is the attitudinal shift in the recipient of praise—the indifference to praise is what makes such a person modest. There are a couple of problems with Schueler's proposal. First, it would seem that the modest would care, at least in some respect, about the opinions of others (Driver 2001: 23). In other words, Schueler's account seems too strong in requiring this indifference, for at least some modest people might really care about what others think about his or her accomplishments. A further concern is that a person who is modest in this sense might not care about the opinions of others for some bad reason. They may have contempt for the views of everyone (Driver 2001: 23).

As an alternative, let us consider the following account of modesty, which captures many of our intuitions about what the virtue involves while avoiding some of the problems just mentioned. The account involves three conditions: a) having genuine accomplishments, b) being aware of the value of these accomplishments, and c) having a disposition to refrain from putting forward one's accomplishments.

Condition (a) is not likely to be contested. Modesty does not really apply to cases where someone has not accomplished something significant. (b) is a condition that fits with more traditional accounts of modesty. For example, Aristotle does not offer a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that separate modesty from its excess and defect, but he does insist that modesty involves truthfulness and awareness about what one has accomplished (NE 1127 a20–25). (c) is where the account offered here makes explicit a condition which is, at most, implicit in traditional characterizations of modesty. (c), of course, rules out boasting, but might involve stating one's accomplishments, probably reluctantly, if pressed into a situation where this is unavoidable.

2.5.4 A Response to Driver's Argument

Now that we have before us an alternative account of modesty that requires that the modest person be knowledgeable, let us focus our attention back on premise (3) from Driver's argument above. Are there virtues that require ignorance? How does Driver's contention that modesty requires ignorance fare in comparison to the account just proposed? Driver begins with her own analysis with the sentence "I am modest," thinking that a good account of modesty should explain the oddity of uttering this sentence. There are situations in which the claim would be odd, such

as ones in which someone proudly or publicly proclaims the virtue of modesty. It is contexts of this sort that probably function as backdrop for this claim when we first think of it being made. But there are cases in which uttering the claim would not be so odd. Imagine that an eminent cellist who is not disposed to highlight her own skills is asked to give a speech entitled "What it is like to be the world's premier cellist." When asked, the star musician might not recommend that someone else give the speech, realizing that she is the world's premier musician in her field. But the cellist, not wanting to offend, might decline by privately saying "I am modest." There doesn't seem to be anything unusual about saying "I am modest" in this context because an honest person is forced by the circumstances to state what is known to be true even though such a person is inclined not to make public proclamations about the superiority of her own musical abilities.

Consider the example of Erik Demaine, a whiz kid who entered university at age 12 and finished at age 14, was hired as a faculty member at MIT at the ripe of age of 20. When interviewed by PBS about some groundbreaking work of his related to using computer models to create brilliant Oragami puzzles, he insisted that his status as a child prodigy was irrelevant to his current work. We see here the same sort of pattern as in the other examples of modesty. Someone has a characteristic or accomplishment that is unusually exemplary, so much so that others want to highlight it. The recipient of praise, who is modest, does not deny the accomplishment, but rather wishes not to focus on it. This seems more like genuine modesty or humility.

One more example reinforces the point well. Bill Gates, who is arguably the most successful person in the computer software business, shows genuine modesty when he attributes much of his success to luck. Malcolm Gladwell tells a story about Bill Gates that makes sheer good fortune a much more important factor in his climb to the top of the computer industry than we might think (Gladwell 2008). After telling the story of Gates's early formation, Gladwell summarizes the features of Gates's good fortune and opportunity:

> Opportunity number one was that Gates got sent to Lakeside. How many high schools in the world had access to a time-sharing terminal in 1968? Opportunity number two was that the mothers of Lakeside had enough money to pay for the school's computer fees. Number three was that, when the money ran out, one of the parents happened to work at C-Cubed, which happened to need someone to check its code on the weekends, and which also happened not to care if weekends turned into weeknights. Number four was that Gates just happened to find out about ISI, and ISI just happened to need someone to work on its payroll software. Number five was that Gates happened to live within walking distance of the University of Washington. Number six was that the university happened to have free computer time between three and six in the morning. Number seven was that TRW happened to call Bud Pembroke. Number eight was that the best programmers Pembroke knew for that particular problem happened to be two high school kids. And number nine was that Lakeside was willing to let those kids spend their spring term miles away, writing code (Gladwell 2008: 54).

Reflecting back on these early experiences that made his future accomplishments possible, and when asked how many teenagers in the world had this kind of experience, Gates said:

> If there were fifty in the world, I would be stunned. There was C-Cubed and the payroll stuff we did, then TRW—all those things came together. I had a better exposure to software development at a young age than I think anyone did in that period of time, and all because of an incredibly lucky series of events (Gladwell 2008: 55).

Now, of course, to emphasize the role of good fortune in this story is not to minimize some of the personal qualities and skills needed to become one the world's top business leaders. But Gates does not mention the latter. It is striking that Gates would highlight what an important role luck had played in making possible the circumstances that allowed him to flourish in business. This is a good illustration of modesty. Many people would have highlighted their own abilities, but a modest person tends not to focus on those. The modest person tends to recognize the importance of factors outside of his control instead. This real example of modesty does not seem to rest on ignorance.

Similar things should be said about the other alleged virtues of ignorance. Blind charity, insofar is it involves ignoring someone's defects, is not a virtue at all. Someone who fails to see the shortcomings of others is putting himself in a potentially dangerous or hurtful situation. Imagine dating someone who is rude and offensive to others. Isn't it likely that these character defects will do a relationship harm in the long run? Is it really possible for a good person to overlook such shortcomings indefinitely? Of course, we admire people who try to highlight the strengths of others, and who do not focus on shortcomings, but this thinking well of others takes place in the context of knowing full well what those shortcomings are. Placing trust in others requires faith in another person's character, and faith goes beyond what is strictly known, but this does not imply that trust requires ignorance in the relevant sense. To trust someone with a secret is to share with them information with the expectation that they will not share it with others. We usually become vulnerable in trusting others, and this is why we place trust in those who we find trustworthy. In other words, based on what we know about a person, we expect that they might be worthy of keeping a secret. Both trust and modesty seem to be equally dependent on knowledge. We are reluctant to trust people about whom we know little. And finally, when we forgive and forget, we give up a grudge we have against someone for a wrong they may have done. We overcome our anger so that our relationship can move on. But this does not mean that we entirely block the event to be forgiven out of mind. If my daughter does something to severely betray my trust and I discover this, I may with time come to a point where I forgive her, which means I have overcome my anger toward her for her transgression, but this does not mean that I completely block the event out of my mind forever. It is highly unlikely that this is even psychologically possible.

We should reject premise (3) of Driver's argument. Since there is a good account of modesty that explains why genuine cases of modesty should be classified as virtues, there is no solid reason to think that virtues do not require knowledge.

2.5.5 Virtue and Good Intentions

Continuing with the attack on traditional virtue theory, Driver attempts to sever good intentions from virtue. The pattern of argumentation is similar to what we have seen

already. There is a traditional view, going back at least as far as the Greeks, that has it that acting virtuously requires having good intentions. But close examination seems to reveal that this assumption about the relationship between virtue and good intentions is unfounded. Therefore, we should give up virtue theory as it has been traditionally conceived. Here is a formulation of the main argument:

(2a) If a person can act virtuously from feeling, but against what he takes to be right, then acting virtuously does not require good intentions.
(2b) A person can act virtuously from feeling, but against what he takes to be right.
(2c) Acting virtuously does not require good intentions.

(2a) is based on what it means to act from good intentions. Let us just stipulate that acting from good intentions is acting on the basis of what a person understands to be right. (2b) is a controversial claim and Driver is quite aware that it requires support and elaboration. The claim is to a large extent supported by the example of Huck Finn who, in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, is portrayed by Mark Twain as having a bad morality. This is the way that Huck's morality is classified by Jonathan Bennett in *The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn* (Bennett 1989). Huck believes that slavery is right. So Huck's morality is bad. In accepting a bad moral principle that is widely embraced in his culture, and after helping to free his slave friend Jim, the pangs of conscience bother Huck, so he thinks he may have done the wrong thing. So he sets his mind to turning Jim in, but realizes that he cannot do it because his feelings for Jim are too strong. Huck cannot bring himself to do what he thinks is morally right.

Jonathan Bennett characterizes this conflict in Huck as a case of weakness of will. He states his main point eloquently:

> And when the moment for final decision come, Huck doesn't weigh up pros and cons; he simply fails to do which he believes to be right—he isn't strong enough, hasn't "the spunk of a rabbit." This passage in the novel is notable not just for its finely wrought irony, with Huck's weakness of will leading him to do the right thing, but also for its masterly handling of the difference between general moral principles and particular unreasoned emotional pulls (Bennett 1989: 31).

The fact that Bennett describes Huck's situation as involving weakness of the will indicates that Bennett is not saying that feeling can take the place of principles in practical reasoning, but rather that feelings might overpower or override certain kinds of principles—what Aristotle calls particulars or minor premises of practical syllogisms. Weakness of the will involves a conflict between knowledge and action, but the knowledge of a more general principle must be in place for there to be a conflict at all.

The Aristotelian would agree with Bennett that Huck Finn demonstrates weakness of will, albeit weakness of a strange sort. Weakness of will involves a conflict between knowledge and action due to ignorance.

As one might expect, Driver does not understand the Huck Finn case along traditional Aristotelian lines. Instead, she takes Huck to exemplify how (2b) is true. Huck fails to turn Jim in despite moral principles he holds that push in the opposite direction. Huck is moved by his feelings for Jim and not by moral principles. Driver says:

> It is Huckleberry's *sympathy* with Jim that constitutes the virtue and conflicts with what he believes to be right. Huckleberry may be interpreting the sympathy he feels for Jim as some sort of unwarranted favoritism. It would be the sort of favoritism condemned by morality as being incompatible with justice. Jim is his friend, but it is not morally permissible to aid one's friends in crime, in stealing property from a little old lady (Driver 2001: 53).

So if Huck's situation is best understood as being a case in which a person does the right thing and acts virtuously from feeling against what he takes to be right, then it looks like the general thesis that virtue requires acting from good intentions is false, which would be a serious strike against a traditional understanding of virtue theory. But we should be reluctant to accept this result because it is not clear that (2b) follows from the Huck Finn example. In the next section an analysis of that case from the point of view of a more traditional approach to Aristotelian virtue theory will be offered. Since this explanation offers a good account of what is going on with Huck without giving up on the idea that acting virtuously requires having good intentions, we should embrace the explanation inspired by a more traditional understanding of weakness of will instead. In other words, there is an issue of burden of proof that Driver faces, and it does not seem as though her challenge has met this burden.

2.5.6 An Alternative Analysis of the Huck Finn Case

Let us say a bit more about the Aristotelian analysis of weakness of will because doing so puts us in a better position to understand how moral principles and feelings might interact and possibly conflict with one another. According to the Aristotelian analysis of weakness of will, weakness involves a conflict between knowledge and action—a person acts against what he or she takes to be correct. Socrates thought that genuine conflicts of this sort would be impossible because allowing for conflicts between knowledge and action seems to imply that knowledge could be overpowered by desire. But if that is possible, then knowledge would not be the ruling element within us. So these principles seem to lead to a denial of genuine weakness. In responding to Socrates, Aristotle argues that weakness involves ignorance, but only a qualified type of ignorance. He distinguishes between ignorance of general principles and ignorance of particulars, and says that weakness only involves ignorance of the latter. So weakness is possible, contrary to what Socrates thought.

   In presenting his analysis of weakness of will, Aristotle uses a tool that has been come to be known as the practical syllogism. The practical syllogism is a tool for explaining how we put our moral principles into practice. It has a major premise that represents a general moral principle, a minor premise that identifies some particular action that falls under the moral principle in the major, and a conclusion that specifies what ought to be done. Something along these lines:

Major Premise: Actions of kind x ought/ought not be done.
Minor Premise: Doing this is an action of kind x.
Conclusions: This ought/ought not be done.

So if I accept the moral principle that lying is wrong, and I see that telling my boss I am sick today is a lie, I will see that I ought not tell my boss that I am sick today when I am not. Now in weakness of will, I have a desire that is strong enough to block this form of reasoning from going through. So, I would still accept the general moral principle that lying is wrong, but I fail to see my act of telling my boss that I am sick as a lie because of my strong desire to do something else besides going to work. To reiterate, weakness does not involve full-fledged ignorance because the agent who is weak knows the major premise or general moral principle. The agent fails to see the minor premise due to desire or feelings. And, as Bennett emphasizes, it is feelings that are decisive for Huck. One clear signal that Huck's case is a case of weakness is the regret he displays after he refuses to give Jim up. Huck decides to relinquish any type of principled morality going forward, opting for the view that he will do whatever seems right at the time.

Mark Twain's portrayal of Huck Finn's moral weakness leading to the right action is clever and striking. Equally striking is the recognition that Aristotle seemed to be aware of this sort of situation. Early in his discussion of weakness of the will when dealing with preliminary considerations, Aristotle says:

> There is an argument from which it follows that folly coupled with incontinence is virtue; for a man does the opposite of what he judges, owing to incontinence, but judges what is good to be evil and something that he should not do, and in consequence he will do what is good and not what is evil (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1146a27–30).

It is noteworthy that Aristotle classifies the idea that such a state of affairs could come from virtue as a "sophistical argument." We are not given a direct response to this argument, but Aristotle apparently believed that his analysis of weakness contains the ingredients for a response. We shall soon consider how that analysis might apply to Huck Finn's case. First, it should be noted that Driver seems to equate being virtuous with doing the right thing. Huck does the right thing, but he is not virtuous because he fails to have a virtuous disposition. According to a more traditional understanding of virtue theory, having a virtuous disposition and doing the right thing are not equivalent because having a virtuous disposition requires doing the right thing for the right reasons. Driver foresees this Aristotelian response and says the following:

> Many writers on virtue, particularly those concerned with defending the Aristotelian position, will argue that Huck Finn is not a *virtuous* person. This is because there is a psychological failure present: his feelings and his moral understanding are not in harmony. Such a flawed person cannot be a moral exemplar (Driver 2001: 53).

But it is not only the lack of harmony between feelings and understanding that is problematic from an Aristotelian point of view. It is also the ignorance of the appropriate moral principle in this peculiar case. In any event, Driver responds by noting that the Aristotelian stance, that Huck is not virtuous, follows from an elitist conception of virtue where the virtuous person stands above us ordinary folks as a moral exemplar. Driver characterizes her own position as being "about as nonelitist as one could hope for" (Driver 2001: 53).

How might we attempt to settle this issue about opting for elitism or nonelitism? Driver obviously thinks that nonelitism is preferable. The reason the Aristotelian position ends up being committed to this elitism, in her view, is that it is concerned with making the virtuous person reliable. But she takes this to be a red herring.

> I agree that sensitivity to the morally relevant features of a situation is important... Huckleberry Finn is sensitive to Jim's plight—it moves him in the way it should. Thus, he possesses a virtue. The trait is reliable—he would do the same for Jim over and over again in a variety of contexts...

> Virtue must be accessible—to those who are not wise but kind; to those who had the misfortune to grow up in repressive environments that warped their understanding, yet who are capable of showing the appropriate compassionate responses to human suffering; to those who, like most of us, possess some intellectual or moral flaw (Driver 2001: 54).

It is very reasonable to think the sort of sensitivity Driver highlights here is a key aspect of how good moral agents act. One reason that many find virtue theory attractive is that virtue theory features this sensitivity prominently. But how could this sensitivity operate on its own in the sort of deliberate actions that Huck displays without some type of intellectual guidance? How could we say that "Huck would do the same for Jim over and over in a variety of contexts" unless there is some sort of principle that Huck is acting from that we could identify in these various contexts?

Aristotle's discussion of weakness of the will in general, and the practical syllogism in particular, is designed to show how at least some ways in which moral principles and feelings or sensitivities operate together. Feelings on their own do not produce deliberate actions. Of course, we might spontaneously react in anger when someone hurts us, but that is not the sort of thing we are talking about here. We are talking about the sort of deliberate action that leaves some room for consideration. Huckleberry Finn has a certain feeling, most likely compassion, for Jim in a specific set of circumstances. But Huck acts deliberately on that feeling only because he has internalized moral principles, whether he can consciously articulate them or not, that guide his feeling to produce an action. Huck accepts a principle about compassion that is difficult to articulate given what we know about the story. It may be a very specific principle such as:

> When a friend is fleeing from danger and I am partly responsible for putting him in this danger, I should tell his pursuers whatever is necessary to divert them from the successful pursuit of my friend.

Or the principle might be more general:

> When a friend is in danger, I should do whatever I can to help.

There are indefinitely many principles that could be specified here at different levels of generality. The only reliable way we can identify which one is operative is to have information about different types of situations. This extra information would most likely help us eliminate the more specific principles. The first of the two principles mentioned above, for example, is too specific to have the sort of repeatability to get the reliability that Driver finds in Huck's character. The second principle stems from

Huck's compassion, but is still not a very refined moral principle as stated because it leaves room for morally illicit means. Still, it is a moral principle that is capable of directing deliberate action, and given what we know about Huck's character from the rest of the novel, it seems like a plausible principle to attribute to Huck. If we apply something like what Aristotle offers for explaining actions, we might get some variation of the following schema of practical reasoning:

> When a friend is in danger, I should do whatever I can to help.
> My friend Jim is in danger.
> I should do whatever I can to help Jim.
> Lying to these men will help Jim.
> I should lie to these men.

Of course, Huck does not begin with the moral principle at the top and reason through to his final decision in a top down fashion like one might do in carrying out a mathematical proof. This would be the sort of artificial hyper-intellectualizing that bothers Driver. Aristotle never suggests that this is how practical reasoning operates, and no one is proposing that we ought to think of it in this way. A better way to think of practical reasoning is that in some specific context we simply employ whatever principles we have, whether we consciously entertain the principles or not, and we do some action that results. Moral agents acquire principles in different ways, but it is reasonable to think that most of them come from induction. Again, only the more reflective will be aware of the principles they hold, and it is easy for a person to make mistakes about what principles govern their actions. We all wish to think well of ourselves, so we would imagine that the tendency would be to think that we hold loftier principles than we in fact do. We might even know principles at the highest level of generality innately, principles such as "one ought to do good", "one ought to be kind", and so on. The more specific principles that would operate at the level of minor premises of Aristotelian practical syllogisms are the ones that can be affected by desires as in the case of strength and weakness of will.

Huck's weakness of will involves his inability to act on a moral principle, albeit a bad moral principle. His compassion for Jim is what inhibits him from acting on the basis of this principle. The bad moral principle is one that prohibits helping fugitive slaves. As we have seen, this principle has special bite for Huck because it involves doing harm to Miss Watson, who has done Huck no personal harm. An explanation of Huck's weakness of will looks something like this:

> Huck's bad moral principle: *Enabling a fugitive slave ought not be done.*
> Minor Premise: *Refusing to turn Jim in enables a fugitive slave.*
> Resultant action: *I should turn Jim in.*

It makes a lot of sense to think that Huck may well have two conflicting moral principles in his morality; we might even say that this is part of what makes his morality a bad morality. Bennett does not characterize a bad morality this way, but it seems like a reasonable minimal condition for having a good morality is that it be consistent. But these two principles come into conflict in this case:

> Enabling a fugitive slave ought not be done.

and

> When a friend is in danger, I should do whatever I can to help.

Both principles play a role in practical inferences that lead to a specific action to be done. Since the principles conflict in this situation, one will have to win out over the other. What decides this? One course of reasoning is blocked or impeded by the desire present in the other course. So at the time he acts, Huck's sympathy for Jim blinds him to the idea that refusing to turn in his friend is enabling a fugitive slave. Huck follows the other course instead.

If we think of the practical syllogism as a useful tool for analyzing how practical reasoning may have proceeded in retrospect, then it is the sort of tool we can use to analyze the practical reasoning Huck Finn employs or fails to employ (Dahl 1984). Of course, one might still think that it is over-intellectualizing to employ this sort of analysis in hindsight. It is hard to see how one could make sense of acting on a feeling alone though, especially if the feeling or sensitivity is something that can be acted on in repeatable circumstances. To be able to identify or individuate the feeling or sensitivity, we would have to articulate it in terms of a moral principle. There does not appear to be any way around this point.

Driver's concern with over-intellectualizing virtue seems to stem in part from a worry that if moral principles are brought on the scene, we are left with the picture of someone standing detached from a situation calculating what should be done, which is both unrealistic and foreign to how virtue theorists would explain what happens in practical reasoning. But moral principles are features of our deliberate actions whether we consider them consciously or not. The reflective person has considered these principles and most likely has made some attempt to make them consistent.

Recall that Bennett uses the Huck Finn situation to illustrate how sympathy might override moral principles. This seems correct if the explanation takes the shape of an Aristotelian analysis of weakness of the will. As we have seen, it is crucial to this analysis that knowledge conflicts with action. Desires or sympathies are capable of hindering us from acting on some type of specific moral principle. But what Driver's critique misses is the fact that Huck seems to hold competing moral principles, and at least one of these ultimately overrides a principle of his bad morality. So at this level of analysis, there is not a battle between sympathy and moral principle, but a battle between conflicting moral principles. In other words, the triumph of sympathy over principle takes place within the context of the tension between competing moral principles. Desire plays a role in silencing considerations that would enable one type of moral principle to be operative. But we should not ignore the fact that competing principles are often at work in the sort of deliberative dilemmas that Huckleberry Finn embodies so well. Bennett does not draw our attention to this conflict between principles as this theme falls outside of the scope of his article. Driver fails to consider the conflict as it might play out in Huck's case and opts for the explanation that desire is what controls Huck. Driver's oversight of this important point leads her to abandon traditional virtue theory much too hastily.

So we have good reasons for rejecting the proposal that virtue does not require knowledge. Since this is a key tenet of virtue theory as it has been traditionally understood, we have no good reason to reject virtue theory based on this objection. We do have solid reasons for thinking that acting virtuously requires having good intentions and that a necessary condition of having a virtue is having knowledge. Although some might take these results to be trivial or obviously true, Julia Driver's challenge should not be dismissed out of hand. Although there are some reasons for thinking that some situations suggest that knowledge and virtue can be separated from one another, we have seen that close analysis reveals this impression is only surface deep.

2.6 Objections from Philosophy of Biology

Aristotle famously opens the *Nicomachean Ethics* with a remark that characterizes his teleological approach to virtue ethics "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim." These thoughts represent a deep-seated theme in Aristotle's philosophy; a commitment to the idea that a wide variety of organisms are goal-oriented in the sense that they tend toward ends. Trees and other plants tend to grow toward light. Animals are inclined to avoid predators. The view that living organisms act toward ends usually includes a commitment to final causes and is often called a teleological position. It is abundantly clear that Aristotle is committed to teleology and final causality. When we ask "What is this for?" or "For the sake of what is this done?" we are seeking an explanation in terms of a final cause.

After beginning the *Nicomachean Ethics* with the teleological claim above, Aristotle proceeds a few chapters later to refer to the function of human beings with this same teleological theme in mind:

> Now if the function of man is an activity of soul in accordance with, or not without, rational principle, and if we say a so-and-so and a good so-and-so have a function which is the same in kind, e.g. a lyre-player and a good lyre-player, and so without qualification in all cases, eminence in respect of excellence being added to the function (for the function of a lyre-player is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre-player is to do so well): if this is the case, [and we state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence: if this is the case,] human good turns out to be activity of soul in conformity with excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a6–18).

Aristotle's ethical theory is grounded in the idea that human beings have a function on the basis of which they are oriented toward a specific end, which is human flourishing. The human function or *ergon* is rational activity, and by performing actions that conform with rational activity human agents put themselves in the best position

to flourish. This general view of human nature as being constituted in a way that is fulfilled by a specific end is the basis for Aristotle's teleological conception of ethics.

Some have taken the idea that Aristotle's ethics is based on a teleological conception of human nature to be a serious reason to dismiss the theory. There are various reasons for concern about the plausibility of a teleological approach to ethics. Some have thought that Aristotle's teleology in ethics is grounded in a teleological approach to biology, and that the latter is untenable. It has been said that Darwin exorcized teleology from biology (Hull 1974). If it is true that teleology has no place within biological explanations, then it would follow that Aristotle's ethics would be dead in the water given the dependence of his ethical theory on human biology.

In this section we will consider issues about teleology in biology and in ethics, paying special attention to whether Darwinian biology entails the demise of Aristotelian ethics. There is an obvious problem with the model of Aristotelian ethics being developed here if the objection that Darwinian biology undermines Aristotelian ethics has merit. We might commit to the project of developing an Aristotelian model of an ethical theory solely as an intellectual curiosity, ignoring what Darwinism establishes. But the model being proposed in this book is presented as a plausible account of what a good ethical theory would look like. Since this model is based on a teleological conception of human beings, this conception must be defended against the Darwinian challenge if it is to be taken seriously as a view that can be successfully applied to the human condition as we now understand it. We shall see that contrary to some popular characterizations, there is good reason to think that Darwin was himself a teleologist in an important sense, and that Darwinian theory is consistent with the sort of teleology needed for Aristotle's ethical theory. There is much to be learned from considering this objection from the Darwinian camp carefully, but it does not prove to be fatal to the Aristotelian enterprise. In fact, Darwinism and a certain kind of Aristotelianism are not only consistent but complementary in some important ways.

2.6.1 Different Senses of "Teleology"

It was noted earlier that teleology is about acting toward ends. But there are at least three different senses in which thinkers have understood teleology, so it is important to identify these different senses right up front. Some have understood teleology to refer to goal- directed vital forces. Such forces are not taken to be directly observable, but proponents of such forces would argue that we observe their effects in nature. Descartes's familiar conception of the human soul represents a clear example of this sort of vitalism. Others have used the term "teleology" to refer to divinely designed adaptation. Proponents of the classical design argument for God's existence, such as William Paley, are representative how the term "teleology" is used in this second sense. The third and most subtle form of teleology is selection-based explanation founded on final causality. This third form of teleological

explanation is genuinely distinct from the first two, and it will be argued below that both Darwin and Aristotle offer systems of explanation of the natural world that appeal to teleology in this third sense.

Those who think that teleology or appeal to final causes is an outmoded form of explanation might be taken to endorse an argument of the following sort.[8]

(1) If teleological explanations are taken seriously, then one must either say that there are goal-directed vital forces in nature or that adaptation is divinely designed.
(2) There are no goal-directed vital forces in nature.
(3) Adaptation is not divinely designed.
(4) So teleological explanations should not be taken seriously.

Darwin is seen as providing a theory that overturns appeal to goal-directed vital forces and divinely designed adaption. The theory of natural selection provides a simpler and more elegant explanation of how organisms evolve than do the other alternatives. Darwinian theory supports (2) and (3) of this argument. Some have taken the view that since the first premise of the argument is obviously true, the conclusion follows straight away. David Hull expresses this extreme view bluntly when he claims that "evolutionary theory did away with teleology, and that is that" (Hull 1974). (3) is consistent with Aristotelianism. Aristotle thought that causal sequences or chains had to terminate somewhere with some ultimate cause, which he thought of as an unmoved mover. It might be possible to give up on this claim and still hold (3), but there is no need to explore this difficult line of reasoning, because (3) is consistent with a belief in an unmoved mover. Aristotle does not invoke an appeal to the divine in his biological explanations because he seems to have thought of nature as a system of substances and causes put in motion by some first cause, but not regulated by the first cause by means of direct intervention.

Aristotle's theory has more trouble accommodating (2) because Aristotle thought that living activity has to be explained by a formal principle or first actuality. Matter and form always complement one another in Aristotle's system; the soul is a first *actuality* of a body having life potentially (*De Anima* Bk.2). Just as potency and act are complementary concepts, so too are matter and form. Aristotle considered reductive materialism to be a failed theory because there are processes and operations in nature that cannot be explained in purely physical/chemical terms. For Aristotle, a soul is strictly an actuality of material. As a result, Aristotle's concept of a *psuche* or soul is quite a bit more nuanced than Plato's. Any living organism in Aristotle's system must have some formal principle or formal cause that accounts for its living operations. Plants have a formal principle that allows for their growth and reproduction. Animals have a formal principle that accounts for growth, reproduction and sensation. Human beings have a formal principle that enables them to grow, reproduce, sense and perform higher order intellectual operations such as thinking and communicating by means of language. Since there is an

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[8] Lennox (1993) does not formulate an argument in this particular way, but he does present and discuss the different types of teleology mentioned here.

intimate relation between formal and final causes in Aristotle's metaphysical system, it is very plausible to think that Aristotle did subscribe to goal directed vital forces in nature. But can one adopt Aristotle's metaphysical system without making the commitment to the existence of goal-directed vital forces? I don't think it is possible to be an Aristotelian without acknowledging goal-directedness. But what about vitality? Does the Aristotelian worldview commit us to positing vital forces in nature? Answering this question depends on what is meant by the term "vitality." The most straightforward connotation of the term has to do with living. What ultimately explains living activity? There is a continuum between theoretical attempts to explain living activity with Platonic souls at one end and molecular interactions giving rise to life at the other. Aristotle rejected both extremes, adopting a middle position. Platonic dualism and reductive materialism face serious problems of quite different sorts.

Biologists don't talk in terms of formal causes these days, but they do talk about genetic programs. Ernst Mayr proposes that we understand Aristotelian formal causes in living organisms as programs, which like formal causes are also unobserved, and which are required to explain the gap between physical processes and higher order vital activities:

> ...it is quite legitimate to employ modern terms like genetic program for *eidos* where this helps to elucidate Aristotle's thoughts. One of the reasons why Aristotle has been so consistently misunderstood is that he uses the term *eidos* for his form-giving principle, and everybody took it for granted that he had something in mind similar to Plato's concept of *eidos*. Yet, the context of Aristotle's discussions makes it abundantly clear that *his eidos* is something totally different from Plato's *eidos* (I myself did not understand this until recently). Aristotle saw with extraordinary clarity that it made no more sense to describe living organisms in terms of mere matter than to describe a house as a pile of bricks and mortar. Just as the blueprint used by the builder determines the form of a house, so does the *eidos*...give the form to the developing organism, and this *eidos* reflects the terminal *telos* of the full-blown individual...Since the modern scientist does not actually "see" the genetic progam of DNA either, it is for him just as invisible for all practical purposes as it was for Aristotle (Mayr 1988: 56–57).

Here Mayr notices how the Aristotelian formal and final causes relate to one another. Mayr sees how these concepts connect with contemporary discussions in biology. Using the concept of a genetic program to represent Aristotle's form provides an excellent way of seeing how the basic hylomorphic understanding of the world is compatible with explanation in contemporary biology.

The real problem with the argument above is premise (1). James Lennox argues persuasively that the goal directed adaptationism Darwin utilizes involves neither divine intervention nor appeal to vital forces in nature. Darwin showed that there is another form of teleology, selection-based teleology, that "...simply failed to conform to any model of teleological explanation available in the nineteenth century" (Lennox 1993: 410). Those inclined to believe that Darwin had done away with teleology were thinking of teleological explanation in terms that were too narrow. Darwin offers "...consistent arguments that natural selection acts *for the good* of

each being, and that its products *are present for* various functions, purposes and ends" (Lennox 1993: 411).[9] Lennox goes on to note that:

> If a variation functions in a particular environment, in a way that increases its relative frequency in subsequent generations, that variation is selectively favored *because of* that function. The (relatively) advantageous consequences of that variation are (part of) the causal basis of its presence in the population. Darwin's explanation thus displays the "selection" teleology defended recently by a variety of biologists and philosophers of a neo-Darwinian persuasion (Lennox 1993: 414).

So premise (1) of the main argument is not true. The argument is not sound. There is a form of teleological explanation used by Darwin that is consistent with the type of explanation by appeal to final causes needed in Aristotle's biology.

2.6.2 Teleology in Aristotle's Ethics

Going back to the *Nicomachean Ethics* passage from Aristotle that began this section, we can see how the point Mayr makes applies to the core of Aristotle's thought. The human function, which is rational activity, represents the *eidos* or form of human beings. Rational activity is oriented toward human flourishing, which is the *telos* or goal of human activity. There is an intimate relationship between the formal cause and the final cause in Aristotle's thinking, and this relationship is featured at the core of his ethical theory.

The argument about the human function in the paragraph that began this section contains an analogical comparison that begins with an inanimate object, a lyre, and moves from there to plants and then animals and then on to human beings. It might be helpful to think a bit more about how these points about formal and efficient causes are related in inanimate objects to see how well salient points carry over into the animate world. Let us consider a flat-bladed screwdriver, which has a very clear and easily identifiable function: to turn in and twist out certain types of screws. If we were unfamiliar with this type of tool and were to pick it up and ask a mechanic what it is for, he could easily explain. The explanation would appeal to the final cause of the screwdriver. In the case of tools, they are designed with a specific purpose in mind. The formal cause of the screwdriver is its structure, the way its material is shaped. Good screwdrivers have a handle that is comfortable to grip and twist. The shaft and blade are made from a type of steel that does not bend or break easily. These formal elements are intimately connected with the purpose of the screwdriver or the reason it was made. In other words, the screwdriver has the type of handle and blade it has because these better serve the purpose of performing the function of the screwdriver: inserting and removing screws. A blade made from plastic would not serve this purpose very well nor would a handle made of ice. Screwdrivers can perform tasks falling outside of their designated function, but they do not ordinarily perform these other tasks as well as they perform tasks that directly connect to their

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[9] Lennox cites (Darwin 1964: 149, 152, 224, 237, 451).

function. For example, one might open a lock with a screwdriver if there is no key available, but a screwdriver is likely to damage the lock. A key will do a much cleaner job of it because a key is built for this task.

Most of these points about the function or purpose of a screwdriver apply directly to the human case. Human beings have a specific function, which is rational activity. There are certain types of activities that are conducive to this function, such as developing one's mind or cultivating creative talents. There are other activities that frustrate this function, e.g., drinking poison, treating others cruelly, et cetera. Human flourishing, which Aristotle calls *eudaimonia*, is the final cause or goal for human beings. Our form or function, having a rational nature, is what determines this end for human beings. We would say that a tomato plant flourishes when it grows full and produces juicy, sweet fruit. The general point is no different in the human case. We have the best chance of flourishing when we are in an environment that facilitates the development of our intellectual and aesthetic potential. The right kind of environment or even the best type of education does not assure human flourishing because of the complexity of human nature. There are many factors that can impede flourishing in even the best of circumstances. But the presence of internal or external impediments does not undercut the presence of an underlying nature or function.[10]

The main point of disanalogy between an instrument like a screwdriver and a plant, animal or human being is that a screwdriver is obviously and uncontroversially an artifact created by a designer for a specific purpose. The claim that living organisms are created by a designer is far from uncontroversial, and Darwinism is usually taken to show that there is a perfectly good naturalistic explanation of the adaption and development of living organisms not requiring appeal to a divine creator to guide the process. Variation in the natural world is unguided according to Darwinian theory. So there is a plausible objection that it is unfair to compare living organisms to artifacts because of this point of contention about the difference of the origin of each; artifacts are by definition made by intelligent minds while living organisms do not have an intelligent designer built into their very definition.

As plausible as this objection is, the point of disanalogy does not undercut the general point about functions and final causality in Aristotle because an Aristotelian is not committed to a divine creator who intervenes in the evolutionary process of living organisms. Even though both deism and some forms of interventionism by a supernatural creator are consistent with Darwin's theory (Sober 2009), deism fits best with Aristotle's world view as it is presented throughout his corpus. But if it were to turn out that the world of nature and all its laws came to be without a creator, the Aristotelian biological picture and the ethical system built upon it remain intact. Even on purely naturalistic grounds there are final causes or ends that guide aspects of the life of living organisms. And there are specific natures underlying these goals. A chameleon changes color in different environments for a

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[10] More will said about this point when for-the-most-part relations are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

reason. There is a good answer to the question "Why does this animal change color in different environments?" Chameleons change color so as to blend in with their environment, which helps them evade detection by predators. Why does a honeybee dance in a curious way in front of its fellow bees when it comes back to the hive? Because by doing so it communicates the specific location of a flower to other bees so that other bees will be able to retrieve pollen from a specific flower. Nature is full of final causes understood in this Aristotelian sense. Wherever there is a final cause there is a formal cause underpinning it. It is hard to see how there could be natural sciences without formal and final causality understood along these lines. Aristotle's biology is outdated in a number of significant ways, but formal and final modes of explanation are ubiquitous in contemporary biological explanations.

One might object, as Kant did, to grounding an ethical theory in human biology. That sort of objection can be set to one side because the Kantian project of deriving all of ethics from reason alone has significant problems of its own. There is considerable initial plausibility in the idea that the flourishing of human beings will be grounded in the facts about the kind of being that we are. If this idea proves to be unworkable, then the Kantian alternative would have to be considered more carefully. But the defense of Aristotelian teleology offered here against a type of Darwinian objection is enough to keep the model of ethics being developed in this book on the table.

The biological principles needed to get Aristotle's ethical theory underway are still alive and well and have not been overturned by Darwinism. The language in biology has changed over two millennia to be sure. We now talk about a genetic program or code instead of a formal cause, for example. But the concepts involved in providing explanations are similar enough to make the basic Aristotelian worldview relevant to contemporary biological explanations. The claim is not that Aristotle had a theory of natural selection. Nor is the claim that Darwin's theory did not make significant advances beyond Aristotle's biology. The contention is that Aristotle's appeal to final causes in natural explanations is consistent with Darwinian teleology. Since this is so, Darwin's theory does not overturn Aristotle's in this key respect.

It follows in turn that the model of virtue ethics being developed in this book is not undercut by the objection from Darwinian theory. Aristotelian ethics is grounded in a biology built on the foundation of final causes. But these final causes involve a type of teleology that Darwin's theory requires—a selection-based teleology. Aristotelian ethics is consistent with the existence of the teleology of a divine creator, but it does not require one. Aristotle's hylomorphic conception of the human person does not commit him to a type of vitalism that would be incompatible with Darwinism. Aristotle's method of appeal to final causes to provide explanations of the activities of living organisms is in keeping with the methods inherent in the best contemporary biological theory.

2.7 Chapter Summary

We have considered some different types of objections against the deductive paradigm of Aristotelian virtue ethics. The objections considered in this chapter come from diverse perspectives. The initial objections to moral foundationalism considered in Section 2.2 will be addressed in Chapter 4. That chapter is devoted to the epistemic side of the deductive model of Aristotle's virtue ethics offered in Chapter 3. The objection in Section 2.3 is against a deductive construal of Aristotle's ethics, based primarily on passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that seemingly speak against constructing a deductive paradigm of Aristotle's ethics. An attempt was made to deal with the specific textual passages by explaining how each could be reasonably interpreted in a way that, at the very least, leaves the main issue open. In addition, features of Aristotle's ethics support the type of deductive model of virtue ethics proposed in this book and offered in Chapter 3. In view of the response offered in Section 2.3, it is hoped that the reader who is sympathetic to the widespread non-deductive construal of Aristotle's ethical theory will approach the rest of the work in this book with an open mind.

The objection in Section 2.4 is more radical because it targets an idea so fundamental to the project of this book, the idea that virtue theory presents a plausible basis for a moral theory. We saw that, although the data Doris considers from social psychology is fascinating and valuable, such data does not show that virtue theory is untenable. In fact, there is a way of understanding the results of some the empirical studies Doris presents as supporting the virtue theorist's case. There are resources within virtue theory to explain the relevant phenomena, and that further experimentation of a very specialized sort would be necessary to show that virtue theory is untenable. For someone who might be skeptical about the plausibility of a virtue-based approach to ethical theory, Section 2.4 provides further reason for reading on.

The purpose of Section 2.5 is to defend a traditional understanding of virtue theory, one that holds that virtue requires knowledge and that acting with intention is necessary for virtue, against a contemporary challenge attempting to sever the connection between virtue and knowledge. Alleged virtues of ignorance offer us much to consider carefully, but they do not offer solid reasons for abandoning a classical understanding of virtue theory. There is a good account of modesty based on traditional assumptions about the relation between knowledge and virtue that explains why genuine cases of modesty should be classified as virtues. Similarly, cases where it seems like someone could act virtuously without good intentions are not compelling. A traditional Aristotelian analysis of weakness of will can explain what happens in these cases without giving up on the idea that acting virtuously requires having good intentions. If these conclusions are correct, then a traditional understanding of virtue theory is still viable. Such an understanding is required for the deductive model in Chapter 3.

Finally, the fact that virtue theory usually makes a commitment to teleology should not be taken to undercut this type of approach to ethics. The model of Aristotelian virtue ethics being proposed in this book is offered as a plausible

account of what a good ethical theory would look like. Since this model is based on a teleological conception of human beings, this conception must be defended against the Darwinian challenge if it is to be taken seriously as a view that can be successfully applied to the human condition as we now understand it. In Section 2.6 we saw that, contrary to some popular characterizations, there is good reason to think that Darwin was himself a teleologist in an important sense, and that Darwinian theory is consistent with the sort of teleology needed for Aristotle's ethical theory. Darwinism and a certain kind of Aristotelianism are not only consistent, but probably complementary. Concerns about the teleological underpinnings of virtue theory should not lead us to give up on the deductive model.

Chapter 3
A Sketch of an Aristotelian Science of Ethics

3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers different components of the deductive paradigm of Aristotelian ethics. *Topics* III takes up questions concerning which is the more desirable, or the better, of two or more things. If there is a close connection between the concept of human flourishing and concepts about desirability, then since happiness (*eudaimonia*) is a first principle of ethics in some important sense, it is plausible to think that the concept of desirability would be closely connected to it. Section 3.2 focuses on Book III of Aristotle's *Topics* to get insight into how we might think about framing ethical axioms. Since principles about desirability are presented in some detail in *Topics* III, drawing attention to portions of Aristotle's discussion of these principles with his ethics in mind will help clarify some of the key ideas at the foundations of ethics.

Sections 3.3–3.7 are devoted to considering ethics as an Aristotelian science. A key component of the case is an analysis of for-the-most-part relationships in Aristotle. The success of constructing a realist model of virtue ethics deductively rests in part on providing an interpretation of for-the-most-part relations allowing for their demonstrability. Aristotle maintains that what holds for the most part is demonstrable and suggests that ethical subject matter is largely composed of relations that hold for the most part. If an analysis of for-the-most-part relationships could be offered that fits with the type of ethical subject matter he characterizes while being demonstrable, then such an analysis would go a long way toward filling out the model. More specifically, Aristotle seems to leave room for the demonstrability of relationships that hold for the most part. This possibility provides an opportunity to understand Aristotelian ethics as an Aristotelian science. After considering the extent to which ethics can fit within the strict standards of Aristotelian science in a general way in 3.3, two very different proposals for working out the connection are examined in 3.4 and 3.5. The first suggests that Aristotle has two conceptions of science, pure and plain science, and that ethics can be properly classified as a plain Aristotelian science. The second maintains that there is only one type of Aristotelian science, but that it includes two forms of demonstration. Some demonstrations are strict and others are soft. Aristotelian science is possibly broad

enough to include the subject matter of ethics, according to this second proposal, as long as we remember that ethical subject matter can fit within softer demonstrations. Both of these proposals offer an analysis of for-the-most-part relations in Aristotle, and the success of either proposal depends, to a considerable extent, on how well the respective analyses work.

We shall see that both proposals have problems and that neither offers an analysis of holding for the most part that is ideal. An alternative analysis is proposed in 3.6 that fits with what Aristotle says about such relations and that explains how one conception of Aristotelian science is broad enough to include ethical subject matter. Using this analysis, we can see the promise in constructing an Aristotelian science of ethics, which would provide the type of deductive framework needed to derive action-guiding moral principles from more general principles about human beings, their dispositions and features of their actions.

After this general case for a deductive science of ethics is made, we consider some specific scientific syllogisms with ethical subject matter in Section 3.7. Using the alternative analysis of holding for the most part, we shall see what types of syllogisms can be constructed. This work is merely a gesture in the direction of constructing a full-fledged deductive science of ethics, but it does represent a promising start.

The chapter ends with some ideas about the goals of ethical inquiry in 3.8. There are two distinct levels considered: what might be called "second-order" considerations about the natures of the essences of the basic components involved in matters of conduct (inquiry into such entities is primarily cognitive in character and only secondarily practical) and "first-order" practical questions and concepts about how such concepts specifically relate to one's own moral situation (these are immediately practical and cognitive incidentally.) Ethics has both cognitive and practical goals, but its ultimate goal is practical—this is why ethics as a discipline should be properly classified as a practical science. There is no obvious reason for thinking that cognitive goals drop out of the picture in a practical science whether it be medicine or ethics. It makes sense to think of ethics both as a practical science and as a theoretical science.

3.2 Looking at Topics III

In *Topics* III Aristotle takes up the question concerning which is the more desirable, or the better, of two or more things. Little attention has been paid to this discussion of choice-worthiness in the *Topics* III, but insights there shed light not only on Aristotle's ethical theory, but also on the foundations of ethics generally considered. Examining *Topics* III helps us gain a clear view into the close connection between the concept of human flourishing and concepts about desirability. It is clear that Aristotle regards happiness (*eudaimonia*) as being a first principle of ethics in some important sense, and it is plausible to think that the concept of desirability would be closely connected to it. Intuitively, it would seem that the final end of our actions would best satisfy our human desires. Moreover, it is somewhat obvious that what makes us happy is desirable in some sense. It would be contrary to common sense to

think that human happiness would consist of something that is undesirable in every plausible sense.

Since the *Topics* is a treatise about dialectic, we might wonder why Aristotle would devote one book to the topic of desirability or choice-worthiness. Aristotle's belief that dialectic provides a pathway to principles might provide a partial explanation. Since desirability is a basic ethical concept, it is reasonable to think that dialectical considerations about desirability would help clarify issues at the foundations of ethics. Desirability is a basic ethical concept because questions about the final ends of human conduct seem to rest upon it. Aristotle insists early in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that happiness is the final end of our action. Even though this appears to be so, it is meaningful to ask the question "Why should human beings seek happiness?" A plausible answer is that happiness is the final end of our action because happiness is the most desirable thing for human beings. Indeed, the desirability of happiness seems to be taken for granted by Aristotle.

One might worry about closely associating desirability with happiness for the reason that the two seem to be separable. There are many cases in which what is desirable to someone might not lead to his or her happiness as Aristotle thinks of it. For example, many people desire excessive amounts of physical pleasures. Although Aristotle believes that physical pleasures are good things, excessive amounts of them frequently hinder our ability to acquire happiness. Conversely, we can imagine cases in which what would lead to happiness would not be taken to be desirable by some. For example, Aristotle argues that the life of study is the activity that is most conducive to human flourishing, ultimately because this activity best completes our function as rational agents. But a contemplative life is far from desirable for many people. So, it might seem to be a mistake to closely connect happiness with desirability.

On the other hand, the concerns just raised can be met by paying attention to the distinction between what happens to be desirable and what is desirable by nature. Aristotle seems to have the distinction in mind in *Topics* III when he says ". . .what is good by nature is more desirable than the good that is not so by nature" (*Topics* 116b7). What people find to be desirable on a particular occasion may or may not conform with what a human being ought to desire. What humans ought to desire is determined in part by considering carefully whether a type of desire conforms with or hinders our function as rational agents. Since the same type of standard, i.e., a reference to the human function, is a significant factor used in determining whether an activity leads to happiness, it is reasonable to draw a close conceptual connection between what is desirable by nature and what leads to happiness.

But independently of considerations about why Aristotle examines desirability in the *Topics*, we might wonder about the status of the many principles pertaining to choice-worthiness and desirability proposed in *Topics* III. For instance, we might think that at least some of the principles are intended to serve as principles or axioms for an ethical theory. Some have expressed doubts about this possibility (Garver 1999). Does the fact that most or all of the principles from *Topics* III hold for the most part present any serious obstacle for establishing connections between the *Topics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*? Not obviously, because Aristotle classifies the

subject matter of ethics as holding for the most part (*NE* 1094b14–22). If there is good reason for thinking that principles from Topics III hold for the most part, then this gives us further reason for looking carefully at the role such principles might play in the ethics.

Since the principles from *Topics* III are too numerous to consider seriatim, let us pick some that have obvious and clear connections to the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[1] The first of the principles from Topics III is *that which is more lasting or secure is more desirable than that which is less so* (116a13). One application of this principle comes in *NE* X, 7 in the course of a discussion about which life is the most supremely happy. As he addresses the life of study as a plausible candidate, Aristotle says "Besides, it is the most continuous activity, since we are more capable of continuous study than of any continuous action" (*NE* 1177a22). Aristotle's conclusion about the life of study as being the supremely happy human life is based on the premise that this kind of activity is more lasting or secure than any other type of human activity. But this premise rests on the idea that what is more lasting or secure is more desirable than what is less so—the first principle from *Topics* III.

The third principle from Topics III is *that which is desired for itself is more desirable than that which is desired for something else* (116a29). We might understand this subordination principle as: *ceteris paribus, for any two goods A and B, if A is desired for itself while B is desired for the sake of something else, then A is more desirable than B.* This principle is applied throughout the *NE*, but frequently in the early portions of book 1. The first occurrence is at 1094a15–1094b10 in a discussion of hierarchy of goods and sciences. Aristotle argues for the supremacy of political science on the basis of the idea that the ends of other practical sciences are subordinate to it. Since the end of political science is the good of the political community while the end of household management is the good of the household, political science is superior to household management by the subordination principle. Later at 1096a7–11 Aristotle puts some closure on the issue of which life is best by ruling out the life of money making. He implies that the happy life is superior to the life of money making because wealth is acquired for the sake of happiness. It appears as though the subordination principle is at work here as well. At 1097a32 Aristotle argues that happiness is unconditionally complete because we choose it for itself, but never for the sake of anything else.

We might wonder about the status of the principles from *Topics* III independently of the issue of the applications the principles might have. For example, should we think of these principles as axioms for Aristotle's ethical theory? In one of the few articles that pays direct attention to *Topics* III, Eugene Garver claims that topics in Aristotle "are not principles in the scientific sense, immediately known premises for scientific demonstration" (Garver 1999: 113). Garver takes this point to apply to "topics" in the *Rhetoric*, but he seems to think the same point applies to "topics" wherever they occur, including *Topics* III, which is the focus of his attention. Garver

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[1] I owe a debt of gratitude to Thomas Sullivan Jr. for his work on drawing connections between *Topics* III and the *Nicomachean Ethics* as an undergraduate philosophy major at the college of St. Thomas.

goes on to claim that "Premises authorize and justify their conclusions, but rhetorical and dialectical topics do not."Although it seems right to think that the topics in *Topics* III are too general to offer concrete guidance about how to act in specific situations, it is wrong to think that the generality of such principles would count against their role in deductive arguments in ethics.

To see why, consider what has been said already about the very first principle offered in *Topics* III, *that which is more lasting or secure is more desirable than that which is less so* (116a13). We could formalize what was said above about the application of this principle in *NE* X, 7. Let us take the conclusion to be that the life centered around contemplation is the supremely happy life. We could then represent Aristotle's reasoning in terms of the following syllogism:

(1) That which is based on the most lasting and secure human activity is the supremely happy life.
(2) The life centered around contemplation is based on the most lasting and secure human activity.
(3) The life centered around contemplation is the supremely happy life.

In Book X, as well as most other places in the *NE*, Aristotle is outlining and constructing an ethical theory. In offering arguments like the one presented syllogistically above, he is offering reasons for accepting theoretical claims about happiness. Some are more abstract and general than others. Since Aristotle focuses primarily on making his students better people in the *NE*, it would be a distraction in this context to offer all of the premises needed to justify the conclusions he is interested in establishing. But it is possible to supply such premises. In fact, in support of (1) above, we might construct this syllogism:

(a) The most desirable life is the supremely happy life.
(b) That which is based on the most lasting and secure human activity is most desirable.
(1) That which is based on the most lasting and secure human activity is the supremely happy life.

(a) is obviously true. (b) is a slight variation of the principle *that which is more lasting or secure is more desirable than that which is less so* from *Topics* III. What we have is a case where a principle from *Topics* III is needed in order to establish a conclusion that is critical to Aristotle's ethics, and the application is not peculiar to this specific principle. Many other principles from *Topics* III are also required to provide support for several of the conclusions Aristotle reaches in his ethics. Even though it is plausible to think with Garver that these principles are too general to function as premises in practical syllogisms as such syllogisms are ordinarily understood, it is nevertheless entirely reasonable to see these principles functioning as premises in syllogisms that provide a deductive framework for the major premises of practical syllogisms. It is possible to gain much insight into the core of Aristotle's ethical theory by considering principles from *Topics* III in this manner.

When considered on their own, it is quite plausible to think of these principles as holding for the most part. So, for example, the principle *that which is more lasting*

or secure is more desirable than that which is less so is not a principle that is true unconditionally. Since a life lived in a hermetically sealed room free from the risks that come with a life lived in our world may prove to be more lasting and secure than one outside of such a room, there seems to be possible exception to this principle. Still the principle seems to be true more often then not.

Consider the principle *that which is desired for itself is more desirable than that which is desired for something else.* Since Aristotle regards happiness as some kind of a first principle in ethics, it ought to play a role in explaining why this principle about desirability is true. It is plausible to think, at least initially, that things closer to happiness are more inherently desirable than what it more remote from it, even though what is more remote may seem more appealing to some individuals. So, for example, Aristotle's system commits him to the thesis that doing philosophic work is more closely connected with happiness than twiddling our thumbs. It is not as though there is anything wrong with twiddling our thumbs; it is rather that engaging in philosophical work is more likely to bring about the kinds of states connected with human flourishing. The fact that many people probably would prefer thumb-twiddling to doing philosophy does not show that philosophy is less inherently desirable. We should think of proximity to happiness as a standard for desirability, even though it may be difficult to see how the standard specifically applies in a number of cases. If we think about these matters in terms of a hierarchy of desirability, happiness is right at the top. Activities that directly engage our highest powers aimed at noble objects would be near the top, e.g., doing philosophy, mathematics, reading literature, and so on. Activities that engage lower powers toward noble objects would be lower still, e.g., eating fine cuisine or taking a swim. Activities that engage our lowest powers toward ignoble objects are near the bottom, e.g., listening to raunchy music, engaging in illicit sexual activities, and so on. Of course, this model is quite simplistic and is in no way intended to be exhaustive, but it helps capture some of the spirit of Aristotle's ideas about desirability in his ethics.

Presenting these ideas syllogistically helps shed additional light on matters:

(A)   Whatever is more closely connected to happiness is by nature more desirable than what is more remote from it.
(B)   Things desirable for themselves are more closely connected to happiness than things that are instrumentally desirable.
(C)   So, things desirable for themselves are by nature more desirable than things that are instrumentally desirable.

(A) is virtually axiomatic within Aristotle's theory, and it is pretty easy to see why. If everything we do is aimed at happiness, then we should desire things more closely related to happiness over things more remote from it. (B) is implied by the definitions of the relevant terms. Of course, this principle is only intended to apply to good or desirable things since the good and the desirable are the scope of the discussion for *Topics* III, but even among good things the principle might not hold true in every case. Pleasant amusements are often chosen for their own sake, as ends in themselves. Such activities may be chosen for the sake of pleasures they provide, but might not be chosen for the sake of any other end. On the other hand, we can imagine that someone undertakes the task of reading some difficult philosophical

work, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* for example, strictly for the sake of acquiring a better understanding of reality, possibly with the hope of being more content. But if we strictly apply the *Topics* principle *that which is desired for itself is more desirable than that which is desired for something else,* then we appear to get the result that pleasant amusements are more desirable than reading difficult philosophical works. This result is obviously at odds with Aristotle's view on the matter.

If we understand the principle as holding for the most part in the sense that there is a connection that holds *by nature*, even though it may not always hold *in nature*, then we seem to get results more resonant with Aristotle's view. Ends are more desirable than means by nature because ends tend to satisfy desires in ways that means cannot. Ends are superior to means by nature even if some activity that is naturally a means is regarded as being an end by some individual for a particular reason. Means are sought to bring about ends that satisfy desires, while ends are sought to satisfy desires themselves. If someone has a properly ordered set of desires, then, by Aristotle's view, all of that person's activities will be somehow ordered toward their final end. By this way of thinking about it, the practically wise person will see the pursuit of pleasant amusements as contributing to her ability to engage in the more sublime activities that best perfect our function, activities such as contemplation.

When we put together all of the considerations together, we get results that suggest that at least some of the principles from *Topics* III can be understood as being helpful in understanding basic principles within Aristotle's ethical theory.

3.3 Can Aristotle's Ethics Fall Within His Conception of Science?

A substantial portion of this chapter attempts to make the case for a deductive model of virtue ethics by examining the relation between Aristotle's conception of science and his conception of ethics. If it turns out there is good reason for thinking that Aristotle's ethics fits within his conception of science, then thinking of ethics as an Aristotelian science would provide insight into how a deductive model of virtue ethics might be formulated.

There is a practical side of Aristotle's ethics, its concern with deliberation about particulars, that might be thought to count against the existence of ethical demonstrations. To the extent that particulars are the objects of deliberation, they would not fall within the scope of Aristotelian science. But setting particulars aside, there is a significant portion of ethics that could be codified according to the standards of Aristotle's conception of science in the *Posterior Analytics*. The questions Aristotle raises and the methodology he employs in the *Nicomachean Ethics* are, to a large extent, theoretical even if Aristotle would not take these theoretical considerations to be relevant to deliberation about particulars.

Another important issue is whether Aristotle's exposition of science in the *Posterior Analytics* and elsewhere leaves open the possibility that there is more

than one conception of Aristotelian science. This point deserves more than passing attention, because the foundationalistic model of science presented in the *Posterior Analytics* sets very high standards for what counts as a genuine science. It appears as though Aristotle must have had in mind a select few subject genera as satisfying the criteria he offers in the *Posterior Analytics*. Many of the examples in the treatise are drawn either from mathematics, whose subjects are matterless, or from astronomy, whose subjects are seen by Aristotle as containing necessary matter (Sorabji 1980: 49).

But given that Aristotle also calls subjects like biology and physics "sciences," we should be cautious with the proposal that the foundationalistic model of science presented in the *Posterior Analytics* is meant to apply only to abstract sciences like mathematics, geometry and astronomy. There are many examples in *Posterior Analytics* involving material substances that fall within the domain of natural science. Aristotle does not offer any alternative account of science to the one presented in the *Posterior Analytics* under which the natural sciences could be subsumed. Furthermore, Aristotle nowhere rules out the idea that the *Posterior Analytics* account could apply to subjects like physics, biology and chemistry. In fact, remarks in the second book of *Posterior Analytics* provide good reason for thinking that the methodology in the *Posterior Analytics* does indeed apply to natural sciences.[2]

The following sections examine the flexibility of Aristotle's conception of science. In particular, we will consider the suggestion from C.D.C. Reeve that Aristotle operates with two notions of science, one of which may leave room for ethics as an Aristotelian science. We will call this the "Two Science Proposal;" TSP hereafter. As promising as this suggestion may sound, we shall see that the fundamental distinction Reeve proposes does not fit well with Aristotle's conception of science in the end. TSP does not present a plausible model for an Aristotelian science of ethics, but it is very important to take a look at it anyway because of the insight it offers into the possible connections between Aristotelian science and ethics.

3.4   The Two Science Proposal (TSP)

The initial observation that there is some point of significant difference between natural sciences (physics and biology) and those that are more abstract (mathematics and geometry) appears to be well-founded, but providing a plausible unified account of science that accommodates whatever differences dividing the natural sciences from the more abstract disciplines is not a simple matter. TSP claims that Aristotle operates with two notions of science, "pure" and "plain" science, both of which fall under the *Posterior Analytics* exposition of science (Reeve 1992: 13, 16,

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[2] Bolton (1987) argues that the method described in the *Posterior Analytics* proceeds through a series of three definitions. Bolton provides evidence that this method is at work in the most mature of Aristotle's biological works, *De Partibus Animalium*.

18–21). Ethics and other natural sciences like physics and biology are "plain" sciences according to TSP, and so there is no good reason why ethics should not be considered as an Aristotelian science in the same sense that other natural sciences are (Reeve 1992: 27). Pure science involves demonstrations of things that are unconditionally necessary. Plain science, on the other hand, provides demonstrations of things that hold for the most part due to the sensible matter of its subjects.

Motivation for TSP comes from remarks Aristotle makes about the relationship between science and what holds for the most part (*hos epi to polu).* Included among these are the following:

> Scientific-knowledge (*epistēme*) is of what holds always or for the most part (*hos epi to polu*) (*Metaphysics* 1027a20–1).

> For "rule" applies to what is always true or true for the most part, whereas chance belongs to a third type of event (*Physics* 197a18–20).

> There will be immediate first principles also in the case of what holds for the most part (*APo* 96a17–19).

> There is no scientific-knowledge through demonstration of what holds by luck. For what holds by luck is neither necessary nor does it hold for the most part but comes about separately from these; and demonstration is of one or other (*thaterou*) of the former (*APo* 87b19–22).

> We next point out that what admits of being otherwise (*to endechesthai*) is said in two ways, in one it signifies what holds for the most part but falls short of the [unconditionally] necessary, for example a man's turning gray or decaying, or everything that holds by nature . . . In another it signifies the indefinite . . . or everything that happens by luck . . . Scientific knowledge and demonstration are not concerned with things that are indefinite, because the middle term is uncertain; but they are concerned with what holds by nature and as a rule arguments (*logoi*) and inquiries are made about things that are possible in this sense (*APr* 32b4–21).

These texts do provide support for the idea that Aristotle's conception of science encompasses what comes to be by nature. Aristotle also associates matter with what holds for the most part. Since ethics seems to be concerned primarily with what holds for the most part, TSP can explain how Aristotle's conceptions of ethics and science are more similar than they may initially appear to be. TSP builds on the distinction between pure and plain science to show the similarity.

3.4.1 Holding for the Most Part

A central component of TSP includes providing an analysis of relationships that hold for the most part. TSP is ultimately founded on and supported by an analysis of Aristotle's technical phrase *hos epi to polu,* which is supposed to provide the basis for plain science; the latter being weaker than its pure counterpart. Since there is ample textual evidence to support the view that Aristotle clearly intends science to encompass for-the-most-part relationships, an account of how *hos epi to polu* could be treated scientifically is required.

There are, however, grounds for thinking that Aristotle does not wish to treat for-the-most-part statements scientifically. At one point Aristotle associates holding for the most part with probability (*Rhetoric*), but it is quite difficult to see how the latter could be a sufficient basis for Aristotelian science. Roderick Chisholm notes that Aristotle associates probability with statistical frequency. In his discussion of probability, Chisholm links these concepts together: "Taking the term in its statistical sense, we may say with Aristotle that the probable is 'that which happens for the most part'" (Chisholm 1966: 7). It is difficult to see how Aristotle's model of science could allow for the treatment of, or leave room for, statements that hold for the most part, if such statements only involve statistical probability, given that science, as Aristotle conceives of it, is concerned with necessity and not mere probability. In fact, Aristotle claims in *Posterior Analytics* I.4 that one condition that scientific premises must satisfy is that an attribute is predicated necessarily of its subject. Necessary predications, by definition, are not only true, but they could not be otherwise. The per se condition that accompanies scientific necessity is surely stronger than statistical probability since statistical probability leaves open the possibility of exceptions. Consideration of the textual evidence in favor of the view that Aristotelian science is concerned with necessity and the observation that necessity is stronger than mere probability lead us to recognize that a special approach such as TSP is required to explain how it is that necessity could be compatible with possible and actual exceptions.

The interpretation that Chisholm adopts has fallen from favor. Michael Ferejohn takes issue with the idea that Aristotle identifies for-the-most-part relations with probability or statistical frequency.

> The distinctly quantitative nature of the expression *epi to polu* can make it seem initially plausible that in singling out this type of predication Aristotle is simply pointing to the purely statistical fact that there are some instances of high but imperfect correlation between event-types in the natural universe. But this statistical view of *epi to polu* predication is easily dispelled by the observation that there is a conspicuous absence of examples of predications expressing correlations that could be called purely coincidental (Ferejohn 1991: 119–20).

But not only does Aristotle's notable omission of examples speak against this purely statistical interpretation, as Ferejohn points out, Aristotle often associates holding for the most part with what comes about by nature (*GA* 777a19–21, 727b29–30; *PA* 663b28–9; *Metaph.* 1027a8–28), and frequently contrasts the former and the latter with what comes about from chance (*GC* 333b7; *De Caelo* 283a33; *Posterior Analytics* 87b19; *EE* 1247a32). So although at times it may look as though Aristotle intends for-the-most-part predications to cover statements or predications that are merely statistically probable, there is ample evidence to support the idea that there is more to the relation. Since holding for the most part is closely associated with what happens by nature in Aristotle, for-the-most-part predications must involve some sort of causal relationship. If for-the-most-part predications express causal relations between event-types, then they should be considered as legitimate candidates for being scientific premises. Following Mario Mignucci, Ferejohn suggests that *hos epi to polu* statements like "A man grows chin whiskers [as he ages]" (*Posterior*

Analytics. 96a10) should be interpreted as "Every man has P (that is for the most part manifested by the growth of chin whiskers at the appropriate time)" (Ferejohn 1991: 130).

In the TSP analysis of for-the-most-part relations, one notices that Reeve concurs with Ferejohn that for the most part predications involve more than just statistical probability. Somewhat misleadingly, Reeve calls the relationship that holds between the subject and predicate of a for the most part relationship "probabilization," arguing persuasively that "*hos epi to polu*" cannot be interpreted as "most" because Aristotle recognizes valid categorical syllogisms quantified with the former that would be clearly invalid if quantified with the latter (Reeve 1992: 14) (Barnes 1975: 184). Barnes' example is:

> Most women are under seventy.
> *Most centenarians are women.*
> Most centenarians are under seventy.

Since TSP is committed to the view that Aristotle has two conceptions of science, one of which is founded on for the most part predications, and since necessary relations are taken to be the *sine qua non* of Aristotle's conception of science, TSP involves the idea that for-the-most-part relationships must involve a derivative notion of necessity (Reeve 1992: 15). A careful look at the TSP analysis of for-the-most-part relations promises to provide insight into the operative notion of necessity. Reeve says:

> The unconditionally necessary holds always; the probabilized can fail to hold although it rarely does; "The contrary of what holds for the most part is always comparatively rare" (*Topics* 112b10–11; see *Metaph.* 1025a14–21). That is why Aristotle sometimes refers to things that hold for the most part as *endechomena*, as things that admit of being otherwise. What he means to exclude by doing so is not necessity in every sense of the term, however, but only unconditional necessity (*A.Pr.* 25b14–15, 32b4–13).

> Unconditional necessity is a necessary, law-like relation between universals that guarantees the truth of the corresponding universally quantified proposition: if F and G are thus related, "All Fs are Gs" is necessarily true. Probabilizing is a necessary, law-like relation between universals that guarantees that the corresponding universally quantified propositions will be for the most part true: if F and G are thus related, "All Fs are Gs" will necessarily hold for the most part (Reeve 1992: 16).

In a universal affirmative proposition, "F is G," if the subject, F, and predicate, G, are related by unconditional necessity, "F is G" is not only true but necessarily true. Propositions that are legitimate candidates for Aristotelian science are associated with *de re* necessity, since such necessity indicates real definitions and essences (Reeve 1992: 11). *De dicto* necessities, by contrast, (in this context) are connected with nominal definitions and essences that are not the focus of science as Aristotle conceives of it. Given this distinction, "F is G" is necessary *de re*. Appealing to the *Posterior Analytics* account of science, we would say that propositions that contain a subject and predicate that are related by unconditional necessity must meet the minimal condition that the predicate is true of the subject in every case and at all times (*Posterior Analytics.* I.4). So the relationship of unconditional necessity is stronger and more restrictive than the type of necessity at work

in for-the-most-part predications, since for-the-most-part predication leaves room for possible and actual exceptions. In light of these observations, since TSP has it that since pure science involves unconditional necessity, its plain counterpart would have to involve some weaker or qualified sense of necessity, given the plausible contention that necessity is a minimal condition of Aristotelian science. We should consider whether Aristotle operates with a notion of scientific necessity that is weaker than unconditional necessity, or whether he should have, especially in view of the fact that he countenances facts that hold true for the most part in his scientific exposition.

Consider any proposition, S, whose subject and predicate are not related by unconditional necessity. Could such a proposition be part of an Aristotelian science at all? Given Aristotle's conception of science, for S to be a scientific proposition it must be either an existence claim, definition or axiom, or derivable from one of these through a demonstrative syllogism. Assuming that S is not an existence claim, if S is to be a candidate for scientific treatment it must still express a truth about a real essence or a definition or, if it does not, it must be a primitive statement of an axiomatic nature. Since for-the-most-part relations are related to essences and natures that are expressed in or connected with definitions according to TSP, if a predicate is said of a subject for the most part, then, according to TSP, the corresponding proposition is a legitimate candidate for scientific treatment. But TSP also says that for-the-most-part propositions involve "probabilization," which provides the basis for saying that a universal affirmative proposition that involves the relation necessarily holds for the most part. So if S involves probabilization, then S necessarily holds for the most part according to this view.

But what can be made of the ambiguous claim that a proposition necessarily holds for the most part? One way of understanding the phrase "for the most part" is "possibly false." But to say that a proposition S is possibly false is just to say that it is possibly not true. But this is equivalent to saying that S is not necessarily true. So if "for the most part" is understood as "not necessarily true," then "S necessarily holds for the most part" means that it is necessary that it is not necessary that S is true. This does not seem to be the way to understand for-the-most-part relations according to TSP.

Ordinarily, it is propositions that are said to be true or false, not relations between subjects and attributes. Consider the proposition "Fs necessarily are for the most part Gs." To say that an attribute holds of a subject for the most part seems to be equivalent to saying that it holds in most cases. This proposition should then be taken to be claiming that it is not possible that G would not be attributable in most cases to Fs. But TSP does not allow us to understand *hos epi to polu* as most (Reeve 1992: 14).

Another possibility is that the modal operator has the whole proposition S as its scope and that "for the most part" applies only to the relation between subject and predicate: it is necessarily the case that All Fs are for the most part G. But this is a *de dicto* reading that TSP rules out given its commitment to the relation between *de dicto* readings and nominal definitions. Whatever merits this interpretation may have, it does not appear to be one that fits with TSP.

Since none of these possible readings fits with TSP, it is reasonable to construct an alternative interpretation. The general problem here is that TSP's suggestion that "F probabilizes G" entails "'All Fs are Gs' necessarily holds for the most part," which leaves the nature of for-the-most-part relations unexplained. An explanation is precisely what is desired in this context.

For a viable alternative interpretation of for-the-most-part relations in Aristotle, let us begin with Michael Ferejohn's suggestion that propositions that involve for-the-most-part relations such as "A man grows chin whiskers [as he ages]" should be understood as "Every man has P" where P is a property that all male human beings have by nature and that is more often than not manifested in the actual growth of chin whiskers at the appropriate time in a man's life (Ferejohn 1991). Although Ferejohn does not mention the distinction between capacities and corresponding activities in connection with his interpretation, it looks as though this distinction should play an important role in understanding for-the-most-part relations.

Ferejohn's suggestion allows us to say that the proposition "Every man has P" is necessary *de re* insofar as something pertaining to the property P is related to the nature of human males. The relationship between men and P is explained under the usual *de re* modal interpretation that Reeve does not wish to abandon. Ferejohn's proposal appears to leave open the alternative that the relevant relationship is one of unconditional necessity since the necessity involved pertains to the relation between men and the capacity (*dunamis*) for the growth of chin whiskers. While the relation is one of unconditional necessity by the standards of the proposed analysis, the property that manifests the capacity, as a matter of fact, can fail to be actually manifested if intervening factors get in the way.[3]

Even though the capacity for the growth of whiskers can be said to hold by *de re* necessity of all men, actual growth may fail to occur in any particular man because of factors that may intervene and impede whiskers from appearing. But if the actual growth of whiskers fails to occur in a particular individual, the capacity (*dunamis*) for growth is nevertheless present in every particular man given the relationship that obtains between the capacity for growth and the essence of the subject in question, i.e., adult human males. It is the indeterminacy of matter that ultimately accounts for the failure of such properties to be manifested.

Although Ferejohn's suggestion regarding how we should understand for-the-most-part predications is one plausible way of construing TSP's "probabilizing" relationship, it appears to involve an important distinction that may prove harmful to TSP. The distinction between pure and plain science is founded upon the distinction between unconditional necessity and an allegedly weaker notion of necessity operative in for-the-most-part propositions. But given that perseity is concerned with relations between subjects and predicates of propositions, and that scientific necessity and perseity are coextensive for Aristotle (McKirihan 1993), scientific necessity pertains to relations between the subjects and predicates of propositions. So we would expect that any genuine scientific premise should involve scientific

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[3] See, e.g., *Physics* 199b25, 256b10–23.

necessity. But for-the-most-part relations, under this interpretation, involve uncon-
ditional necessity in at least one of the component relations. TSP's probabilizing
relation is supposed to capture something other than unconditional necessity.

According to the suggested reading inspired by Ferejohn's proposal, the "for the
most part operator," so to speak, not only takes the relation between such subjects
and predicates as its scope, it also takes the relation between the capacity (*dunamis*)
in the predicate and its actualization to be within its scope. Given the essence of
human beings, one discovers that the potential to grow chin whiskers is present in
every male member of the species. But not every adult male member of the species
manifests the growth of whiskers, where the absence of growth could be explained
by appealing to the indeterminacy of matter involved. This interpretation of the for-
the-most-part relations thus involves two component relations, the second of which
(the manifestation of a property) is dependent on the first (the possession of the
capacity itself). If we focus on the second of the relationships in isolation, then we
may well be led to treat "hos epi to polu" as "most".

It may be helpful to draw a distinction that will be utilized to illuminate some of
these points. Some facts hold by nature while others hold in nature. The former are
intimately connected with substances and their essences. For example, humans are
rational *by nature*; rationality is an important component of the essence of human
beings. The relation between human beings and rationality holds by unconditional
necessity. In fact, rationality is predicated per se in the first mode of human beings
according to Aristotle's conception of scientific predication.[4] The actual manifes-
tation of rational operations is a phenomenon that occurs *in nature*. We find that
human beings, for the most part, display rational operations. People in comas or
vegetative states or even young children are exceptions to the rule or law that all
humans are rational. But we can plausibly explain the exceptions by appealing to
imperfections or indeterminacy associated with matter. The fact that there are excep-
tions to the rule in nature does not count against the fact that rationality is a per se
property of human beings. But this recognition does not require that we read *hos epi
to polu* as "most". Even if it were to turn out that most human beings did not display
the operations that indicate rationality, this would not count against the presence of
a law or rule in virtue of which human beings would if there were no impediments
present. The regularities *in nature* are more than mere statistical frequencies because
they are founded upon necessities that hold *by nature*.

The absence of a fundamental distinction of the sort just suggested leads TSP
to bring in an unusual and awkward modal notion, one for which no elaboration
is offered. TSP's commitment to saying that Aristotle countenances two forms of
science is based on the apparent difference between what is true by virtue of uncon-
ditional necessity and what is true for the most part. There is a significant area of
overlap between these two notions inasmuch as both require relations that hold by
unconditional necessity. Although unconditional necessity is not offered as part of

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[4] See *Posterior Analytics* 73a34-b15 for Aristotle's discussion of essential predications in science.

TSP, it may indeed accommodate the various apparently conflicting ideas that TSP sets out to reconcile.

The present interpretation should lead us to carefully reconsider the idea that Aristotle is operating with two conceptions of science. When Aristotle speaks of unconditional or simple necessity in the *Posterior Analytics* and elsewhere, he means to refer to that which could not be otherwise (*Metaphysics* 5: chap. 5 and 7). Unconditional necessity can be said to be at work in nature once we acknowledge that matter involves indeterminacy, which leaves open the possibility that the unconditionally necessitated tendency may not be realized. Aristotle claim that "In natural products the sequence is invariable if there is no impediment" (*Physics* 199b25). Absence of impediments is sufficient for the invariability of the production of the end of a natural process provided other factors are present and constant.

Aristotle would likely endorse what one might call a "Principle of Non-interference" that could be more clearly understood in connection with the following assignments:

R: A non-living natural substance realizes or actualizes some capacity it has.
I: A natural substance is impeded internally from actualizing a capacity it has.
I*: A natural substance is impeded externally from actualizing a capacity it has.

Making use of these assignments, consider the following formulas:

Principle of Non-interference (PNI):
        If R, then (–I and –I*)
The **contrapositive of PNI** is:
        If (I or I*), then –R

PNI says that a necessary condition for a natural substance to realize some natural capacity it has, is that it not be impeded internally or externally. The absence of such impediments is not by itself sufficient for the realization or fulfillment of a capacity. Internal impediments are those that could inhibit a generating organism from becoming a properly functioning member of its kind. Aristotle's discussion of reproduction provides an appropriate example (Reeve 1992: 18). External impediments, on the other hand, inhibit a developed member of some kind from fulfilling some other natural capacity, e.g., fire could be shielded in such a way that it is unable to rise or a stone could be placed on a ledge so that it is unable to fall.

It is important to consider a related but stronger principle in this context with the additional assignment:

E: An appropriate efficient cause is present.

We can now generate a biconditional that Aristotle advocates at times. Let us call it a "Strong Causal Principle":

Strong Causal Principle (SCP):

(E and -I and -I*) if and only if R

SCP says that a natural substance realizes some capacity it has just in case impediments are absent and an appropriate efficient cause is present. In *Metaphysics* IX, 5 Aristotle distinguishes between non-rational and rational potencies (*dunameis*), the former of which are present in both living and non-living things:

> ... as regards potencies of the latter kind (non-rational), when the agent and the patient meet in a way appropriate to the potency in question, one must act and the other must be acted on, but with the former kind of potency (rational) this is not necessary (1048a5–7).

When Aristotle says "in a way appropriate to the potency" he seems to have in mind both PNI and the fact that potencies are potencies for specific ends.[5] One feature that divides rational potencies form non-rational ones is that the former are capable of producing contrary effects (*Metaphysics* 1048a9). So even if SCP is true of non-rational potencies involved in living and non-living things, Aristotle does not say it holds true for rational potencies in human beings; in fact, the living beings that he is referring to here are non-human animals. Since animals lack the capacities for rational activities, according to Aristotle, they are not capable of deliberating about what course of action to choose in some set of circumstances where alternatives are present. There is one important ingredient for the case of human beings missing

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[5] A problem for this understanding of PNI arises in connection with a remark Aristotle makes in the same passage: "And it has the potency in question when the passive object is present and is in a certain state; if not it will not be able to act. (To add the qualification 'if nothing external prevents it' is not further necessary; for it has the potency on the terms on which this is a potency of acting, and it is this not in all circumstances but on certain conditions, among which will be the exclusion of external hindrances; for these are barred by some of the positive qualifications.)" (1048a13–21). This remark may appear to be problematic for the thesis I am developing because it looks as though Aristotle is saying that qualifications about external hindrances are part of the specification or definition of a potency (*dunamis*). If this is true, then not only is PNI superfluous and possibly misleading, but the chances for formulating codifiable for-the-most-part propositions that fit Aristotle's conditions for scientific premises are bleak, given the difficulty of fixing all the variables that impediments present. So the issue here is whether it makes sense to speak of qualifications about hindrances as being independent of the specification of a potency or whether Aristotle's remarks here rule this out.

Making sense of speaking of impediments as being extrinsic to the specification begins with noticing that Aristotle speaks this way in the *Physics* passages already cited. So Aristotle is either inconsistent about this matter, or his thinking about potentiality has changed from the *Physics* to the *Metaphysics*, or *dunamis* can be understood in either of these ways (among others). I prefer the last alternative. A straightforward way of making this plausible is to understand that Aristotle's way of speaking about potentiality in the *Physics* is one in which potentialities that are part of a thing's nature are at issue. One way of understanding what a nature is involves identifying it as a set of potentialities that a thing has. This set of potentialities marks the thing off from everything else in the world. *Dunamis* in *Metaphysics* IX 5, on the other hand, can be understood as referring to the potentialities an individual thing has insofar as it is capable of attaining some particular end. Since the latter use of *dunamis* refers to individuals, it will not fall within the scope of Aristotelian science. Nothing precludes the former sense from being an object of science, though.

on the left side of the biconditional, i.e., desire (*orexis*) (*Metaphysics* 1048a11). Aristotle continues:

> For the non-rational potencies are all productive of one effect each, but the rational produce contrary effects, so that if they produced their effects necessarily they would produce their effects at the same time; but this is impossible. There must, then, be something else that decides; I mean by this, desire or will. For whichever of two things the animal desires decisively, it will do, when it is present, and meets the passive object, in the way appropriate to the potency in question. Therefore everything which has a rational potency, when it desires that for which it has a potency and in the circumstances in which it has the potency, must do this (1048a8–15).

How broadly does Aristotle construe *orexis* here? Consider a case where a hungry bear finds the carcass of a dead animal. Under Aristotle's description of the situation, the efficient cause is the bear's instinct to eat, which moves the bear toward the available meat. Provided there are no impediments present (e.g., a larger bear is already eating, the carcass is in a place that is inaccessible) if the bear is able to get to the meat, the bear will necessarily eat. Since Aristotle claims that non-human animals (such as bears) lack rational desire (*boulesis*), he would classify the bear's inclination to eat as being a mere appetite. If Aristotle is correct, then in the situation just described it is not possible for the bear to refrain from eating.

"Desire" (*orexis*) in this context should be taken to refer to the sorts of inclinations that humans have by virtue of their rationality, i.e., *boulesis*. There will be certain instinctual tendencies that humans share with other members of the animal kingdom, and with respect to these, it is to be expected that human action will be necessitated when the appropriate conditions are present in the way the actions of their non-rational animal counterparts are. But we can imagine a situation in which a human agent is hungry and there is food present and it is within the agent's power to acquire the food but the agent refrains. This state of affairs is one to be expected in a case where a person is on a diet. Situations like this present a person with conflicting desires. So even with respect to the instinctual tendencies that human beings share with other animals, it is possible for desire to overcome them.[6] The reason that it is possible for human beings to have conflicting desires is because human beings have a sense of time (*DA* 433b5ff), and the ability to deliberate (*DA* 434a10–15). Both of these factors explain why it is that conflicts of desire are possible.

It is important to take note of the fact that Aristotle utilizes a principle of this kind, because the interpretation of for-the-most-part relations being proposed here involves two distinct causal relations, the second of which leaves room for exceptions. By keeping the above causal principle in mind, we can show how the presence of exceptions in for-the-most-part propositions does not rule out their candidacy for scientific treatment.

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[6] We would expect the behavior of living and non-living natural substances that lack rationality to be predictable in a way in which the behavior of rational beings is not. But since the notion of predictability is not a pressing one for Aristotle, the fact that particular human actions are not predictable in the way animal actions are not will not count seriously against treating matters of conduct according to the standards of Aristotelian science.

At a more general level, PNI promises to play an important role in the discussion of Aristotelian ethics as an Aristotelian science. Since *eudaimonia* is the goal (*telos*) in ethics that is most completely attained through the activity of contemplation (*theoria*), we will need some way of accounting for the fact that a vast majority of moral agents fail to engage in the activity in which their flourishing consists. Indeed, we will need such an explanation even if flourishing consists in a life of virtuous activity that does not include contemplation. Noting the complexities that accompany an agent in relation to factors like passion, emotion, reason et cetera, we can preliminarily understand how impediments (both internal and external) could be an important element in explaining how it could be that so few agents actually attain their natural end. If PNI is an important explanatory component of Aristotelian natural science generally, we would expect to see it play some significant explanatory role in ethics, if ethics can be rightly regarded as an Aristotelian science.

If science, as Aristotle conceives of it, is concerned with necessary causal relations and such relations are to be found in the natural world, then why should we say that the world of nature can only be captured within some picture of science that is weaker than pure science? If Aristotle could (or does) make use of something along the lines of PNI, then, from the perspective of scientific necessity, the fluctuation that accompanies matter seems to be somewhat incidental to science.

3.5 One Conception of Science with Two Types of Demonstration (TDP)

Georgios Anagnostopoulos's ideas about exactness/inexactness in Aristotle have important implications for trying to decide whether or not one classifies various undertakings as Aristotelian sciences (Anagnostopoulos 1994). Anagnostopoulos's understanding of Aristotle's remarks about exactness/inexactness leads him to offer a unique account of how for-the-most-part relations function in ethics and in science, one we will call TDP. His account is notably different from TSP and remarkably different from the alternative just sketched. Since TDP does not take unconditional necessity to be a necessary condition of Aristotelian science, TDP can still hold that Aristotelian science may leave room for ethics.

On the basis of various remarks that Aristotle makes about what holds for the most part, TSP took for granted the idea that Aristotle was operating with two notions of science in the *Posterior Analytics*. TDP, by contrast, would say that considerations related to exactness/inexactness may imply that Aristotle operates with one conception of science that is rich enough to cover the natural sciences, and possibly ethics, in addition to more abstract disciplines. Ultimately the practical goals of ethics weigh most heavily against characterizing it as an Aristotelian science, since such goals require reaching particulars that fall outside of the scope of science. But this fact does not undermine the case for a theoretical science of ethics that could be demonstrative in character. In the end TDP is not committed to the claim that ethics is an Aristotelian science in some specific sense, but it does present compelling observations and reasons to think that it could be.

   The most significant wedge dividing TSP and TDP is divergent understandings of Aristotelian science. TDP has it that Aristotle works with one conception of science that includes two types of demonstration, one of which is looser or softer (*malakoteros*) than the other. Not surprisingly, the looser or softer sense of demonstration leaves room for premises and conclusions that hold for the most part, which makes demonstrations "soft." Whereas TSP requires that a necessary condition of Aristotelian science is necessary relations between universals, TDP indicates that necessary relations need not be understood as providing an absolute condition of Aristotelian science. How can we accommodate all disciplines that Aristotle calls "sciences" if we confine ourselves to what is included in the realm of what holds by necessity (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 246)? TSP's "probabilizing" relationship was one attempt to answer this question.

   Unlike TSP, TDP maintains that Aristotle does not have a notion of scientific necessity distinct from the simple or unconditional necessity at the core of the *Posterior Analytics* account of science (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 261). Since simple or unconditional necessity requires that something could not be otherwise, and things that hold for the most part can in fact be otherwise, TDP implies that things that are true for the most part cannot hold by simple or unconditional necessity.

   According to TDP, for-the-most-part relations exhibit one kind of inexactness, i.e., fluctuation, which does not ultimately preclude the demonstrability of propositions that hold for the most part, since it is possible in principle, according to this view, to eliminate such inexactness. Part of the project of TDP consists in showing how to implement a procedure whereby inexactness can be eliminated. Much of what TDP has to say with regard to the prospects of treating ethics as an Aristotelian science is importantly influenced by a unique analysis of for-the-most-part relations. We shall see that the TDP analysis of for-the-most-part relations, reflections about the inexactness that accompanies them, and attempts to eliminate such inexactness form a picture that has shortcomings serious enough to force us to carefully consider whether this interpretation of what holds for the most part in Aristotle has the strength to provide the basis for ethics as an Aristotelian science. If it turns out that the analysis of for-the-most-part relations just proposed, an analysis neither TSP nor TDP entertains, fits more naturally with what Aristotle says about science than either of the former proposals, then it is this analysis that should be utilized in considering ethics as an Aristotelian science. This alternative analysis will be reexamined later in this chapter and developed in more detail.

3.5.1 For-the-Most-Part Propositions: Necessary or Contingent?

For-the-most-part relations involve some type of fluctuation. Aristotle appears to think that exactness/inexactness can be either a material or a formal feature of an investigation or both (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 203).[7] Material features of an

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[7] See *NE* 1094b13; 1094b15–17; 1098a25.

investigation involve the subject matter of the undertaking while formal features pertain to the types of accounts one might give of the subject matter. TDP includes a "congruence thesis" according to which "some kind of congruence holds between the exactness/inexactness of our accounts (formal level) and the nature of the subject matter (material level)"(Anagnostopoulos 1994: 203). More specifically, Aristotle seems to think that inexactness at the material level results in inexactness at the formal level (*NE* 1104a). So if the subject matter of Aristotle's ethics is inherently inexact, then it would follow that our accounts or methodology in ethics should also be inexact given the congruence thesis (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 292). Aristotle's adherence to this thesis has important implications for how we understand his treatment of diverse disciplines. For more abstract, matterless disciples like mathematics, the type of precision that characterizes the treatment of its subjects may dictate that accounts that deal with them may virtually lack imprecision. In any event, if a congruence thesis is true, then we should expect correspondence between exactness/inexactness at both material and formal levels.

What does it mean to say that for-the-most-part relations are inexact? How does variation or fluctuation relate to their inexactness? Consider the relationship between "wealth" and "beneficiality" in the for-the-most-part proposition "Wealth is beneficial." Wealth, (and for that matter bravery), are quite often beneficial but occasionally harmful; there is some room for fluctuation between the subject and attribute of the proposition "Wealth is beneficial." We expect propositions (and arguably accounts) about wealth and bravery to hold for the most part and not in all cases. Does Aristotle think that all matters of conduct exhibit the kind of fluctuation that would justify the claim that all propositions about matters of conduct are true only for the most part? Although Aristotle makes some remarks that could be interpreted as an endorsement of this view (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 208, 209, 299), many statements in the *Nicomachean Ethics* clearly rule out the possibility. Aristotle thinks that theft, adultery and murder have no mean (*NE* 1107a12), that moral dispositions are destroyed by excess and deficiency (1104a12), that *eudaimonia* is the ultimate end of human activity (1094a20), that one has *phronēsis* if and only if one possesses all of the moral virtues (1145a). These are theses about which we could form propositions that would be universally true. Aristotle's extensive list of theses of this sort speaks strongly against the idea that fluctuation is all-pervasive in matters of conduct. It is possible to formulate at least some universally true propositions about matters of conduct. So although fluctuation is pervasive in matters of conduct, it remains to be seen what explains the variation.

One possible explanation of the fluctuation in matters of conduct is the fact that all of its subjects, i.e., human beings, have matter, and matter always leaves room for the possibility of fluctuation. But if this is so, we might wonder whether the amount and degree of fluctuation in the natural sciences in general, and in biology in particular, is attributable to matter. Is the cause of fluctuation in ethics the same cause of fluctuation in other natural sciences? If the cause is the same or at least notably similar in both domains, we will have support for the thesis that ethics could be an Aristotelian science, since Aristotle is willing to speak of *epistēme* in

connection with natural sciences. Is there anything about ethics that renders it significantly different from other putative sciences? If thorough investigation points to some such feature or set of features that set(s) the discipline of ethics apart, then one would be inclined to think that ethics may be a science only in some analogical sense.

Let us return to these general questions later. TDP is committed to saying that for-the-most-part propositions are not necessary, but contingent. Let us begin examining the TDP treatment of for-the-most-part relations by presenting textual support from Aristotle for this view. A passage from the *Prior Analytics* suggests that "*hos epi to polu*" is properly understood as a type of possibility or contingency. The full passage reads as follows[8]:

> . . . the expression "to be possible" (*to endekesthai*) (being contingent) is used in two ways. In one it means to happen generally (*hos epi to polu*) and fall short of being necessary (*anagkaion*), e.g. man's turning gray or growing or decaying, or generally what naturally belongs to a thing (for this has not its necessity unbroken, since man's existence is not continuous forever, although if man does exist, it comes about either necessarily or generally. In another sense the expression means the indefinite, which can be both thus and not thus, e.g. an animal's walking or an earthquake's taking place while it is walking, or generally what happens by chance: for none of these inclines by nature in the one way more than in the opposite (*Prior Analytics* 32b5–14).

Aristotle's main point in this passage could be that there are two ways in which something can be said to be contingent: by holding for the most part or by being accidental (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 221). He cautions, however, that we should not think that being contingent is the same as being for the most part, but rather that being for the most part is one of two types of contingency. What sets for the most part occurrences apart from those that happen accidentally is that the former come about as the result of causes whereas the latter are indeterminate.[9] So we should expect to have genuine explanations for for-the-most-part relations (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 222).

The following subset of propositions from various places in Aristotle's treatises on conduct, logic, metaphysics and biology are problematic if we understand for-the-most-part propositions as being contingent (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 216):

> (a) Men for the most part become gray-haired or grow or waste away (*APr* 32b5).
>
> (b) Sultry heat occurs during the dog days always or for the most part (*Met.* 1026b36).
>
> (c) I call passions such things as anger, fear . . . and in general those things that are for the most part accompanied by sensory pleasure or pain (*EE* 1220b13).
>
> (d) It seems that the brave man is for the most part fearless, and the coward liable to fear (*EE* 1228b5).

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[8] In my view, Anagnostopoulos fails to include the important parenthetical qualification of the first sense of "to be possible" in his presentation of the passage.

[9] Richard Sorabji argues that coincidences or chance events come to be without causes (Sorabji 1980). I personally think that this claim is dubious, but it would be a diversion to address this point directly in this context.

None of (a)–(d) obviously exhibits contingency. In (a) growing and wasting away are properties that are true of all men, and these processes appear to have some type of physical necessity underlying them (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 216). In (b) it looks as though Aristotle is equating or at least associating what is for the most part with what is always; this counts against the intuitive idea that what happens for the most part does not happen always. (c) is problematic because. "…the emotion of fear is, according to Aristotle, part of the definition of the brave person (and of bravery) and of the coward (and of cowardice)" (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 217). A similar problem arises in connection with (d). It is clear that if for-the-most-part relations are a type of contingent relation, then some explanation should be offered that may overcome the various discrepancies just mentioned. Since TDP involves affirming the antecedent, it must accept the challenge of offering an explanation. More specifically, TDP takes Aristotle's willingness to treat the above propositions as displaying the for-the-most-part relations as showing that Aristotle thinks that at least some essential attributes are contingent (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 217–8).

When Aristotle compares what is demonstrable (that which is necessary, always or for the most part) with what is not demonstrable (the accidental or what comes about by luck), we should observe that Aristotle is also drawing distinctions within the demonstrable (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 218). At several points Aristotle distinguishes what is for the most part from necessity, at others from what is always[10] (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 218). These contrasts provide support for the contention that what holds for the most part is not meant to designate some kind of necessity. For if "*hos epi to polu*" did designate some kind of necessity, then why the apparent contrast?[11] If, however, what holds for the most part is not a type of necessity, then we need to consider how such relations should be classified, given that they seem to involve more than pure chance.

There is a problem at this point. It is not clear that Aristotle wishes to distinguish between two types of contingency in the passage from the *Prior Analytics* passage, both of which are distinct from what is necessary, as TDP indicates. The parenthetical expression that accompanies the first sense of "to be possible" leaves the matter unresolved. The suggestion that Aristotle is even appealing to a type of necessity here cannot be ruled out in any obvious way (Hintikka 1973: 29).[12] Aristotle is definitely saying that a man's existence is contingent and that such existence is therefore not necessary, but this is only a preliminary point. The main point seems to be that even though man's existence is contingent, man turns gray, grows and decays necessarily or generally. That is, given that human beings are material beings, there are certain necessities that accompany human existence, what Jonathan Cooper calls

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[10] See *APo* 87b20; *Met* 1027a25, 1064b15, 1065a5; *Phys* 196ab19.

[11] See *Metaphysics* 1026b30, 1064b33–37, 1065a2; *Physics* 196b20,35; *Prior Analytics* 32b7.

[12] Hintikka notes that Aristotle operates with a sense of "possibility" which is broad and loose enough so that necessary things are sometimes called possible: "…possibility proper, covers *two kinds of cases*. When one says that *p* is possible (in the sense of possibility proper), one sometimes could also say that *p* is contingent and sometimes that *p* is necessary." This may very well be the sense of possibility utilized by Aristotle here.

"Democritean" or "material" necessities (Cooper 1987). TDP acknowledges that material necessities underlie these processes in connection with (a) above, which was one of the for-the-most-part propositions that presented a problem for this interpretation. It should be acknowledged that it is not easy to see why Aristotle actually claims that such processes (especially growth and decay) come about generally, unless he is making a weaker claim than the context warrants, since growth or decay always accompanies material beings. Such characteristics should be regarded as being underwritten by material necessity since they always happen. The attribute of growing gray can also be understood as being a result of material necessity, which is unconditional, even if gray hair does not always come about. We can defend this view by appealing to PNI from our earlier discussion. More will be said about this construal of for-the-most-part propositions soon.

This passage from the *Prior Analytics* is quite puzzling, and like many other passages in the Aristotelian corpus, it does not lend itself to any decisive interpretation. The passage could be read in the way TDP suggests: taking the distinction to be between two types of contingency, i.e., what happens for the most part and what is accidental, both of which are distinct from necessity. But this interpretation leaves us wondering what to do with the important qualification of the first sense of contingency.[13] The passage could also be understood as saying that Aristotle is distinguishing between two concepts that are distinct from unconditional necessity simply considered: the first, what happens for the most part, involves necessity but leaves room for exceptions while the accidental involves no necessity at all. The latter reading leaves room for the idea that there may be some overlap between simple necessity and what holds for the most part. This line will be explored later in this chapter.[14] This second interpretation accommodates the parenthetical qualification more easily than does the first alternative, but it renders the overall distinction Aristotle wishes to draw in the passage more opaque. Hintikka's helpful insight, that Aristotle occasionally uses "possibility" to designate necessity, makes this alternative more credible. However, we should observe that Aristotle does say that what happens for the most part "falls short of necessity" in the passage above.[15]

Since the text is ambiguous, we should be quite careful about the amount of emphasis placed on this passage. Since this passage in the *Prior Analytics* is the decisive text supporting the view that "*hos epi to polu*" expresses a type of contingency, it is reasonable to have worries about an approach that is centrally based upon this text.

In addition to this text, TDP can be buttressed by a reading of *Topics* 112b, which makes it evident that "Aristotle does not include what is for the most part in what is always or by necessity" (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 220). The text reads:

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[13] Anagnostopoulos omits the qualification in his presentation of the text. The omission indirectly supports the point about the tension which the parenthetical qualification presents.

[14] No weight will be placed on the *Prior Analytics* text for this interpretation.

[15] "Falling short of necessity" is also ambiguous. It may or not mean contingency. It may imply falling short of unconditional necessity simply considered.

> Seeing that some things happen of necessity, others for the most part, others as chance
> dictates, the assertion that a necessary occurrence is a for the most part occurrence or a for
> the most part occurrence … is a necessary occurrence, always gives occasion for attack.
> For if a necessary occurrence is asserted to be a for the most part occurrence, it is obvious
> that whoever makes the assertion is stating that which obtains in all cases does not obtain in
> all cases, and therefore he is in error; and the same is true if he has stated that a for the most
> part attribute is necessary, for he has stated that it obtains in all cases, when it does not.

Notice that all Aristotle says here is that someone who claims that holding for the most part is equivalent to what is necessary "gives occasion for attack." But the fact that the position leaves itself open to attack should not lead us to conclude that the position is indefensible.[16] The attack that ensues is based on some of our pretheoretic ideas about what holds for the most part. But we shall see shortly that Aristotle's use of ordinary phrases in technical senses will often force us to abandon our pretheoretical ideas about what a phrase denotes. In short, this passage by itself is not decisive, and the case that can be made with it in conjunction with the *Prior Analytics* still leaves the issue open. Setting these problems to one side for the moment, we can see that since TDP concedes that for-the-most-part occurrences admit of explanation and since Aristotelian science is primarily concerned with offering causal explanations, TDP is in a position to accept that Aristotelian science could embrace such occurrences, provided that for-the-most-part propositions do not violate any other important scientific restrictions. But it is a daunting task to show that scientific necessity is not a minimal condition that the premises of Aristotelian science must satisfy. TDP aims to show how premises that are not necessary could be proper components of an Aristotelian science by arguing that genuine demonstrations can be carried out with a premise and conclusion that hold only for the most part, where the latter is merely a type of contingency. Given that Aristotle claims (among other things) that demonstration pertains to what holds for the most part, it seems that we can choose between two ways of viewing Aristotelian science: (1) Aristotelian science pertains only to what holds necessarily. This alternative requires its advocate to explain how holding for the most part could be compatible with simple necessity and how such a model of science could encompass putative natural sciences. (2) The scope of Aristotelian science extends beyond the necessary. Advocating this line can set for-the-most-part relations outside the sphere of necessary ones, but requires explaining how what holds for the most part could be demonstrable. TDP explicates and defends (2). As we saw earlier, TSP favors

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[16] At *Topics* VI.4 141b5–142a10 Aristotle discusses the nature of the relationship between what is more known to us and what is more knowable by nature. He claims that it is better to get to know what is posterior through what is prior, but for those who find this difficult (most of us), it is better to proceed the other way—from what is posterior to what is prior. For such people it is better to frame an account (*logos*) in terms that are more familiar to them. Aristotle proceeds to remark that this view is open to the objection that there are many different definitions of the same thing. He then remarks that definitions should not be formulated in this way. However, his discussion of three kinds of definition in *Posterior Analytics* II 8–10 clearly indicates that Aristotle accepts definitions of the sort he is discussing here in the *Topics*. This provides further reason for not placing much importance on what is said in the *Topics* passage that Anagnostopoulos cites.

an approach along the lines of (1). The alternative analysis of for-the-most-part propositions proposed earlier is also consistent with (1).

3.5.2 The TDP Account of What Holds for the Most Part

Since TDP claims that necessity is not a necessary condition of Aristotelian science,[17] it maintains that there are two types of demonstration, and "The weaker, softer or inexact types of demonstrations or the less strict or absolute knowledge are primarily those that demonstrate from premises that fail to meet the condition of necessity" (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 264). What holds for the most part, according to TDP, expresses a kind of contingency opposed to what holds necessarily. Since Aristotle claims that holding for the most part is no impediment to being demonstrable (*APo* 87b20; *Metaph* 1027a25, 1065a), we might be led to think that the demonstrable must include the non-necessary. The premises and conclusions of what TDP calls "Platonic" demonstrations embody the strict, absolute conditions expounded in the early chapters of the first book of the *Posterior Analytics*. "Soft" (*malakos*) demonstrations, by contrast, make use of at least one premise that holds for the most part. As a result, the conclusion of soft demonstrations will hold, at best, for the most part. The knowledge associated with soft demonstrations will be correspondingly weaker than *epistēme* by this account, but such knowledge can still be scientific in some sense.

It may be instructive to briefly compare TDP and TSP interpretations of for-the-most-part propositions. Recall that TSP did not claim that holding in most cases was a necessary condition for holding for the most part since TSP acknowledged that syllogisms like the ones Barnes presents are invalid if quantified with "most." This recognition led to a commitment to probabilizing relations for TSP. TDP also recognizes the problem Barnes points to, but claims that one can generate a description of the form "All Xs other than Y" where X ranges over the subject of some for-the-most-part relation and Y designates the exceptional case or cases that will render for-the-most-part propositions almost true.

If we look at the form of propositions that Aristotle takes to hold for the most part, we notice that they are universal propositions of the form "All A is B," not propositions of the form "As are for the most part Bs" or "Almost all As are Bs." Operating with propositions of this form, however, leaves us with propositions that are, at best, almost true, not propositions that are all strictly true. This leads to the question of how we should understand demonstrations involving for-the-most-part propositions; demonstrations whose acceptability Aristotle clearly acknowledges. There appear to be two possibilities: for-the-most-part demonstrations preserve almost-truth, or universal propositions that are almost true can be redescribed as appropriately restricted universal propositions that are strictly true. If we understand them as the latter, then

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[17] Anagnostopoulos also thinks that the truth condition is problematic. The condition that the premises of a demonstration must be strictly true will be discussed shortly.

the relevant demonstrations can be seen to rest on demonstrations that are genuinely truth preserving.

Since generating valid syllogisms with for-the-most-part propositions requires treating them as being universal in form, one result of this account is that there will be a gap between the syntax of such propositions and their content. The facts expressed by for-the-most-part propositions simply will not obtain in every case in the world, e.g., wealth will not be beneficial in every case. It is in precisely this sense that for-the-most-part propositions may be said to be inexact.

While redescribing "All As are Bs" as "Most As are Bs" does yield propositions that are strictly true, this kind of redescription fails to certify as valid those demonstrations about what holds for the most part that Aristotle takes to be warranted. However, redescribing these propositions as "Almost all As are Bs" where the exceptions to all As being Bs can be specified, so that such a redescription will be equivalent to one of the form, "All As except Xs are Bs," will not have the problems that a redescription in terms of "most" has. In fact it yields Anagnostopoulos's view.

Consider the following two syllogisms used by TDP to illuminate his analysis:

> Fissepedes produce many offspring.
> *The hare is a fissepede.*
> The hare produces many offspring (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 272).

> For the most part fissepedes produce many offspring.
> *The elephant is a fissepede.*
> For the most part the elephant produces many offspring (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 276).

Aristotle presents an argument that can be represented in the first pattern at *GA* 734a34; the second is modeled after the first. Aristotle notes that the proposition that functions as the major premise in each argument admits of one exception, i.e., the elephant, which produces only one offspring; the major premise involves a for-the-most-part relation. But Aristotle does not indicate the proposition should be quantified with "most," presumably because doing so would undermine the validity of the inference.

According to TDP, in the first syllogism Aristotle acknowledges that the first premise is true for the most part, the second premise is strictly true and the conclusion is true in all cases. But it is important to notice that the major premise and conclusion of the first syllogism are not quantified with "for the most part." When the major premise in the second syllogism is quantified with "for the most part", the conclusion is quantified in this way. But the proposition "For the most part the elephant produces many offspring" is simply false. So in the second case one has a false conclusion and two true premises. These examples purport to show that quantifying with "for the most part" cannot be the properly scientific way of treating propositions that involve for-the-most-part relations. Rather, such propositions must be assimilated into ones that are true universally by means of some description that restricts the subject class. A gap between syntax and semantics results. But this procedure makes valid deduction with for-the-most-part propositions possible while at the same time accounting for their inexactness.

If the major premise of a categorical syllogism is universally true and the minor premise holds for the most part, then the conclusion will be true for the most part; such inferences are truth preserving. The problem appears in cases where either both premises hold for the most part or the major premise alone holds for the most part. Inferences of the latter sort are not apparently truth preserving.[18]

TDP characterizes for-the-most-part relations as follows:

> The (for the most part) propositions are universal in form, and therefore any one of them asserts some property P belongs to all members of a kind K, but because matters of conduct are only for the part, P applies only to most Ks. Such propositions are not total misrepresentations of the facts, but nonetheless they do not fit the facts exactly—they are rough pictures or outlines. The proposition "Wealth is beneficial" asserts that all wealth is beneficial, but this is not true in all cases. It is true only in most cases; it is roughly true. Similarly, the proposition "Fissepedes produce numerous offspring" is roughly true. It is true of almost all of the fissepedes—the elephant being the exception (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 274).

> It is clear, however, that the truth for the most part of the conclusions of such problematic syllogisms is not guaranteed by the truth for the most part of their premises; it is not implied by the form of the premises alone. If it were, Barnes's syllogism about centenarian women would be valid; the truth for the most part of its conclusion would be guaranteed; and so would that of the syllogism about the elephant. . . (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 276).

But the following comment indicates some qualification:

> Many of Aristotle's examples of things that are for the most part indicate that "For the most part Bs are A" is not to be equated with "Most Bs are A." Rather it is to be equated with "Almost all Bs are A" (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 277).

It is not apparent how to formulate a rule that would allow us to distinguish between "most" and "almost all" and TDP does not provide one. However, we could say that "most" is a term that could cover a fairly wide range, a limited portion of which is encompassed in the expression "almost all." "Most" could truly designate just a bit more than half or somewhere around three-quarters. It could also be used to cover cases in which the threshold is quite high. It is in this last case the "most" and "almost all" overlap. These distinctions are, to a large extent, beside the main point, given that TDP takes Aristotle to be committed to the view that "For the most part Bs are A" is to be equated with "Almost all Bs are A." If there is a genuine logical equivalence between these two expressions, then since "most" is apparently weaker than "almost all" and "almost all" is at least a necessary condition for holding for the most part, it follows that "most" is a necessary condition for holding for the most part. This feature of TDP distinguishes it from TSP and the alternative interpretation offered earlier.

TDP argues that the strict truth of propositions is a condition that the premises of an Aristotelian science would not have to satisfy:

> The condition of truth, however, is one of the conditions that may be looked upon as a plausible candidate for distinguishing between soft or weak and cogent or exact demonstrations.

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[18] Such inferences cannot be truth preserving if one takes holding in most cases to be a necessary condition of for-the-most-part relations.

> After all, it is one of the conditions which Aristotle requires of the premises of demonstra-
> tion. Without abandoning it altogether, without making the premises outright false, it can
> perhaps be weakened somewhat. Thus there can be demonstrations whose premises are
> strictly true (the exact or cogent ones) and others whose premises, although not strictly true,
> are almost true (the soft or inexact ones). Such premises could be just those propositions
> that Aristotle takes to be true for the most part—the propositions about matters of conduct
> and the world of nature. As seen earlier, these propositions are not false, but they are not
> strictly true either. Though they have exceptions, they are almost true (Anagnostopoulos
> 1994: 263).

More needs to be said about what it means to say that some universal proposition
is almost true; it is not clear how abandoning the (strict) truth requirement could be
consistent with Aristotelian science.

Even though TDP does not require that strict truth be a necessary condition for
the premises of an Aristotelian science, some attempt to eliminate the inexactness
that accompanies for-the-most-part relations and the propositions that express them
is quite important for TDP:

> The more one reflects upon the question of the scope of the inexactness Aristotle associates
> with being for the most part, the more one realizes that it cannot really be separated from
> the question of the eliminability of this type of exactness at the formal level, for whether all
> propositions about matters of conduct are inexact by being true for the most part depends on
> whether they can or cannot be replaced by others that are not true only for the most part. It
> depends, that is, on whether the inexactness at the formal level can or cannot be eliminated
> altogether or in part (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 22).

Redescribing for-the-most-part propositions that are almost true as ones that are true
in all cases is how TDP attempts to eliminate the inexactness.

Consider the proposition "Fissepedes produce many offspring." This proposition
is one that Aristotle claims holds for the most part (*GA* 771b3). It turns out that
elephants are fissepedes but produce only one offspring (771a20, 771b10). Since
with the exception of elephants the proposition is universally true, we could for-
mulate a proposition "All fissepedes except elephants produce many offspring." By
restricting the class of fissepedes in this way TDP can assimilate propositions that
are almost true into ones that are strictly true.

Another proposal to eliminate the inexactness from for-the-most-part relations
involves providing a description that involves a causal mechanism. Aristotle appar-
ently thinks that an explanation of why some animals produce many offspring and
why others produce few is an animal's size, not the sort of foot it has.[19] "One can
describe the phenomena then by using the universal *large animal* or *small animal*,
a move that may not only produce universally true propositions but also may allow
one to see a causal mechanism operating far beyond the species (elephant) men-
tioned above..." (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 286). Aristotle has reservations about
the prospects for implementing descriptions with causal mechanisms in natural sci-
ence to eliminate inexactness. This is even more difficult in ethics because of the
pervasiveness of inexactness that matters of conduct involve. We shall see shortly

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[19] See *GA* 771b6. Anagnostopoulos calls attention to this point.

that we cannot properly understand for-the-most-part relations in Aristotle without considering "causal mechanisms." Even though Aristotle does not make a habit of utilizing the kinds of descriptions involved in TDP, his actual usage of for-the-most-part propositions suggests that causal mechanisms are part of what constitutes them.

Though the TDP proposal redescribes for-the-most-part propositions, it does not come without expense. First of all, there is no indication that Aristotle would be willing to allow for propositions restricted in the way TDP suggests to be proper elements of a science. Although Aristotle does restrict the subject class in some propositions in some contexts, there is no evidence for the view that he would allow such a procedure to play a significant role in science. Since natural kinds are part of the furniture of the Aristotelian world, and science is directed toward explaining causal relations that take place between natural kinds, it is not apparent how restricting classes could reveal causal relations that would be relevant to this conception of science.

If carrying out the practice of restricting classes in the way just indicated is allowed, will any subject genus be a legitimate object of scientific inquiry? What if it were to turn out that the matter that happened to be available in the world were such that almost all xs were y but that there was not necessary causal connection between x and y? Would such a relation be a scientific one? What about Aristotle's idea that natural kinds are the proper subject matter of science? In short, if universal propositions that hold for the most part are redescribed with appropriately circumscribed propositions that are true, we do not get causal relations holding among natural kinds, which raises significant problems.

3.5.3 Summary of TDP

TDP's understanding of *hos epi to polu* and TDP's ideas about indefiniteness have important implications for how we understand Aristotelian science. The claim that Aristotle embraces two related but distinct types of demonstration in science promises to provide a basis upon which we could understand ethics as a science. However, there are some components of TDP's account of Aristotle's use of *hos epi to polu* that are somewhat controversial, the most notable of which are the views that necessity is not a necessary condition of Aristotelian science, and that science may have to leave room for propositions that are not strictly true. It will be helpful to set out explicitly some important claims that play a significant role in this portion of the overall argument for TDP. Here are some highlights:

1) Aristotle accepts a thesis about the congruence between material exactness/inexactness and formal exactness/inexactness according to which material inexactness implies formal inexactness.
2) For-the-most-part relations involve inexactness in the sense that they involve fluctuation or variation.
3) For-the-most-part propositions are contingent (from 2) (Anagnostopoulos 1994: 218–9).
4) For-the-most-part propositions are not necessary (from 3).

5) For-the-most-part propositions are appropriate elements of demonstration in Aristotelian science (*APo* 87b19–22, 96a17–19; *Metaph* 1027a20–1).
6) For-the-most-part propositions are universal in their syntax (from 5).
7) For-the-most-part propositions are non-universal in their semantics (from 2, 3).
8) For-the-most-part proposition embody a type of inexactness (from 6, 7).
9) For-the-most-part propositions are not strictly true, but almost true (from 6, 7, 8).
10) Aristotelian science does not require propositions that involve necessary subject-attribute relations (from 3, 5).

From here, we might extend TDP this way:

11) Aristotelian science should leave room for propositions that are not strictly true (from 3, 8).
12) Ethical accounts can be deductive.
13) An important class of ethical propositions involves for-the-most-part relations.
14) An important class of ethical propositions can be treated scientifically (from 5, 13).
15) There is good reason to think that ethics could be an Aristotelian science (from 14).

Although a good case can be made for (14) which would lead us to believe that (15) has a good chance of being true, TDP is not committed of the truth of (15), even within the bounds of its broad notion of Aristotelian science. Some main concerns are the practical goals of ethics, indefiniteness at the core of ethics and the bleak prospects for eliminating inexactness from for-the-most-part propositions to make soft demonstrations possible. The prospects for TDP's suggestions about eliminating inexactness from for-the-most-part propositions do seem somewhat bleak, but it is the TDP interpretation of for-the-most-part relations that gives rise to this problem. The alternative interpretation offered earlier provides a plausible way of avoiding these problems. Some considerations were offered in the previous section in support of the claim that there is no obvious reason why we should think that indefiniteness in ethics poses any more serious problems for considering ethics as an Aristotelian science than does indefiniteness in other parts of nature. A point that is yet to be considered is whether the practical goals of ethics ultimately tell against treating ethics as a science. This point presents a formidable challenge to be addressed shortly.

3.6 Further Considerations About What Holds for the Most Part: An Alternative Account

In trying to provide a plausible account of the intended force of Aristotle's technical expression *hose pi to polu,* we should attempt to accommodate various ideas that pertain to the relation, some of which seem puzzling when taken in conjunction with others. There is a certain intuitive understanding we have of holding for the most part, and we might expect that Aristotle's understanding of the relation would be consistent with most of our pretheoretic ideas about the matter. However, given that Aristotle has special technical uses for seemingly ordinary phrases, it would not be surprising to find that our intuitive sense of the phrase "for the most part" may be challenged by at least some nuances of the more technical sense of the phrase. Given

our intuitive understanding of the phrase and Aristotle's more technical usage, the best interpretation of the relationship should ideally take into consideration all of the following:

1) Our intuition (and textual support for the idea) that since "necessity" designates what cannot be otherwise, that holding for the most part involves some component in virtue of which it is weaker than simple necessity.
2) Our intuition (and textual support for the idea) that holding for the most part should be stronger than mere chance.
3) That Aristotle's use of "*hos epi to polu*" should correspond to things that happen with some degree of regularity in the world.
4) For-the-most-part propositions involve some type of inexactness since the facts often expressed by such propositions leave room for some degree of fluctuation.
5) Textual support for the idea that propositions that express for-the-most-part relations are demonstrable (*APo* 87b20; *Metaph* 1027a25, 1065a).

(1) is supported by the contrast Aristotle draws between what holds for the most part and what holds by necessity in places where the two together are contrasted with what happens by chance. This same idea provides textual support for (2). In connection with (3), since what holds for the most part is contrasted with what holds by chance, we would expect only the former to occur with some degree of frequency in the world. TDP's emphasis on (3) leads to thinking that holding in most cases is a necessary condition for for-the-most-part relations. (4) is justified by considering Aristotle's examples of for-the-most-part propositions from his logical and biological works, and treatises and conduct. We notice that the facts expressed by such propositions are mostly susceptible to fluctuation. In light of points (1)–(4), it is difficult to account for (5). In addition, there is tension between claims (4) and (5). TDP cannot satisfactorily accommodate all of these claims. More specifically, TDP's inability to provide a satisfactory explanation of the tension between (4) and (5) leads it to abandon a key component of Aristotelian science, i.e., the idea that the premises of demonstration must be necessary. The alternative account developed in this chapter can better accommodate (1)–(5), without abandoning central components of Aristotelian science.

According to this alternative, the way Aristotle uses the phrase "hos epi to polu" implies that the relationship is importantly connected to necessity. For every for-the-most-part occurrence there will be a corresponding relationship between a subject and the capacity (*dunamis*) that holds by simple or unconditional necessity, which ultimately explains the subject's (possible or actual) manifestation of the developed attribute in the world. Whether the capacity for an attribute is realized depends partly upon whether impediments are present and partly upon other factors, one of which is the presence of an efficient cause (possibly the thing's essence) to activate the *dunamis*. If impediments are present, then the capacity will not be realized or fully realized even if other conditions are satisfied.

In order to fill out this alternative interpretation of Aristotle's use of the phrase *hos epi to polu* more thoroughly, it will be helpful to entertain the thesis that for-the-most-part propositions may involve two important component relations which, when understood together, provide the basis for understanding how to reconcile the points listed above. The first component relation is one that holds between the

subject and a capacity (*dunamis*). Not every capacity that is truly predicable of a subject is essential to it. Nor, for that matter, does every capacity of a subject belong to it necessarily. But it is important to note that most, if not all, of Aristotle's for-the-most-part propositions involve relations between subjects and capacities that are either necessary or essential.

When we notice that Aristotle makes use of different senses of the term "necessity," we might attempt to spell out relevant senses of the term that may be at work in for-the-most-part relations. In *Metaphysics* V Aristotle says "We say that what is necessary cannot be otherwise is necessarily as it is. And from this sense of "necessary" all the others are somehow derived..."[20] The type of necessity at work in this first component of the for-the-most-part relation seems to be a definitional or conceptual one. The necessity operative in this case is simple or unconditional in the sense that the essence or nature of any subject defines and identifies the subject as a member of its kind, and this essence or nature entails a set of capacities. Propositions that hold by some sort of definitional necessity involve the prediction of a necessary or essential feature of a subject. Thinking of this sense of "definitional necessity," we can say that Aristotle identifies definitional necessities with the first two modes of perseity in *Posterior Analytics* I.4. Definitional necessity lies behind all proper principles of a science that are not existence claims. The second component relation involved in for-the-most-part propositions is a genuine type of necessity, but it is not obviously identifiable with definitional necessity. The relevant relation is not one between a subject and a capacity, but rather between a capacity and its fulfillment, actualization or realization. This relation is complicated because it involves a related but distinct type of necessity, what we might call "causal necessity," and qualifications that such necessity brings with it regarding the possible or actual presence of intervening factors. An attempt was made earlier to formulate a version of a principle that Aristotle seems to utilize in connection with intervening factors, what we might call a principle of non-interference (PNI). According to PNI, a necessary condition for natural substance to realize some natural (essential or necessary) capacity (*dunamis*) is that it not be hindered by either internal or external impediments. So an enmattered subject could not realize a necessary or essential capacity it has unless intervening factors are absent. But the absence of intervening factors by itself will not guarantee the actualization of a *dunamis*; there must also be an efficient cause present, which may be the thing's nature, suited for the appropriate end. For example, an acorn has an essential capacity to become an oak tree. This capacity sets acorns apart from other types of seeds. Moreover, if an acorn lacked the capacity to become an oak tree, it would not be an acorn. In the generation of an oak tree there are two types of intervening factors that can impede an oak tree from coming about. Internal factors would include defects in the matter of the acorn itself. Given the imperfections of matter in the world, the matter present in an acorn may not be sufficiently suited for cooperating with the form in

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[20] Each sense of "necessary" on Richard Sorabji's purportedly exhaustive list of senses of necessity in Aristotle boils down to some variation upon or application of this basic meaning (Sorabji 1980).

generating an oak tree. Provided the matter is sufficiently suited to the task, there are still external impediments that can block development, i.e., rocky soil, the presence of brush that blocks light, et cetera. But even if both types of impediments are absent, the generation of a developed specimen of the kind is not ensured. Efficient causes such as rain, rich enough soil, proper light, et cetera must also be present and operative. Efficient causes necessitate their effects in the sense that if conditions are suitable and impediments are absent, then the effect could not fail to come about (Sorabji 1980).[21] The point that must be emphasized in relation to Aristotle's idea of causal necessity is that it is a genuine type of necessity according to the core meaning given in *Metaphysics* V. A capacity (*dunamis*) could not fail to be actualized if impediments are absent and the requisite causal powers are operative.

We may still wonder whether causal and definitional necessities are really distinct for Aristotle? Does Aristotle's core sense of "necessity," i.e., what cannot be otherwise, cover both applications? Definitional necessities are unconditional in the sense that a subject could not be the type of thing it is if it lacked the capacities that belong to it necessarily or essentially; so definitional necessities are unconditional in Aristotle's core sense. Causal necessities involve effects that may be impeded by factors distinct from the causal powers at work. Furthermore, causal necessities require the capacities that are the subject of definitional necessity. However, causal necessities are unconditional in the sense that necessarily, if the cause is present and unhindered, then the effect comes about.

The last sentence may suggest that the present account of necessity in Aristotle equates causal necessity with what is often called "logical necessity," which is often distinguished from physical necessity and necessity of other sorts, where the latter are sometimes thought to be weaker senses of the term. Some possible worlds analysis is usually utilized to specify what logical necessity amounts to. For example, a modal element is involved in defining validity for arguments: an argument is valid if and only if it is not possible for the premises to be true while the conclusion is false. The idea is that the truth of its premises necessitates the truth of the conclusion. In laying out the four types of causes involved in demonstration at *APo* II 11, Aristotle identifies the second type of cause as "an antecedent that necessitates a consequent" (94a22), which appears to be a reference to material causality.[22] The fact that Aristotle associates material causality with the type of necessity involved in valid inference suggests that Aristotle does not distinguish physical necessity from logical necessity as contemporary philosophers do. If material causality involves some type of physical necessity, then Aristotle thought that there are features of matter that are necessary in his core sense.

To illustrate how these different senses of necessity apply in a specific case, consider the for-the-most-part proposition "Exercise for the most part produces health"

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[21] It does not follow from this that the effect was determined all along. This latter claim would be required for stronger versions of determinism.

[22] Aristotle says that the premises of a syllogism are the material cause of the conclusion at *Physics* 195a18.

(*Rhetoric* 1362a34). Applying the distinction just drawn, we see that there is an important definitional relationship between the subject and predicate of this proposition. Exercise is done for the sake of health; health is the final cause of the activity. We cannot fully understand what exercise is unless we understand what health is. However, it turns out that not every act of exercise is in fact healthy for every person. For example, for those who are tremendously obese, running, which is one type of exercise, is not conducive to good health; it is more likely harmful. But we would still be inclined to say that running is the type of activity that is by nature conducive to health even though it is not actually healthy for all individuals in every case. The reason that running or some other type of exercise may not be healthy in some cases is because of an imperfection in the matter of a subject. In the case of obesity, there is simply too much matter. But the presence of an impediment in this case and in others does not undermine the causal relationship that holds between exercise and health.

Furthermore, it could turn out that obesity is quite common, so much so that finding a person who is not obese is quite unusual. In such a state of affairs, it would turn out that the activity of running (or other kinds of exercise) is not healthy for most people. But the proposition "Exercise produces health" is nevertheless true for the most part, according to the present proposal, given the causal relationship that obtains between the subject and attribute.

For every for-the-most-part proposition like "Exercise produces health" there will be a corresponding relationship between the subject of the proposition and the *dunamis* for the attribute in the predicate. Furthermore, this relationship is such that the subject could not fail to possess the capacity for the attribute given the essence of the subject; the capacity for the attribute belongs to the subject necessarily either because it is part of the essence of the subject or somehow entailed by the essence of the subject. It is precisely because every for-the-most-part proposition involves a necessary relationship between a subject and a *dunamis* that for-the-most-part propositions fall within the domain of Aristotelian science.

The causal relationship between the capacity and its fulfillment is one that can be hindered by different types of impediments; it is because this is so that such capacities will not be realized all of the time in the world. It is in this second component relationship that for-the-most-part propositions involve fluctuation. But the fluctuation and contingency involved in the second relation are underwritten by necessary causal relationships that do not fluctuate at all. So it is not correct, according to this interpretation, to describe for-the-most-part relationships as being contingent relations in the way that Anagnostopoulos does. His approach simply overlooks the necessity in for-the-most-part relations that provides the grounding for Aristotelian science. We can eliminate the fluctuation involved in for-the-most-part propositions either by focusing on the relationship between a subject and the capacity for an attribute, which does not fluctuate, or by qualifying for-the-most-part propositions with PNI. But what this shows is that in either case for-the-most-part relationships involve the type of necessity that Aristotelian science is supposed to explain.

On the way of understanding Aristotle's for-the-most-part relations proposed in this chapter, not only is the relation based on things that are strictly true, but we can

still maintain that attributes of this kind hold for all members of a kind, in virtue of their nature; TDP seems not to be able to maintain this. Second, the propositions that are true in virtue of what holds for the most part are necessarily true, so that contingency does not come with what holds for the most part in the way TDP maintains. Nevertheless, it is a contingent matter whether what holds for the most part, in the sense of what realizes the relevant capacity, does or does not occur on a given occasion. Thus, there is a sense in which what holds for the most part is contingent, even though it is a necessary truth that subjects of for-most-part relations realize specific capacities for the most part. This helps explain why someone might mistakenly think that propositions about what holds for the most part are contingent.

With these ideas in mind we can see how TDP's claim that (a) for-the-most-part propositions are the proper object of explanation and (b) there is fluctuation present in them are both fundamental to the present proposal. These ideas are just accounted for in a different way by the present proposal. TDP is correct in noticing that these two ideas need not be incompatible and that both need be acknowledged in any correct treatment of for-the-most-part relationships in Aristotle. If the proposal offered as an alternative is correct, then not only is necessity importantly present in every genuine for-the-most-part relation, but we can also hold onto the idea that Aristotelian science is confined to necessary relationships; the latter idea is clearly and directly stated by Aristotle at several points. What holds for the most part will be a genuine candidate for scientific explanation to the extent that the relation involves the sort of necessity that Aristotelian science sets out to explain.

So the alternative analysis of for-the-most-part relations naturally accommodates theses (1), (2), (4) and (5) above. This account leaves states of affairs in which (3) could be false, but (3) is probably true in the world we live in. But, given that *hos epi to polu* is a technical phrase for Aristotle, it should not be entirely surprising if the technical use of the phrase conflicts with at least some of our pretheoretic ideas about the relation. In short, the tension between the account offered here and (3) is quite tolerable if there is a genuine tension here at all. At the very least, to the extent that there is a tension, it is easily more tolerable than the tensions that TDP creates.

We should take seriously the alternative interpretation of the character of technical for-the-most-part relations in Aristotle sketched here because it promises to provide a basis upon which Aristotle's ethics can be understood as an Aristotelian science. The interpretation of for-the-most-part relations in Aristotle proposed here is one that leaves room for the possibility that propositions exhibiting such relations are necessary, and thus candidates for inclusion within Aristotelian science.

3.7 Virtue Theory and Scientific Demonstrations

There have been some helpful attempts to show how one might construct Aristotelian demonstrations in ethics. C. D. C. Reeve thinks that there are probably only one or two demonstrations in ethics that can satisfy the strict standards

of "pure" Aristotelian science.[23] Although Reeve's syllogisms are interesting and thought provoking, both syllogisms would require at least some reformulation to satisfy the standards of Aristotelian demonstration as it is presented in the *Posterior Analytics*.[24] St. Thomas Aquinas proposes another syllogism that seems more suited to showing how demonstrations in ethics might go. Aquinas does not explicitly take up the issue of whether ethics fits Aristotle's model of science, but he does offer a syllogism in his commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* that deals with ethical subjects and attributes. It will be helpful to present and analyze what Aquinas takes to be a scientific syllogism in ethics. If this syllogism does in fact turn out to be both sufficiently scientific and ethical, we might have a suitable model for generating demonstrative syllogisms from the content of Aristotle's ethical theory.

St. Thomas Aquinas's proposal for an ethical demonstration is presented as follows:

> Every habit conducive to happiness is a habit operating according to right reason.
> *Virtue is a habit conducive to happiness.*
> Virtue is a habit operating according to right reason (Aquinas 1970: II 7).[25]

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[23] Reeve presents his pure syllogisms like this:
Primary *eudaimonia* is study.
Every nous aims at primary eudaimonia.
Every *nous* aims at study.

Every *nous* aims at study.
Every human being is most of all its nous.
Every human being aims most of all at study.

[24] It should be noted that neither syllogism in the previous note is valid as stated since the minor premise in both cases has a predicate that is not identical to the subject term of the major premise; a minimal condition of a categorical syllogism is that it contain only three terms. There is a suppressed premise involved in the first case to the effect that: If two things are identical and something aims at the first, then that thing aims at the second. If the first syllogism is understood in the context of this principle, then there is a way of making the argument valid. But then one wonders about the immediacy of its premises. In the second syllogism what is needed is a principle like: If a power is the *ergon* of an individual and the power has a specific aim, then the individual who possesses the power has the same aim. Although both principles appear to be true, it is not obvious that the subject and predicate in the major premise of the first syllogism are identical. Can primary *eudaimonia* and study (*theoria*) be equated? Some argument should be offered for an affirmative response. If not, then the principle underlying this premise requires further refinement.

A further, possibly more serious, problem with Reeve's syllogisms is that each makes use of the phrase "aims at" which introduces an intentional context. This fact raises concerns about the validity of both arguments and further amplifies initial concerns about whether these arguments are in syllogistic structure.

In any case, since we are looking for a scientific syllogism that is directly tied to the domain of ethics, if there is a syllogism which is better suited to this purpose, then it would be an unnecessary diversion to explicitly reformulate and analyze the syllogisms Reeve presents.

[25] Since Aristotle defines virtue as being a state (*hexis*), one wonders why Aquinas chooses to speak of a habit instead of a state in this syllogism. The discussion below will reveal that Aristotle's conception of what a *hexis* is involves habituated activities. Aquinas is assuming, in this context, that a *hexis* and a certain kind of habit are the same thing.

Since the syllogism is presented in the first figure with affirmative premises and an affirmative conclusion, it satisfies the minimal formal conditions of a scientific syllogism. The middle term "habit conducive to happiness" functions as a cause or explanation for why the predicate of the conclusion inheres in the subject of the conclusion. In fact, since *eudaimonia* is characterized by Aristotle as being the *telos* of all human activity and as the first principle in matters of conduct (*NE* 1140b17–20), it could be said that the middle term in this syllogism functions as final cause.

Do the premises of this syllogism satisfy Aristotle's per se conditions as these conditions apply to the theory of demonstration? Demonstrations must have major premises and conclusions that are per se in the second or fourth mode given that demonstrations are carried out in the first figure. The minor premise must be per se in the first mode.

Let us examine the minor premise first. A proposition is per se in the first mode if the predicate is part of the essence of the subject. "Virtue" is defined at *NE* 1106b35–1107a3 as "a state that decides, consisting in a mean, the mean relative to us, that is defined with reference to reason, i.e., to the reason by reference to which the intelligent person would define it." We might notice that "habit conducive to happiness," which is the predicate of the minor premise, does not appear in this definition. It may therefore seem as though being a habit conducive to happiness is not strictly an essential feature of virtue.

Further examination reveals that this conclusion is hastily drawn. At *NE* 1103b22–25 Aristotle sums up his account of how virtue is acquired with the remark "A state (*hexis*) [of character] arises from [the repetition of] similar activities. Hence we must display the right activities, since differences in these imply corresponding differences in the states (*hexeis*)." If Aristotle's point here is that some *hexeis* are caused by habituated activities, then it is reasonable to maintain that specification of what some *hexeis* are will make reference to habits. Since being a *hexis* is part of the essence of virtue and habituated activities give rise to *hexeis*, there is a way of specifying the genus of virtue, i.e., *hexeis*, that makes reference to habits. As we shall see, since the *hexeis* at issue are further specified in the definition as being those that aim at what right reason would dictate, and since there is reason to take happiness to be what reason aims at, there is a way of understanding "habits conducive to happiness" as being necessarily related to virtue.

Is the major premise of the syllogism, "Every habit conducive to happiness is a habit operating according to right reason," per se in either the second or the fourth mode? We need to keep in mind the idea that the rational activity that makes up the *ergon* of human beings is or includes being able to act on one's conception of the good.[26] Aristotle's initial account of happiness maintains that happiness is a life of rational activity of the sort involved in acting on one's own conception of the good when that activity is in accord with the virtues appropriate to that kind of activity. Since these virtues are virtues of a certain kind of rational activity, these activities

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[26] At least that is the notion of rational activity that I take to be involved in the *ergon* of human beings that Aristotle makes use of in his function argument in *Nicomachean Ethics* I 7.

will make the activity Aristotle refers to in his definition of *eudaimonia* activity in accord with a certain kind of right reason, namely, the kind that allows us to act on our conception of the good and to do so well. This implies that "a life of activity in accord with a certain kind of right reason" is convertible with "happiness." So the major premise of the syllogism given expresses a convertible relation between subject and attribute. Is the predicate part of the definition of the subject? It seems to be, since specifying "right reason" as acting from one's conception of the good cannot be understood without making reference to happiness.

The conclusion of this syllogism appears to be nominal definition of virtue. Aristotle thinks that the conclusions of demonstrations will be of this general character. This proposition appears to be per se in the fourth mode as well, given the necessary causal relation that it exhibits. If this interpretation of the premises and conclusion of Aquinas's syllogism is correct, then it is in fact ethical and scientific in the relevant senses. Thus, the subject matter of ethics does lend itself to scientific demonstrations.

3.7.1 Can For-the-Most-Part Relations be Demonstrated?

According to the interpretation of technical for-the-most-part propositions proposed in this chapter, there are two component relations for every technical for-the-most-part proposition. Can both component relations be treated demonstrably? It seems pretty clear that the first can, since it involves a necessary relation between a subject and a *dunamis*. Concerns about whether the *dunamis* happens to be part of the subject's essence or not do not speak against the possibility of a *dunamis's* relation to a subject being necessary. Aristotelian science is not only concerned with attributes that are essential in the sense that they are part of the definition of their subject, but it is also concerned with non-essential necessary attributes as well.[27] Predications exhibiting different definitional relations will be per se in either the first or second mode, while those that exhibit necessary non-definitional relations will be per se in the fourth mode.[28]

It is reasonable to think that, according to Aristotle's view, some attributes may not be actualized in their subjects in the world even though the *dunamis* for such attributes is related necessarily to its subject. The second of the two component relations in technical for-the-most-part propositions is the one at issue here. The relation between a *dunamis* and its manifestation is not a necessary one in the sense that its manifestation must occur. But there is a more complicated relation that is necessary,

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[27] Hypothetically necessary relations and *propria* relations are both necessary and non-essential. The former are significant in natural science while the latter will play a large role in both natural sciences and more abstract disciplines. Aristotle's scientific paradigm must be able to encompass relations of this sort.

[28] This move is mandatory given that (a) perseity and necessity are coextensive, and (b) only the first, second and fourth modes deal with scientific predications.

namely, that a *dunamis* will give rise to its manifestation under the circumstances appropriate for its manifestation if nothing interferes.

Let us say that a technical for-the-most-part proposition "S is P" should be analyzed in terms of two relations. The first is between S and P*, where P* is an unactualized *dunamis*. The second relation is between P* and P, where P is the actualization of the *dunamis* P*. We have seen that technical for-the-most-part propositions in Aristotle should be understood as expressing a relation between S and P through P*. It is for this reason that a proper understanding of these technical propositions requires acknowledging both relations.

Some syllogisms in ethics that contain for-the-most-part propositions may qualify as scientific demonstrations only when their premises and conclusions are specified in terms of *dunameis* instead of in terms of actual properties. Consider the proposition "Human beings are morally virtuous beings." Reflect on its occurrence in the following syllogism:

> Every morally virtuous being leads a happy life.
> *Human beings are morally virtuous beings.*
> Human beings lead happy lives.

Since the minor premise should be understood as holding for the most part, so should the conclusion. There are two component relations involved in the minor premise "Human beings are morally virtuous." The following assignments make this clearer:

> S: Human beings
> P*: The *dunamis* to be morally virtuous.
> P: The manifestation of moral virtue.

The relation between S and P* in technical for-the-most-part propositions is a necessary, per se relation. In this particular instance, the *dunamis* in P* is simply the *dunamis* to act from one's conception of the good. Because this *dunamis* is identifiable with the *ergon* of human beings, it is undeniably essential to human beings. Focusing on the per se relation between S and P*, and respecifying the other premises in terms of *dunameis* yields this demonstration:

> Whatever has the *dunamis* to be morally virtuous has the *dunamis* to be happy.
> *Human beings have the dunamis to be morally virtuous.*
> Human beings have the *dunamis* to be happy.

Each premise in this syllogism is per se in a way required by the standards of Aristotelian demonstration. Moreover, each proposition within the syllogism involves subjects and attributes falling within the genus of human conduct. So this syllogism presents another instance of an ethical demonstration. Since the first component relation of technical for-the-most-part propositions, the one between S and P*, is necessary and per se, an Aristotelian science of ethics clearly would concern propositions expressing these relations.

But what about the second component relation? Two reasons suggest that it is not the proper object of an Aristotelian science. The first has already been noted, namely, that the relation between P* and P is not a necessary one in one important

sense. Since impediments or the absence of an efficient cause can hinder a *dunamis* from being actualized, the relation between a *dunamis* and its manifestation might be understood as being contingent.[29] But Aristotelian science deals only in necessary relations. Another reason for thinking that the second component relation is not a scientific one is its concern with particulars. It is the presence or absence of certain particulars that determines whether something will hinder a *dunamis* from being actualized. One of the distinguishing marks of Aristotle's conception of science is its focus on the universal and not on the particular. Although Aristotelian science is applicable to particulars, its concern with them is only incidental.

Do these concerns about the second of the two component relations in technical for-the-most-part propositions count against their scientific character? Thinking that only the first of the two component relations is the proper object of science implies that for-the-most-part propositions are not strictly demonstrable, but that any such proposition could be redescribed in a way that would express a necessary relation suitable for demonstration. One reason for wanting more than this is that a science of ethics restricted to propositions specified in terms of *dunameis* would appear to be quite sparse.

The Principle of Non-Interference (PNI), a principle mentioned earlier, may provide a means by which technical for-the-most-part propositions can be understood as being directly demonstrable. PNI states that a necessary condition for some substance realizing a natural capacity it has is that it is not impeded internally or externally. Qualifying technical for-the-most-part propositions with something like PNI will produce syllogisms that give necessary causal explanations of a certain kind. We may wonder whether adding a qualification like PNI to putative scientific propositions results in propositions that satisfy the conditions of Aristotelian science. PNI expresses a necessary truth about relations involved in for-the-most-part propositions. Consider the following specification of PNI:

> A *dunamis*, P*, will be realized in attribute, P, in a subject, S, if nothing hinders or prevents it from being realized.

Let us construct an argument form whose premises are (a) the application of PNI, and (b) the predication of a dunamis, P*, of a subject.

(a) A *dunamis*, P*, will be realized in attribute, P, in a subject, S, if nothing hinders or prevents it from being realized.
(b) S's have a *dunamis* P*.
(c) S's will manifest attribute P, if nothing hinders or prevents it from being realized.

(b) will be necessary provided we are willing to accept Aristotle's metaphysics, something that carries this notion of a *dunamis* with it, and the idea that a *dunamis* is something to be found in the real world. (c) is necessary as well. If these points are acceptable, then an argument form can be constructed to show how, with the

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[29] Recall that TDP makes a commitment of this sort.

appropriate qualifications, the second component relation in technical for-the-most-part relations can be understood as being necessary. (a) is just a version of PNI. (b) refers to the first (necessary) component relation in technical for-the-most-part propositions. (c) expresses the analyzed version of a technical for-the-most-part proposition. This argument form provides a way of generating necessary propositions that express analyzed for-the-most-part relations. This result implies that there are necessary causal explanations to be given regarding both component relations of technical for-the-most-part propositions.

Even though an argument that uses PNI and the first component relation of technical for-the-most-part propositions can yield a necessary conclusion about the second component relation, there are still worries about the prospects for this procedure fitting within an Aristotelian science. Focusing on the second of the two component relations involved in "Human beings are morally virtuous," namely, the relation between P* and P, and applying the specification of PNI yields:

(a')   The *dunamis* to be morally virtuous will be manifested in morally virtuous actions for human beings if nothing hinders or prevents it from being realized.

(b')   *Human beings have the dunamis to be morally virtuous.*

(c')   Human beings will manifest morally virtuous actions if nothing hinders or prevents this from happening.

This argument is composed of three necessary propositions. Furthermore, the premises provide a causal explanation for the conclusion. But since the qualification in (b') and (c') includes "unless," (b') and (c') may be thought to fall outside the scope of Aristotelian demonstration. One reason for thinking so is that (b') and (c') would appear to be complex propositions in view of the qualification in the predicates. This syllogism may not be a categorical one. Another possible problem is that (a') and (c') may be understood as being essentially about particulars. If this were true, then these propositions would not be demonstrative propositions.

It may be helpful to briefly address these concerns before moving ahead. First, although (a') and (c') involve complex expressions, we can read both (a') and (c') as being categorical propositions with complex predicates. Secondly, it is not obvious that the *dunamis* utilized in this syllogism refers to any of the particulars that would hinder the manifestation of a particular *dunamis*. The *dunamis* might be a specific *dunamis*, but the statement made about it, namely that its manifestation will be realized if nothing hinders or prevents it, seems quite general. This is something one could say about any *dunamis*. But then, even if the *dunamis* itself is a particular *dunamis*, what is said about it is perfectly general and will be true in virtue of its being a *dunamis* and not in virtue of its being the particular *dunamis* that it is. So it looks as though both of these problems can be adequately handled. The procedure utilized above provides a means by which the second component relation of technical for-the-most-part propositions can be a component of Aristotelian demonstration.

We would expect to find other syllogisms in a science of ethics involving for-the-most-part relations in both the minor premise and the conclusion. For example, the

following syllogism ends with a technical for-the-most-part proposition that human beings are moral agents:

  (i)   Whoever acts from his or her own conception of the good is a moral agent.
  (ii) *Human beings act from their own conception of the good.*
  (iii) Human beings are moral agents.

A syllogism whose conclusion establishes that human beings are moral agents is appropriate for a deductive model of Aristotelian ethics because it is important to determine what kind of beings are the appropriate subjects for study within the subject genus. One would expect the middle term of such a syllogism to provide the appropriate explanation for why moral agency is proper to human beings.

The major premise of this syllogism appears to involve a *proprium* relation; its subject and predicate are convertible. In addition, its subject is part of the essence of the predicate, which gives reason to think that this proposition is per se in the second mode. Acting from one's own conception of the good is a truly distinctive feature of moral agents. It is Aristotle's view that non-human animals are not moral agents because their soul does not allow for rational operations. But not every being with a rational soul is a moral agent. Since no natural slave or child, according to Aristotle's view, acts from his or her own conception of the good, no child or natural slave is a moral agent. The reason that young children are not moral agents is that they do not yet display rational operations at a level that is as sophisticated as the level at which mature members of the species operate. Natural slaves are incapable of displaying such operations.

Both (ii) and (iii) should be understood as being instances of technical for-the-most-part relations. If these two propositions are not explained in this way, this syllogism will not be a demonstration for the reason that both (ii) and (iii) would be strictly false in the absence of a special explanation or some qualification. As was just noted, from Aristotle's standpoint, neither children nor natural slaves act from their own conception of the good, even though both have the capacity to do so.[30] Explaining how this syllogism could satisfy the conditions of Aristotelian scientific demonstration would show not only that for-the-most-part relations are demonstrable, but also how demonstrations involving for-the-most-part propositions could play a role in a deductive model of virtue ethics.

If the minor premise "Human beings act from their own conception of the good" expresses a technical for-the-most-part relation, then the following assignments apply:

S: Human beings
P*: The dunamis to act from one's conception of the good
P: Acting from one's conception of the good

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[30] Natural slaves have the capacity to act from their own conception of the good in the same way that blind people have a capacity for sight that, for example, rocks lack.

The interpretation of technical for-the-most-part propositions presented above indicates that the component relation between S and P* is a necessary one. Because having the capacity to act from a conception of the good is the *ergon* of human beings, having this capacity is truly essential to all human beings. "S is P*" expresses a per se relation in Aristotle's first mode. What is needed is an analysis of (ii) that yields a necessary scientific proposition.

There is a way of accounting for the necessary causal relation in this proposition within the confines of Aristotelian science. Remember Aristotle's Strong Causal Principle (SCP) that says that a natural substance realizes some capacity it has just in case impediments are absent and an appropriate efficient cause is present. Suppose that SCP is understood as playing a regulative role in subject genera where enmattered subjects and attributes are studied. The idea is that SCP would be treated as an axiom in natural sciences and in ethics since both of these genera are concerned with enmattered subjects and attributes. Combining SCP together with the first component relation of technical for-the-most-part propositions would entail the second relation. Examples of how this procedure would work need to be examined, but this manner of proceeding, if successful, would have the result that technical for-the-most-part propositions like "Human beings act from their own conception of the good" can be understood as being necessarily true and per se in genera where SCP is an axiom and technical for-the-most-part propositions are deductively linked to it.

The advantages of this procedure would be manifold. First, it would accommodate Aristotle's idea that for-the-most-part propositions are demonstrable by introducing a meta-principle governing technical for-the-most-part propositions that clearly allows the latter to be treatable within Aristotelian syllogistic. This procedure would avoid the worries raised earlier about adding qualifications to demonstrative propositions. Second, introducing SCP as a meta-principle would account for the per se character of technical for-the-most-part propositions since SCP is true per se. A third benefit follows from the first two: Aristotle's conception of demonstrative science could be applied to ethics in view of the predominant role of for-the-most-part relations in ethics. If demonstration in ethics were restricted to the relatively few unconditionally necessary propositions that do not display for-the-most-part relations, including those between ethical subjects and *dunameis*, it would be quite difficult to maintain that there could be a deductive model of virtue ethics because demonstrations restricted in this way would seldom, if ever, extend to major premises of practical syllogisms. Lastly, adding SCP as an axiom avoids turning for-the-most-part propositions into propositions about particulars. Under SCP, the reference to what hinders or prevents a manifestation of a *dunamis* is quite general. It does not refer to any particular *dunamis*, and so does not refer to any of the particulars that would hinder the manifestation of a particular *dunamis*. In view of all of these considerations, the proposal offered here provides for the possibility of a fairly rich deductive model of virtue ethics.

How would this procedure be implemented in relation to the syllogism presented above? Since the syllogism includes two for-the-most-part propositions, (ii) and (iii), let us use (iia) and (iiia) to designate the analysis of each technical for-the-most-part proposition:

   (i) Whoever acts from his or her own conception of the good is a moral agent.
  (iia) Human beings have the capacity to act from their own conception of the good and
       will so act if they have had the appropriate moral education and nothing hinders or
       prevents them from so acting.
 (iiia) Human beings will be moral agents if they have had the appropriate moral education
       and nothing hinders or prevents them from acting from their own conception of the
       good.

A demonstration that makes use of SCP can be provided for (iia) along these lines:

  1) Human beings are among the subjects of a science of ethics.
  2) Capacities of subjects of the science of ethics will be manifested if there is an
     appropriate efficient cause and nothing hinders or prevents this manifestation (SCP).
  3) Therefore, the capacities of human beings will be manifested if there is an appropriate
     efficient cause and nothing hinders or prevents this manifestation (from 1, 2).
  4) Human beings have the capacity to act from their own conception of the good.
  5) Therefore, human beings have the capacity to act from their conception of the good
     and will so act if there is an appropriate efficient cause and nothing hinders or prevents
     them from so acting (from 3, 4).
  6) The efficient cause of the manifestation of a capacity of human beings to act on their
     own conception of the good is a moral education.
 (iia) Human beings have the capacity to act from their own conception of the good and
     will so act if they have had the appropriate moral education and nothing hinders or
     prevents them from so acting (from 5, 6).

This argument shows how treating SCP as an axiom in combination with other
principles of a science of ethics will provide the basis for generating technical
for-the-most-part propositions that can play a role in ethical demonstrations.

What are the overall implications of these results for the prospects of a deduc-
tive model of virtue ethics? In general, to the extent that there are demonstrations
dealing with ethical subject matter, there can obviously be Aristotelian demonstra-
tions in ethics. But generating demonstrations in ethics is not sufficient to justify
understanding virtue ethics according to a deductive model. The deductive model of
virtue ethics requires that a fairly large set of ethical propositions be demonstrable.
Since propositions that express definitions of fundamental concepts will qualify as
being per se and necessary, this class of propositions will be a significant subset
of those principles with which a science of ethics would deal. But this may not be
enough. It seems to be Aristotle's view that the genus concerned with human con-
duct is composed, to a large degree, of propositions that hold for the most part. The
case for the deductive model of virtue ethics would seem to rest on the possibility of
carrying out demonstrations that involve for-the-most-part propositions in addition
to unconditionally necessary definitions.

Redescribing technical for-the-most-part propositions in terms of their first com-
ponent relation provides more necessary per se propositions that can function in
scientific demonstrations; however, it does not seem as though these propositions
in conjunction with ethical definitions will compose a large enough class of sci-
entific propositions to generate a science of ethics. What is required is a way of
explaining how the second of the two component relations can be understood as

being necessary. Treating Aristotle's Strong Causal Principle as a regulative meta-principle, which functions like an axiom, will fill the gap present in the second component relation in such a way that technical for-the-most-part propositions can be understood as being necessary. Providing a means for understanding technical for-the-most-part propositions deductively provides material for understanding Aristotelian virtue ethics within a deductive paradigm.

3.8 The Goals of Ethical Inquiry

Given Aristotle's remarks throughout the early books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* about not demanding too much precision in matters of conduct, it may still seem inappropriate or non-Aristotelian to offer an interpretation of the sort advocated here according to which ethical subject matter admits of fairly precise treatment, even though nothing that Aristotle says clearly and explicitly rules this possibility out. After all, the distinctive characteristic of Aristotle's conception of ethics is the role it assigns to virtue and practical reason, both of which are primarily concerned with specific actions that are particular and not universal. Further, Aristotle does insist at various points in his inquiry that the aim of his inquiry is not theoretical understanding of what virtue, right action and happiness are; the aim is to become virtuous and happy. Given these goals, it may seem at least inappropriate to suggest that the model developed here is one that accurately portrays Aristotle's views about matters of conduct.

These problems cannot be addressed adequately without a brief examination of the nature of the goals of ethical inquiry. It may turn out that there are various levels to be considered in matters of conduct and that there are different goals at higher and lower levels. Moreover, it could be that Aristotle does not make this point clear, and that he is primarily concerned with some specific level of inquiry while being concerned with others only secondarily. There are two distinct levels that should be addressed in any exhaustive treatment of Aristotle's conception of ethics: what might be called second-order considerations about the natures of the essences of the basic components involved in matters of conduct (inquiry into such entities is primarily cognitive in character and only secondarily practical), and first-order practical questions and concepts about how such concepts specifically relate to one's own moral situation (these are immediately practical and cognitive incidentally). Some second-order concepts addressed in Aristotle's exposition include the teleological character of action, the nature of moral agency, the essential nature of the end of action, a definition of the human function, definitions of fundamental concepts such as virtue and the mean, a thesis about the unity of virtues, the nature of practical reason, the nature of continence/incontinence and of temperance/intemperance et cetera. First-order considerations, by this approach, would include questions like: How can one determine what action to pursue in some particular case and in what amount? How is a mean determined? How can one know whether a particular desire is a correct one? What are general characteristics of the good life? Is the life of pleasure the best life? Can one be virtuous and still have bad appetites?

Questions at the first-order are likely to be asked by someone in his or her quest to become a good person. Second-order questions, such as those listed above, would also be relevant or useful for such a person, although their relevancy or utility may not be as obvious at first glance. It is clear that Aristotle is concerned with both types of questions in his treatises on conduct, but he seldom indicates what order he is addressing and he often skips from questions of one kind to those of the other. The *Eudemian Ethics* seems to have more the character of a second-order treatise even though first-order issues are addressed secondarily. The stated practical purpose of the *Nicomachean Ethics* indicates that it is a first-order treatise, but second-order concerns and questions are intermixed with those of the first-order.

What role do second-order considerations play in Aristotle's ethical theory? If a deductive paradigm is a correct model for understanding an Aristotelian approach to justification in ethics, what role does such a paradigm play in the grand scheme of things? We might wonder, for example, whether *phronēsis* is necessary for *epistēme*. *Epistēme* about matters of conduct would include knowledge of the first principles of ethics (which is acquired by means of *nous)*, definitions of key ethical concepts and knowledge of the causal connections between fundamental principles and secondary ones. Experience shows that it is quite possible to be morally virtuous without having *epistēme* about matters of conduct.[31]

It is reasonable to think that, on Aristotelian grounds, one could not have *epistēme* that would provide content to the principles involved in ethics or any domain without a tremendous amount of experience. Mere intellectual acquaintance or familiarity with the concepts involved in the principles that lie at the foundation of ethics would not be sufficient for *epistēme*; performing actions is the basis for the necessary experience. The *phronimos* is the paradigm case of a person who has requisite experience. If the threshold of experience required for *epistēme* is at the level of acquisition of *phronēsis*, then *phronēsis* is necessary for *epistēme.* It is quite difficult to say with any certainty where this threshold exists. It is easier to understand how *phronēsis* would be necessary for *epistēme* than the converse.

Recall Aristotle's analogy between ethics and medicine. Medicine has both practical and cognitive goals. Furthermore, since the science of medicine is ultimately for the sake of making people healthy, the discipline is essentially practical in character. But the fact that the discipline of medicine is essentially practical in character (because of the nature of its goals) does not warrant the view that the cognitive goals drop out of the picture altogether.[32] There are branches of medicine involving theoretical investigations that only make people healthy incidentally. It is quite conceivable that some portion of the discipline of medicine could be studied and investigated with no practical objective in mind. We would expect that results obtained in such investigations would be useful for the ultimate goals of the discipline if they were geared toward such a purpose.

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[31] *NE* VI 11,1143b11–14 also provides fairly clear evidence that *epistēme* is not necessary for *phronēsis*.

[32] See, for example, Anagnostopoulos's discussion of this matter.

    These points apply to the discipline of ethics as well. Ethics has both cognitive and practical goals, though its ultimate goal is practical; this is why ethics as a discipline should be properly classified as a practical science. There is no obvious reason for thinking that cognitive goals drop out of the picture in a practical science, whether it be medicine or ethics. It makes sense to think of ethics both as a practical science and as a theoretical science.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the basic ingredients of the deductive paradigm of Aristotle's ethics. Considering whether Aristotle's ethics can be rightly understood as an Aristotelian science puts us in a good position to see how to approach the construction of a deductive paradigm. When considering how ethics might fit within the framework of an Aristotelian science, we find that scholars have approached this issue in different ways. One proposal, which we called TSP, is that there are two types of Aristotelian science, pure and plain science, and that ethics should be thought of as a plain Aristotelian science. Although this proposal has its problems, it focuses attention on relationships that hold for the most part as being an important bridge between ethics and science as Aristotle thought of it. A second proposal, one we called TDP, is that Aristotle has one type of science with two forms of demonstration within it. Like TSP, focusing on relationships and propositions that hold for the most part is a critical part of TDP. A case was made that in light of the problems presented by the analyses of what holds for the most part in TSP and TDP, it is best to consider an alternative analysis of these types of relationships. According to the alternative analysis, for-the-most-part propositions may involve two important component relations. The first component relation is one that holds between the subject and a capacity (*dunamis*). The type of necessity in this first component of the for-the-most-part relations is a definitional or conceptual one. The necessity operative in this case is simple or unconditional in the sense that the essence or nature of any subject defines and identifies the subject as a member of its kind, and this essence or nature entails a set of capacities. The second component relation involved in for-the-most-part propositions is a genuine type of necessity, but it is not obviously identifiable with definitional necessity. The relevant relation is not one between a subject and a capacity, but rather between a capacity and its fulfillment, actualization or realization. This relation is complicated because it involves a related but distinct type of necessity, which we might call "causal necessity," and qualifications that such necessity brings with it regarding the possible or actual presence of intervening factors. We adopted a version of a principle that Aristotle seems to utilize in connection with intervening factors, which was called a principle of non-interference (PNI), which says that a necessary condition for natural substance to realize some natural (essential or necessary) capacity (*dunamis*) is that it not be hindered by either internal or external impediments. According to this principle, an enmattered subject might not realize a necessary or essential capacity it has unless

intervening factors are absent. But the absence of intervening factors by itself will not guarantee the actualization of a *dunamis*; there must also at least be an efficient cause present, which may be the thing's nature. A capacity (*dunamis*) could not fail to be actualized if impediments are absent and the requisite causal powers are operative. Causal necessities are unconditional in the sense that necessarily if the cause is present and unhindered, then the effect comes about.

Once we see how ethical propositions that hold for the most part can be understood according to this analysis, we are in a position to see how ethical demonstrations might be constructed. We considered some examples, and saw that ethical subject matter does seem to lend itself to treatment within the parameters of Aristotelian science. Once we recognize that there are different types of goals one might have when studying ethics, we see that ethics has both cognitive and practical goals. The ultimate goal of ethics is practical, and this is why ethics as a discipline should be properly classified as a practical science. But there is no obvious reason for thinking that cognitive goals drop out of the picture in a practical science. This is true in the domain of medicine, and it seems to be equally true in ethics. Ethics can be thought of as both a practical science and as a theoretical science.

Thinking about a theoretical Aristotelian science enables us to see how it is possible to consider ethics according to a deductive paradigm. At the level of deductions of action-guiding moral principles from fundamental principles about human subjects, dispositions and actions, we would expect to generate moral rules. At the level of applying these moral rules to our lives, we would expect to find the type of flexibility that comes with good moral judgment. Considering both of these levels is part of a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter of ethics. Rethinking virtue ethics means thinking of the ethics of virtue in this comprehensive way.

Chapter 4
How Are Ethical Principles Known?

4.1 Introduction

Now that we have explored some of the details of the deductive paradigm of
Aristotle's ethics, it is appropriate to shift our attention to the epistemic issues. How
are fundamental ethical principles known? This chapter begins by considering the
prospects of a priori or armchair ethics. What role, if any, do empirical considera-
tions play in ethics generally and in ethical theory specifically? After presenting the
views of some contemporary ethical theorists who champion armchair ethics, a case
is made that although much of ethics can be done on the basis of conceptual analysis,
there is a significant part of the subject matter that rests on empirical considerations.
So it is not plausible to characterize ethics as a thoroughly a priori discipline. With
this point in mind, we turn attention to the nature of inductive reasoning and to the
role induction plays in morality. Once a general picture of inductive reasoning is
presented, more specific issues about the role of inductive reasoning in the moral
life are considered. The first has to do with self-assessment in morality. How do we
know what kind of character we have? There are two points in Aristotle's ethics that
are helpful in providing a basis for seeing how we might make accurate assessments
about our own actions and character: (1) we have natural virtues, and (2) we are
naturally capable of recognizing virtuous acts in others. Using these two points, we
can sketch a rough outline of moral self-assessment. Chekhov's short story *The Bet*
provides a helpful illustration about how some points from virtue theory provide a
solid basis for accurate self-assessment.

The examination of inductive reasoning continues with an attempt to see how
some work in contemporary epistemology connects with some themes in Aristotle.
These connections help us see how the classic problem of induction raised by
Hume is not a particularly pressing problem for Aristotelians. Aristotle's theory
of induction is more sophisticated than it is usually taken to be. After some general
discussion of the different types of induction in Aristotle's work, we see that one
specific type, which has been called "intuitive induction" by some, is helpful for
seeing how we come to know basic moral principles.

The final sections of this chapter focus on Aristotle's foundationalism. After a
sketch of how it is possible to defend a foundationalist epistemology against the

alternatives, we consider Aristotle's specific form of foundationalism, which includes an account of how we know foundational principles. Once that framework is in place, we turn attention to ethics. How do we know fundamental ethical principles? The chapter ends with a sketch of an account.

4.2 What are the Prospects for Armchair Ethics?

Perhaps it is helpful to step back from the close examination of Aristotle's theory for a short while to get a broader perspective on epistemic issues that must be confronted by any ethical theory. To what extent is ethics an a priori discipline? Do empirical considerations play any significant role in the model of ethics being developed in this book? Once we have addressed these general questions, we shall once again focus on some of the details of the Aristotelian perspective.

A priori or armchair philosophy certainly has its place in human inquiry. It is worth thinking about whether the discipline of ethics can be adequately conducted from the armchair. The paradigm armchair ethical theorist was Kant, and his influence on the field is nothing short of astounding.[1] This alone gives us good reason to take the prospects for success of armchair ethics very seriously. More support for the armchair approach comes from considering the thought experiments in the literature of ethics featuring creative, and sometimes bizarre, situations involving identical twins headed for waterfalls, fat men stuck in caves, villagers lined up for execution, hoodlums setting cats ablaze, trains headed toward exotic sports cars, violinists attached to one's person intravenously during the night, et cetera. The common practice among professional philosophers of contriving thought experiments to demonstrate key ethical points reinforces the perception that ethics is properly done from the armchair. In addition, our reactions to such stories are often based on our ethical intuitions, which some associate with a priori reasoning.

Although it is right to say that a priori reasoning has a place in ethical enquiry, it is also correct to think that many philosophers have underestimated the role empirical considerations can and should play in well-rounded ethical theorizing.[2] After considering two perspectives illustrating armchair approaches to ethics, we shall consider some limitations of this way of doing ethics. We begin by focusing on a case made by Richard Fumerton, who argues for the thesis that the distinctively philosophical work in ethics is best done from the armchair. We then focus on Michael Smith's work because it presents a concrete example of an attempt to build an ethical theory from a priori foundations. Some of the criticisms offered draw attention to certain features of Aristotelian virtue ethics that are not subject to the shortcomings identified.

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[1] Consider Kant's influence in the work of Moore, Prichard, Donagan, Gewirth, Nagel, and Korsgaard, just to name a few.

[2] Of course, many do emphasize the importance of an empirical approach. Among them are Richard Boyd, Gilbert Harman, Nicholas Sturgeon, David Brink, and John Doris.

4.2.1 Fumerton's Case for Armchair Ethics

Richard Fumerton argues that distinctively philosophical ethics is done from the comfort of the armchair. He first distinguishes between normative ethics and metaethics, and claims the latter is focused on "questions that concern the analysis of fundamental ethical concepts such as good, bad, right, wrong, should, shouldn't, and a host of concepts… probably definable in part by reference to our paradigm ethical concepts" (Fumerton 1999: 29). Having provided this characterization of what a meta-ethical concept is, he argues that such concepts are properly analyzed from the armchair. Fumerton admits some normative questions in ethics are probably not answerable from the armchair, but suggests that departure from the armchair to answer such questions is tantamount to taking off one's philosophical hat.

Fumerton's argument for the conclusion that genuine philosophical ethics is best done from the armchair rests on the premise that genuine philosophical ethics, i.e., metaethics, consists exclusively of a priori content. Part of the case for this premise is based on how "metaethics" is defined. The definition Fumerton offers (quoted above) or some slight variation of it is used widely, so it should not raise many eyebrows. But this definition is closely related to the substantive claim that "questions that concern the analysis of fundamental ethical concepts such as good, bad, right, wrong" are all a priori in nature. In addition, Fumerton asserts that normative ethics is not genuinely philosophical. Let us consider the case offered for each of these ideas.

The support for the idea that metaethical concepts are a priori comes from considering the extent to which metaethical questions are dealt with by means of conceptual analysis. Consider the is/ought problem, a popular and often discussed metaethical puzzle. If the is/ought problem is thought of as raising questions about how it is possible to derive evaluative conclusions from factual, or non-evaluative premises, then surely attempts to resolve the is/ought problem would involve considering ideas such as the nature of inference, possibly whether there is any difference between logical and practical inference, what is involved in making an evaluative claim, et cetera. All of these concepts can be clarified by abstract thought alone, and it is not clear how empirical considerations would have any bearing on them. Or consider another central question in metaethics—how we reconcile the apparent objectivity of ethical judgments with their acknowledged practical force? Dealing with this question involves a lot of hard thinking about the standards used to determine whether certain kinds of claims are true, the nature of motivation, desire, et cetera. Again, it is not clear how empirical considerations would be very helpful in working through issues like these. It does seem as though these are armchair issues if there ever were any.

What supports Fumerton's thought that normative ethics is not genuinely philosophical? Here Fumerton embraces the positivist idea that normative questions are solved by sorting through the metaethical issues, plugging in the empirical data, and then seeing what follows. Philosophical inquiry is surely relevant at the metaethical level, but he notes how "plugging in the data" is probably best done

by people with good common sense, a commodity to be found among practition-
ers of various fields where specific normative questions are relevant (Fumerton
1999: 31).

What should be said about this argument, particularly about the two claims
supporting the premise that genuine philosophical ethics, i.e., metaethics, consists
exclusively of a priori content? Both supporting claims seem dubious. First, it is not
convincing to maintain that empirical considerations have no bearing on metaeth-
ical questions. We may grant that the is/ought relation and the problem about the
objectivity and practical force of moral judgments are armchair issues, but there
are other metaethical concepts upon which empirical considerations seem to bear.
Consider, for example, Bernard Williams's criticism that consequentialism forces
us to abandon our personal projects, thereby creating a sense of alienation. We
might think this point has some degree of plausibility, but, because of its abstract
nature, be unsure about whether it is true. In order to find out whether conse-
quentialism leads to the type of alienation Williams describes, we might have to
think as a consequentialist would in moral situations we face in our own lives.
Because this process of determining the truth of the metaethical principle would
be tied to specific cases we may have faced, it is not clear how this type of think-
ing would be purely a priori. Even if armchair or a priori considerations about the
truth of the metaethical principle are what is decisive in our determining whether
to accept the principle, it nonetheless seems to be the case that these armchair
reflections will only be plausible to the extent that they conform with what we
have experienced in concrete moral situations in our lives. Does our moral expe-
rience support the idea that the type of alienation Williams describes comes with
consequentialism? If it does, then this empirical evidence supports the argument. If
it does not, then empirical evidence counts against the argument. In this instance
we can see that empirical considerations grounded in our own moral experiences
can be quite relevant in helping us determine whether a metaethical point is legit-
imate. If this is correct, then metaethics may not be the purely armchair endeavor
that Fumerton makes it out to be. At the end of the day, Williams' claim about
the nature of consequentialism is empirically falsifiable. In view of this observa-
tion, Fumerton might say that the empirical falsifiability of Williams' claim just
shows that it is not a metaethical claim. But it seems arbitrary to restrict the claims
that genuinely count as being part of philosophical ethics in this way. There will
be many other instances where empirical considerations will not be relevant to a
metaethical principle, but all we need is one plausible case that illustrates how
empirical considerations would be relevant to show that metaethics is not thoroughly
a priori.

Concerning the question about whether philosophers have anything distinctive to
say about normative questions, we can see that they can when we consider concrete
issues in normative ethics. Consider the abortion issue, for example. Surely philo-
sophical considerations are useful in helping us see whether human life has some
special kind of dignity. We might think determining whether and when this special
property exhibits itself in the continuum between conception and death is a matter
answered by appeal to empirical considerations. If so, we would expect that doctors

or possibly embryologists should have something decisive to say about such matters. But we are likely to discover that the level of controversy and disagreement among scientists and medical practitioners about the moral status of the unborn is as about as high as it is in the general public. Why? Because empirical considerations do not by themselves settle the issue, and a sometimes complicated interplay between empirical and conceptual issues is what often separates people on such questions. Philosophers can help sort through the conceptual quagmire, even if they cannot provide a final answer on the question that will be convincing to everyone. Philosophers do have something valuable to contribute to these discussions; they have much to offer on the normative front. More about this point will be said below, but for now it seems fair to think that if philosophers have something distinctive to offer on normative issues, and if what has been said about how empirical considerations might help us understand some metaethical issues is correct, then Fumerton's case for the claim that genuine ethics consists of exclusively a priori content is not very strong. This should lead us to be cautious about what we think can be done in ethics from the armchair.

4.2.2 Michael Smith's Dispositional Theory of Value

Let us now shift attention from this general argument about the nature of ethical inquiry to a specific proposal about how we might go about framing a moral theory in an a priori fashion. Michael Smith attempts to construct a model for ethical theory that incorporates realism, naturalism, and internalism. One attractive feature of Smith's approach to moral theory is that is has something to offer nearly everyone, especially moral realists. For example, Smith takes very seriously ideas often associated with Kantianism—establishing an a priori rational foundation for ethics that is categorical and not merely hypothetical. Most interestingly, Smith's theory is at once both Humean and anti-Humean (in different respects of course). Smith is inspired by the Humean belief/desire paradigm of moral psychology, but attempts to construct an anti-Humean, non-relativist realist ethics that is built on the belief/desire paradigm.[3] What is more, Smith's theory is a dispositional theory of value, which gives it a bit of Aristotelian flavor—it frames value in terms of what we would be disposed to value under ideal conditions.[4] Smith says "facts about what there is a justification for doing, in various circumstances, are in turn plausibly thought to be facts about what we would advise ourselves to do if we were better placed to give ourselves advice" (Smith 2004: 203). Those familiar with the role of the *phronimos* (or practically wise person) in Aristotle's ethical theory, will probably notice a striking affinity on this point.

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[3] Dancy (2004) calls the position "Humean Realism."

[4] When I claim that this is an Aristotelian idea I have in mind the fact that Aristotle seems to be the first moral theorist to have placed importance on the idea of dispositions of an agent under ideal circumstances.

Smith's theory is based on the principle that "what is desirable for us to do in circumstances C is what we would desire that we do in C if we were fully rational" (Smith 1994: 152). This principle offers a potential basis for moral realism because according to it, we have a way of saying that propositions with moral content are in fact true (Smith 2004: 181). The standard for determining whether or not such propositions are true is the justification one would offer under idealized conditions of reflection (Smith 2004: 202). Being in idealized conditions of reflection means that an agent is able to determine the morally appropriate thing to do in any set of circumstances by thinking about what she would advise herself to do if her desires were immune to rational criticism, i.e., if her desires formed a set that is maximally informed, coherent, and unified (Smith 2004: 203). If an agent sees this justification, then she will have the desire to perform the prescribed action all things being equal—absent depression, weakness, or some other form of irrationality.

This theory promises to account for the objectivity of moral judgments because it grounds the justification for what is right to do in terms of rationality as such. In this way, Smith's theory differs substantially from other internalist models like those offered by Bernard Williams and Gilbert Harman, both of whom offer variations of a relativistic internalism. Since rationality as such is still a subjective feature in some sense—a feature of subjects—moral injunctions will have prescriptive force as well. By accounting for both the objectivity of moral judgments and their prescriptive force, Smith claims to have solved what he believes to be the most significant problem in ethical theory.

What Smith says about externalism gives us insight into his views about how ethics should be done. He notes that one problem externalists face is squaring an empirical methodology with the apparent fact that ethics seems to be an a priori endeavor. If this is so, how can we make sense of the idea of interacting causally with a priori principles? Smith straight forwardly characterizes ethics as an a priori endeavor. He says:

> . . .it is agreed on nearly all sides that moral knowledge is a relatively *a priori* matter, at least in the following sense: if you equip people with a full description of the circumstances in which someone acts, then they can figure out whether the person acted rightly or wrongly by just thinking about the case at hand. Someone who claimed that it would be impossible to figure out what is right by just thinking about the circumstances of action would be misusing the word "right" (Smith 2004: 203).

The remarks seem to refer to normative ethics, because the focus is on whether someone acts rightly in a described set of circumstances. Fumerton would classify this as a normative issue at any rate. Smith's remarks seem to apply especially well to the types of thought experiments mentioned earlier.

Consider Peter Singer's proposed solution to world hunger as an illustration of Smith's point. The alleged solution rests on an argument that makes a strong appeal to our intuitions about what would be the morally right thing to do in a hypothetical case. Singer uses a colorful story from Peter Unger in which we are in a position to flip a switch so that a speeding train will be taken off course from smashing into our exotic automobile. But a consequence of our action is that the train will run over a helpless child instead. Our intuitions tell us it would be crass to place more value on

material objects than on human life. From this story Singer hopes to persuade us to give away our excess resources to relive famine in third world countries.

This story about flipping the switch to possibly alter the course of a speeding train is a good example of armchair ethical theorizing, and it illustrates the sort of activity fitting well with the description Smith gives about the a priori nature of ethics. As indicated above, we should not doubt that a priori considerations have an important role to play at both the normative and metaethical level, but there is reason to doubt that this characterization accurately depicts the nature of ethical inquiry generally.

4.2.3   Worries About Armchair Ethics

A basic criticism of a system of ethics that is conceived entirely from the armchair is that it ignores important procedures for getting information that can help us make progress in understanding ethical concepts. Some type of restricted armchair philosophical ethics might be possible, but we unnecessarily limit what ethics can do when we think about ethics as an exclusively armchair endeavor. We saw a case above for the point that empirical considerations seem to bear on at least some important metaethical questions. In addition, induction can be seen to yield moral principles often utilized to think about cases in normative ethics. There are facts about ourselves learned inductively, often through much first-hand experience, that should not be understood as part of what Smith calls the "circumstances in which someone acts." This inductive grasp of general moral principles is not to be confused with casuistry, or applying general principles to particular cases. What is being suggested is an idea that resonates with what Aristotle does in his ethics. Characterizing philosophical ethics as a thoroughly a priori or armchair discipline fails to leave room for the idea that some general moral principles can or must be acquired inductively, both at the normative and metaethical level.

In addition, there are good reasons for thinking that some of our own attitudes are not discoverable a priori, and these attitudes might have an important role to play in normative ethics. Consider the Implicit Associations Test (IAT), which provides a good example of how some of our attitudes do not seem to be discoverable a priori.[5] This test is meant to show, among other things, that we are not always capable of knowing our own minds—that people may be unaware of some of their own attitudes (Gladwell 2007). If the test is capable of showing this, then we have further reason for being suspicious of armchair ethics.

Those taking the IAT can choose from a number of topics to test attitudes, including those about race, age, sexuality, religion, gender-science, and many others. The test begins by placing simple categories on the left and the right of the screen, Good on the left and Bad on the right, in the racial test, for example. The user then taps a key on the left of the keyboard when a word generally associated with goodness—words like "joy," "wonderful," "happy," et cetera—flashes on the screen. A user

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[5] The test is on the Web at https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/

taps a key on the right when a word appears that is associated with badness—words such as "agony," "horrible," "nasty," et cetera. The user is instructed to respond as quickly as possible. The next phase of the test uses the categories White American and Black American, and faces or portions of faces of whites and blacks are flashed on the screen. Again, the user taps keys on keyboard to place the images in the appropriate category. The final phase of the test combines the categories, so on the left we might have Good or Black American; on the right we would have Bad or White American. As words and images from any category rapidly appear on the screen, the user has to quickly place the words in the correct set of categories. The speed of the responses and the number of errors together indicate something significant about one's implicit attitudes about race.

Without being aware of such a test, we might think we could determine introspectively (a priori) what our attitudes about racial groups are by considering our beliefs and carefully attending to how we act and feel in specific situations when we interact with members of other racial groups. Suppose we determine after such introspection that we are basically racially color blind and that we have no negative associations with members of other races. Some of the moral principles we act on when we interact with members of other racial groups seem to be dictated by what we think about our own attitudes. Suppose that (a) I think it is morally good to be racially color blind, (b) I want to be racially color blind, and (c) that introspection tells me that I am. When I interact with members of other racial groups I will simply rely on the same moral principles I use when I interact with member of my own racial group. But now suppose that (a)–(c) hold, but I take the Implicit Associations Test and learn that I have a strong preference toward members of my own racial group and lots of negative associations with members of other racial groups (Gladwell 2007). In view of this discovery, if I strive to be morally good, I may need to invoke additional moral principles when I interact with members of other racial groups; maybe a principle stating that I should make sincere effort to make kind gestures toward members of other racial groups, for example. Once I learn that more exposure to the positive achievements of members of other racial groups tends to lower my negative associations with a group (Gladwell 2007), it is reasonable to think that a person trying to be morally good would strive to make efforts to find opportunities to do so.

This case shows that the sorts of principles a person who wishes to be good brings to bear on a situation depends on judgments about situations formed by experience with facts about the case at hand and facts about ourselves. Such facts are not reliably accessible in an a priori manner. And this is a significant aspect of normative ethics.

We might think of this point as it plays out in this argument:

1) There are many situations such that determining the right thing to do requires knowing which moral principles are most appropriate to the situation.
2) For these same situations, knowing which moral principles are most appropriate often requires that an agent have a sufficient amount of experience, including knowing one's own weaknesses and limitations.

3) Having this type of experience, including knowledge of one's own limitations is not possible from the armchair alone.
4) Therefore, there are many situations wherein determining the right thing to do is not possible *a priori*.

(1) is based on the fact that thinking about a moral situation consists, in part, by determining what moral principles are applicable to the case at hand. Rarely are the principles pre-selected for a given situation. (2) indicates that making a good selection about which principles apply requires the sort of experience we acquire by facing situations similar to the present one in the past. (3) states that this type of experience does not come from the armchair. As was said, this experience comes from interacting with other people in a community.

Furthermore, Smith's standard for determining the right action depends on the notion of a person situated in "idealized conditions of reflection." When we ponder this phrase, it is hard not to conjure up images of a deeply reflective agent sitting comfortably in an armchair thinking through the details of some hypothetical situation. But the coherence of the concept of such an ideal requires an ability to discern which principles are most salient to the case at hand, and this ability would seem to require the sort of habituation and good character traits that come with lots of experience as a moral agent. Put another way, thinking about a situation as a fully rational agent would require the sort of perspective on a situation that a fully rational agent has. But this perspective is not something we gain in the armchair; rather, it is gained by being engaged in a moral life, which involves making mistakes and learning from them, among many other things. This is part of the inductive grasp of moral principles mentioned above, something sure to be featured in a well-developed virtue theory of ethics.

Maybe we should say that it is a mixed bag as far as ethics is concerned—some of its propositions are empirically based while others are not. But absent some cogent argument for the conclusion that empirical propositions are not relevant to the subject matter, it is desirable to try to make use of empirical data wherever relevant. There is reason to believe empirical work has much to lend to ethical inquiry. In Chapter 2 we considered John Doris's case for the idea that there are no steady, reliable character traits on the basis of empirical data. His work attempts to establish a substantive metaethical conclusion on the basis of empirical data. Setting aside the issue of whether Doris's conclusion follows or not, it is reasonable to think that some metaethical conclusion or other will follow from the data he considers together with supplementary conceptual points. Doris is right to insist that philosophers look beyond what seems right to them and look carefully at how their conclusions match up to systematic observations of behavior (Doris 2002: 9).

We have seen that ethics is not an entirely a priori enterprise even though a priori considerations certainly play a significant role. This result could fit quite well within Aristotelian virtue theory developed along the lines suggested in this book. Aristotle's own inquiry in the *Nicomachean Ethics* weaves together conceptual analysis with empirical considerations in ways that resonate with many of the points addressed in this section. Aristotle's rich notion of practical reason involves a

dispositional analysis akin to the one Smith describes, but the relevant dispositions are built on lots of experience and observation of situations. Furthermore, Aristotle's theory of practical reason seems to require some type of inductive grasp of ends of action, which we will discuss shortly. Of course, realizing the severe limitations of armchair ethics does not force one toward an Aristotelian virtue theory, but given the remarkable level of potential explanatory power such a theory offers, it does seem like a fairly good place to turn.

4.3 Induction and Moral Self-Assessment

How do we know what kind of person we are and under what conditions would judgments about this matter be justified? It might at first seem as though introspection, or looking within, would be enough to give us an accurate picture of what kind of person we are. But we all wish to think well of ourselves. Indeed, this tendency seems to be a universal feature of human psychology. We all have a strong tendency to dismiss criticism of our own behavior. We find it admirable to see someone welcome criticisms, but this is certainly not an ordinary disposition. How can we know whether our reflections about our own character are dependable?

Recognizing the limitations of our own ability to evaluate our own character or actions, we might turn to others for help. But there appear to be limitations here as well. A friend may be reluctant to hurt our feelings regarding our behavior on some important matter and so refrain from giving us honest feedback about some bad thing we have done. Acquaintances may not know us well enough to give the right advice or to put it in the best way. Besides, since many people seem to have trouble sorting through their own problems, why should we think that they will do any better with ours? How do we know where to look for dependable advice?

Another possibility is that we can acquire general moral principles by means of inductive reasoning. More about how this works will be said in the next section, but for now we can say that accurate self-assessment in morality comes from at least three different sources: (1) the testimony of others, (2) introspection, and (3) induction. No one of these sources by itself is sufficient to offer a thorough account of moral self-knowledge. Because inductive reasoning in ethics has been given less attention than it deserves, induction as a source of moral knowledge will be highlighted in the discussion below, even though induction does not explain everything about moral self-assessment. Once we have a description of how induction works in ethics before us, we will look to Aristotle to see what might be needed to put a theoretical account of moral self-knowledge together. There are aspects of Aristotle's ethical theory that provide some of the elements needed to get a good picture of how we should understand moral self-assessment. We need some elements from a moral theory to explain the sources of knowledge. There may be other theories that could be combined with these sources of knowledge to yield a good account of self-assessment, but Aristotle's virtue theory is particularly well suited to this end.

4.3.1 Induction in Ethics

Broadly speaking, induction is the form of reasoning that takes us from perception of particulars to universal generalizations. Induction is a form of reasoning essential to natural science and common to everyday experience. In the physical sciences we infer general laws from observed instances. In everyday life we formulate general principles about the weather, financial markets, the behavior of our colleagues, and countless other things based on relatively limited experience. So common is induction to everyday thinking that we would expect to find it prevalent in moral reasoning. Since some generalizations in ethics are principles that have the potential to regulate moral conduct, we might wonder whether some special type of induction operates in the moral domain. How might induction work in ethics? Suppose I tell a joke at the expense of a person I do not know very well and only afterward realize that I have hurt that person's feelings. Wishing to think well of myself, I may initially think it is something peculiar about that person that causes this hurt. Perhaps the person is overly sensitive. On a later occasion I cause hurt to another I do not know well, but I know this second person is not the overly sensitive type. From these few instances I can begin to recognize that I ought not to be telling jokes at the expense of people I don't know very well. From the particular instances of joke telling we can come to know more general principles about how we should regulate humor. There are countless examples of this kind in morality. I come to realize that charitable giving is good for me after doing it on a few occasions. We discover where our limits are with alcoholic consumption by repeated experiences. And on the cases go.

It comes as no surprise that our moral lives are full of inductive reasoning of this sort. Induction differs from others sources of knowledge insofar as it involves the movement from particulars to moral principles. Compare it to testimony, another source of moral knowledge. My parents tell me to always tell the truth, and I accept this principle on their authority. Acquisition of moral principles based on testimony is common. Reliance on the testimony of others is a useful source of knowledge, especially when we are young and less mature. As we mature and grow, we need some way of differentiating between reliable and unreliable sources of information.

Another source of moral knowledge is introspection, or looking within. I might decide, for example, that it is best to treat others as I wish to be treated by just reflecting on the idea of fairness. I may find it plausible based on my own standards. Self-refection often gives us insight into our actions in a way that quick judgment cannot.

We might think that a solution to our problem about the justification of moral self-assessment is already before us. We are capable of making accurate self-assessment by some combination of induction, the testimony of others, and through introspection. But these three sources of knowledge together are not sufficient to provide a basis for accurate self-assessment because each source of knowledge is too indeterminate to do this job. That is, each source of knowledge is itself too indeterminate and it does not look like any combination of the sources will be determinate enough

either. For example, how do I know that the principle that giving to charity is correct solely because I arrive at it inductively? Maybe someone else acquires the principle that one ought to be selfish from other sorts of experiences. The same point applies to testimony. What is it that assures me that the people from whom I am getting information are reliable sources? We can ask the same question about introspection. How do I know that my own reflection will yield correct moral principles?

What is needed is some sort of moral theory that can be combined with these sources of knowledge to yield a correct account of moral self-assessment. In the next section we will see that some features of Aristotle's ethical theory show promise in delivering the type of determinacy we need for a good account of moral self-knowledge.

4.3.2 Looking to Aristotle for a Solution

Although Aristotle does not deal with the issue of moral self-assessment directly, aspects of his ethical theory help us to see our way to a justification for it. First, Aristotle claims that all human beings have "natural virtues," which are undeveloped or uncultivated dispositions to act in the appropriate way (*Nicomachean Ethics* Bk VI, chap. 13). Membership in the human species bestows these dispositions upon all of us. Even a young child has a disposition toward honesty or generosity, and this disposition can develop into the virtue of honesty or generosity if it is nurtured or cultivated appropriately in a good environment in the right kind of way. Of course these dispositions toward virtue in individuals can be stifled almost entirely in the wrong environment or in the presence of bad influences. We have no control over the type of environment we are born into, but we do gain some control over aspects of our environment, such as our social group, as we mature.

A second, related point is that we all have the innate ability to recognize truly good acts when we see them. Aristotle periodically mentions that we must look to the practically wise person for guidance about how to act in situations where we are uncertain about what to do. The fact that we can get guidance from the practically wise person, of course, assumes that we are able to recognize good acts as being good when we see them and that there are people who do embody the virtues. We should expect that recognizing really bad acts would be just as natural and universal. Of course, there will be many acts whose appropriateness will be difficult to judge, but this does not overturn the idea that at least some acts at each extreme will be easily identifiable. There need not be any living individual who embodies all of the virtues in order for us to use the practically wise person as a model for our action. Aristotle never makes this point explicitly, but it seems the common sense thing to say, for we wouldn't want the applicability of virtue theory to rest solely on the contingency of there being a completely virtuous person to whom we might look. We should look to a generous person to learn about generosity, to the temperate person for guidance about temperance, and so on for the other virtues. The piecemeal approach is all that is needed to get the theory off the ground.

With these two central points from Aristotle's theory ((1) that we have natural virtues, (2) that we are naturally capable of recognizing virtuous acts), we are in a position to sketch an account of how it is that we come to make accurate assessments of our own actions and character. Of course, these two points from Aristotle are too indeterminate by themselves to provide much help to an agent in guiding his or her actions, because even if we have natural dispositions toward virtue and the ability to recognize goodness when we see it, we still need some way of getting a determinate picture of what virtue is. (1) and (2) do not give us enough content for an ethical theory, but we do not need a whole ethical theory to explain moral self-assessment. What is needed is a mechanism for taking us from the level of recognizing virtues in the abstract to being able to identify them in the concrete. Inductive reasoning is the mechanism that provides this determinacy.

Consider the following example to illustrate how these theoretical points about moral self-knowledge might be applied. The illustration from literature illustrates how we can recognize excellence in others to come to important realizations about ourselves. Chekhov's short story "The Bet" features two characters, an older banker and a young lawyer in his 1920s. In a heated discussion among the gentlemen about whether capital punishment or life imprisonment would be the better of two sentences, the young lawyer goes against the consensus of the group by saying that he would choose life in prison, primarily for the reason that it is better to be alive than dead. Angered by the contrarian position, the banker slams down his hand and bets a large sum of money that the young lawyer could not make it 5 years in solitary confinement. After the young lawyer raises the stakes to 15 years, the bet is made. The young lawyer is then confined to a cabin on the property of the banker where he is to have no interaction with the outside world. He is allowed to have as many books as he wants, is given a musical instrument, and is afforded the luxury of drinking wine and smoking. Although he cannot receive any correspondence from the outside world, the terms of the bet allow that the young lawyer be able to write letters.

The lawyer finds the first few years very difficult, but after some time he settles into a state of contentment through exposure to great ideas from the finest books ever written. He becomes a master at playing the piano, and begins to flourish in his environment. Meanwhile, the older banker, who loses much of his fortune in the stock market, fears that the young lawyer will finish the 15-year sentence and collect his earnings, leading to the banker's financial downfall. In desperation, the banker decides to kill the lawyer to protect his own livelihood. After sneaking into the cabin to find the lawyer sleeping at his desk, the banker finds a note explaining that the lawyer wishes to leave the cabin early, thereby relinquishing his substantial monetary prize, as part of his belief that happiness is found in detachment from worldly goods. Upon realizing that the lawyer would relieve him of his debt by voluntarily losing the wager, Chekhov tells us that the banker "At no other time, even when he had lost heavily on the Stock Exchange, had he felt so great a contempt for himself. When he got home he lay on his bed, but his tears and emotion kept him for hours from sleeping."

How are we to explain this self-contempt, which seems to be a perfectly justified form of self-assessment in this situation? The banker's disgust with his own actions might be explained by the fact that between the time he realizes that the lawyer might win the bet and the time he reads the note he sees the lawyer not as an innocent, harmless human being, but as a threat to his own livelihood. So the banker, under duress, might be acting on the principle that he must eliminate threats to his own livelihood, and he regards the lawyer as such a threat. Upon reading the note, the banker learns that the lawyer no longer poses a threat. The banker judges the author of the note to be a far superior man. In confinement the younger man had grown to the point where money and worldly goods meant nothing to him. The banker, by contrast, had been, up to the critical point, acting on the principle that worldly goods meant everything, so much so that he would have taken an innocent man's life to secure them. As observers we might at least understand the psychological state of the banker because we realize that an aggressor may not see his victim as an innocent person with equal standing to his own when overcome by a powerful passion or desire. But if an aggressor sees his victim as the aggressor sees himself, as a deserving object of veneration, then it makes it very difficult to see how he could carry out his lethal plans. The profound realization that the lawyer is a man eminently worthy of his own respect fills the banker with disgust for himself, which is only intelligible if the banker had been a good enough man to realize that extinguishing the innocent life of a good man for the sake of worldly goods is a disgrace. The younger man's intentions, expressed in the letter, present a model of virtue to the banker that immediately brings to his awareness the despicability of his own actions.

In one respect it is very obvious how inductive reasoning is employed by the banker. His experience of the lawyer's exemplary conduct leads him to a generalization about the despicability of his own. The banker's realization of his own low moral standing is explained, at least in part, by his ability to see how inferior his own actions are to the actions of the perceived rival. Notice that the banker does not come to this realization from self-reflection alone or by help from others.

We can see how the principles we identified earlier in Aristotle can help us understand some important aspects of this story. We highlighted two features of Aristotle's virtue theory important in helping us understand how to give a good account of moral self-knowledge: (1) that we have natural virtues, and (2) that we are naturally capable of recognizing virtuous acts. These two points on their own, as interesting as they are, do not take up very far, so we brought in inductive reasoning to supplement these two human capacities and to help offer a more determinate picture. Applying these theoretical points to Chekhov's story helps us to understand the banker's self-contempt and to give us insight into self-assessment more generally. First, the banker is not a thoroughly vicious man. He is a desperate man who sets out to act viciously because of his greed. It is because the banker is capable of recognizing the inherent nobility of the actions of the lawyer when he sees them that he is immediately humbled by the younger man's display of virtue. We can understand the banker's self-contempt if we see the banker as a man who otherwise has high moral standards and who, in difficult circumstances, does not recognize his own

wickedness. But he recognizes virtue when he sees it. Saying that the banker has an innate disposition toward the virtues is not enough by itself to explain his dramatic reaction when confronted by the lawyer's exemplary conduct. It is experience over a number of years that helps him build a model of what a noble person would be, and he recognizes this nobility instantaneously in the actions of the lawyer when he reads the letter. Even though the banker is deeply involved in a life built on the acquisition of material goods, he easily recognizes the nobility of character behind a worldview that rejects these goods. This is where Aristotle's natural virtues play a role in the story. Even if our lives are founded on less than noble projects, we still have innate dispositions toward goodness that ultimately enable us to recognize goodness when we see it in others.

To get a dependable assessment of what kind of agents we are rests heavily, but not entirely, on inductive reasoning. Testimony from friends or peers is also very important in many situations. Introspection, though not sufficient by itself, is often required as well. Chekhov's story gives us a vivid example of a person who realizes his own low moral standing by seeing how far short he falls in the face of a worthy exemplar of conduct. This type of situation, though rather dramatic, represents a fairly common phenomenon in our moral lives. We measure our own conduct by using standards made concrete in the actions of others. These standards are built into our constitution in some general, indeterminate form, and it is inductive reasoning through the experiences of our moral lives that helps us come to recognize more determinate standards in the actions of others and of ourselves.

Inductive reasoning not founded on something along the lines outlined from Aristotle's theory is not determinate enough to yield a satisfying account of moral self-assessment. For if we simply say that we acquire our moral principles through our experiences, we have no basis for saying which standards are preferable to have. We can see how such an incomplete picture could easily lead to moral relativism or nihilism. We need something determinate from a moral theory to provide the standard in light of which self-assessment, indeed assessment at all, is possible. If we think of the two points we highlighted from Aristotle above ((1) that we have natural virtues and (2) that we are naturally capable of recognizing virtuous acts) as being the skeleton for an account of moral self-knowledge, then induction might be thought of as the flesh needed to give it some shape and texture. We all have a general disposition to be generous, for example, but only through repeated experiences do we come to understand moral principles about generosity that can regulate our conduct. Human beings are capable of recognizing good acts when presented with them, but it still takes much experience to acquire the general principles about the types of role models we should have and follow.

4.4 Inductive Reasoning Considered Specifically

Some recent work in the theory of knowledge highlighting the role of induction can be seen to support the model of moral epistemology being advanced here. In Chapter 2 we considered different objections to the model of Aristotelian virtue

ethics offered in this book. One objection came from the perspective of Aristotelian scholarship, a second from the point of view of social psychology, a third from ethical theory, and a fourth from the philosophy of biology. It is beneficial to consider objections from such divergent perspectives. Let us further explore the issue of induction in the same spirit. But rather than considering objections from different camps, we will use some different theoretical proposals about the nature of inductive reasoning to help us see how induction should be understood, which will help fill out the epistemological side of the deductive model of virtue ethics. The first account of induction we shall consider comes from analytic epistemology. The second comes from Aristotelian scholarship.

It is important for the thesis about Aristotelian moral epistemology being developed in this chapter that some account of the nature of inductive reasoning be offered, because it seems very plausible to think that most fundamental ethical principles are known inductively. Also, there is good evidence that Aristotle thought that ethical principles come to be known inductively. Since the role of induction in the moral sphere has not been treated very thoroughly in contemporary philosophical discussions, it is best to begin with considerations about the nature of induction and its justification outside of the moral realm. Once we have secured a fairly firm foothold outside of morality, we can attempt to apply what is established there to the moral realm.

It might seem most natural to dive right into the texts of Aristotle to see what he says about induction, since something like a theory about inductive inference can be assembled from bits and pieces scattered around the *Organon*. We will eventually get involved in some of that work, but we shall begin with scholarship in contemporary analytic epistemology about the warrant for inductive inference. The project of developing a naturalized epistemology has produced some interesting insights that can help give the Aristotelian project a footing in contemporary discussions. Even though much of what is done in contemporary analytic epistemology generally, and the project of developing a naturalized approach to epistemology in particular, might seem to fall far outside of the boundaries of the project before us, we will soon see that commitments to a certain type of metaphysical and epistemological realism, especially in the work of Hilary Kornblith, provide a bridge back to Aristotle, even though building this bridge is not part of Kornblith's agenda. We can glean important insights about how an Aristotelian theory might be developed to deal with contemporary problems about inductive reasoning by attending to this work, partly because some contemporary thinkers are attempting to deal with problems related to the reliability of inductive reasoning.

After we take this general look at the warrant of inductive inference from a contemporary perspective and attempt to connect it to Aristotle, we will consider how recent scholarship on Aristotle reinforces and carries the general ideas about inductive inference forward. As we shall see, it is plausible to think that Aristotle identified five distinct types of induction, so his theory of inductive reasoning turns out to be much richer and more sophisticated than it is widely thought to be. We shall see how some of these types of inductive processes apply to the model of ethics being developed in this book to help fill in an account of Aristotelian moral

epistemology that helps explain how fundamental ethical principles are accessed by the human mind.

4.4.1 The Problem of Induction

Hume's notorious questions about the confidence we place in inductive reasoning have provided the basis for what has come to be known as the problem of induction. Unlike deductive reasoning, in which correct inference involves a move from premises to a conclusion that follows necessarily from the premises, inductive conclusions follow from a set of premises probably. Because induction moves from particular instances to general conclusions, there seems to be an inferential gap between the premises and the conclusion of inductive arguments. When I drop a baseball it falls to the ground. Every physical object I have ever encountered, even the lightest feather, falls to the ground when I release it from my hand. I conclude from my finite evidence base that every physical object falls to the ground when dropped. A balloon filled with helium will rise, but this does not undermine the generalization that all physical objects fall when dropped because there are good scientific reasons to account for the anomalous behavior of the balloon. Hume wonders how we can ever be justified in our generalizations from a finite set of instances, since there would be no contradiction if the next observed instance did not conform with the generalization based on the previously observed instances. Of course, the laws of gravity would be contradicted in that case, but this not the sort of contradiction Hume has in mind. The Humean worry is that there is no contradiction in all of my past experience failing to fit with the next experience. How do I know that the next experience will conform to the generalization formulated on the basis of past experience? This puzzle has come to be known as the problem of induction.

Since inductive reasoning is so fundamental to our everyday experience and to how we reason in natural science, it seems like we should be able to provide a straightforward account of how it is that inductive inference is justified. It is somewhat startling, however, to discover how prominent thinkers have failed to address the problem head on. For example, Hans Reichenbach has offered a "pragmatic solution" which turns out to be no solution at all. Reichenbach says:

> A blind man who has lost his way in the mountains feels a trail with his stick. He does not know where the path will lead him, or whether it may take him so close to the edge of a precipice that he will be plunged into the abyss. Yet he follows the path, groping his way step by step; for if there is any possibility of getting out of the wilderness, it is by feeling his way along the path. As blind men we face the future; but we feel a path. And we know: if we can find a way though the future it is by feeling our way along this path (Reichenback 1949: 482).

Blind men? Is that really the best we can say at the end of the day about our situation with respect to our confidence in inductive inference? It is difficult to see how some type of skeptical result doesn't follow from this proposal. Reichenbach as much as concedes that we cannot philosophically justify inductive inference, but thinks that this concession should not undercut our faith in induction because we have

the path before us and a cane in hand. But the metaphor suggests that we could plunge into the abyss at any moment. We should surely be able to do better than this. Of course, Reichenbach's proposal is not the only one put forward, but it has been influential and many take it seriously. It would be an unnecessary diversion in a discussion aimed toward getting a plausible moral epistemology to review the alternative solutions to the problem of induction that have been offered since Hume. Many regard the problem of induction to be one of the most vexing problems in the field of epistemology. Hilary Kornblith has a refreshingly commonsensical response we turn to now.[6]

4.4.2 Induction in Naturalized Epistemology

Within the area of epistemology there is work being done that can be seen to support the model of Aristotle's ethics being developed here, even if it would come as a surprise to its practitioners that the seeds of their labor were being cultivated in this way. Naturalized epistemology is a movement that began with the work of W.V.O. Quine in the 1960s. In his radical paper "Epistemology Naturalized," Quine proposed that justification-based epistemology, which is the traditional approach going back to Plato, should be abandoned or at least understood as being a "chapter of psychology."[7] Whether the naturalized program requires that normativity be abandoned or not, the distinctive feature of naturalized epistemology is that it takes the field of epistemology to be properly understood as a natural science, a thoroughgoing empirical discipline rid of a priori theorizing. Quine's proposal is quite radical indeed, and much of it is problematic; however, there is an important strand within Quine's thinking that deserves serious attention in light of the project of this book. Quine re-introduced the importance of natural kinds in the Anglo-American philosophical mainstream discussion, and scholarship that has arisen from this program has produced results that can be seen as carrying the Aristotelian project forward.

Hilary Kornblith has developed a branch of Quine's agenda fruitfully, abandoning the most radical elements of the initial program. To be sure, Kornblith is not an Aristotelian; his work owes much more to Locke than to Aristotle. It should become clear as we proceed how Kornblith's focus on natural kinds and on fixed aspects of human cognition (something akin to the concept of a stable, rational human nature that is structured in a way that is suited to know these natural kinds) resonates well with the Aristotelian agenda.

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[6] Laurence BonJour's a priori solution to the problem of induction is among the most persuasive of the various solutions. BonJour (1998: chap. 7) presents an excellent overview of the problem of induction, proposed solutions, objections to proposed solution, and BonJour's own a priori resolution.

[7] See Goldman (1988) and Kim (1988). Kornblith (1993) does not see Quine abandoning normativity altogether.

Kornblith develops a type of scientific realism based on the idea that the world contains natural kinds that the human mind is suited to discover and understand. This project is particularly important for seeing how it is that we can provide support for warranted inductive inference. Kornblith's main argument is made fairly explicit when he says:

> I argue that natural kinds make inductive knowledge of the world possible because the clustering of properties characteristic of natural kinds makes inference from the presence of some of these properties to the presence of others reliable. Were it not for the existence of natural kinds and the causal structure they require, any attempt to infer the existence of some properties from the presence of others would be no more than quixotic; reliable inductive inference would be impossible. The causal structure of the world as exhibited in natural kinds thus provides the natural ground of inductive inference (Kornblith 1993: 7).

Let us frame Kornblith's argument into a syllogism so as to makes its premises transparent and to help frame some of the main issues:

(1) If the world contains stable natural kinds that the human mind is suited to come to understand, then inductive inference is reliable.
(2) The world contains stable natural kinds that the human mind is suited to come to understand.
(3) Therefore, inductive inference is reliable.

The first premise draws attention to the idea the inductive inference has to be grounded in something stable and secure to make it reliable. Kornblith argues that this stability comes from natural kinds, which are part of the furniture of the world. This is the claim of the second premise. The first premise is based on a dependence relation between natural kinds and inductive inference.

As we shall see shortly, Aristotle's theory of induction is more complicated and multi-layered than Kornblith's, and some of Kornblith's concerns are much different than Aristotle's. Still, one should notice right off that this argument is quite consistent with Aristotle's metaphysical and epistemic views. Aristotle talks about essences and natures rather than natural kinds, but we could reasonably expect these concepts to overlap almost completely. Additionally, the Aristotelian account of induction is one that requires that there be natural kinds or natures in the world that the mind is suited to come to know. To see the value of Kornblith's work for the Aristotelian project before us, we need to set aside any initial attempts to dismiss Kornblith's work because of its heritage in Quine or because of his efforts to avoid justification-based epistemology. If we focus on the premises of the argument just presented, we will be in a position to appreciate what this proposal from analytic epistemology has to offer.

Kornblith's remarks about psychological essentialism provide direct support for the first premise of the argument:

> It is safe to say that current evidence supports the innateness of psychological essentialism. From the very beginning, we form our concepts in ways which presuppose the existence of an underlying, explanatory essence; we presuppose that superficial, observable properties are only a rough and ready guide to the world, but that these properties are the causal

consequence of deeper similarities, the details of which we are frequently ignorant about. Such an innate endowment gives us a push in the direction of an understanding of the world as it really is. It is part of what makes inductive knowledge a genuine possibility (Kornblith 1993: 78).

Work in psychology and linguistics over the last several decades provides solid evidence supporting some sort of innate conceptual structure that is part of human nature. For example, studies on children by Gelman and Markman (1986) suggest that from a very early age children are receptive to natural kinds and that natural kinds help inform our conceptual tendencies. In addition, Noam Chomsky's work pertaining to an innate structural constraint on human learning has been highly influential. According to Chomsky, the human language organ is equipped with a generative grammar enabling children to become competent speakers of a language on the basis of exposure to structures that are far too limited to explain the language that emerges as an output. Since there are infinitely many possible expressions of a language like English, there must be a mechanism built in that determines which of these expressions are grammatically appropriate. Learning a language would be impossible unless some type of sorting mechanism were in place (Chomsky 1965).

Kornblith supports the conditional first premise of his main argument with some remarks about the relationship between the character of the world and the way the human mind operates:

> Our conceptual and inferential tendencies jointly conspire, at least roughly, to carve nature at its joints and project features of the kind which are essential to it. This preestablished harmony between the causal structure of the world and the conceptual and inferential structure of our minds produces reliable inductive inference (Kornblith 1993: 94).

Again, Kornblith is working on the basis of a full-fledged metaphysical realism building on the foundational assumption of a world in which there are substances with essences, a theme that reverberates throughout Aristotle's corpus. What Kornblith makes explicit is that the reliability of inductive inference results from the mind's aptitude for apprehending this causal structure in the world. It is likely that Aristotle shared this view about the dependence of inductive inference on the mind's ability to come to know natural kinds that are part of the fabric of the world, but nowhere in Aristotle is this point made as explicitly and as plainly as it is made in these passages from Kornblith.

So we have identified some important components for a solution to the problem of induction. There are regularities in nature because of a causal structure of the world. The human mind is capable of making discoveries about this causal structure because the human mind has an innate disposition to know the world as it is. Correct inductive inference is possible when the mind does identify a generalization that genuinely expresses these causal laws on the basis of particular instances that have been observed to embody the causal laws. So far, this contemporary account sounds very Aristotelian, but what it leaves out is an explanation of how it is that we know that we have a correct generalization when we do. There is a difference between inferring that all crows are black from experiencing a number of black

crows and witnessing a number of physical objects falling when released and con-
cluding that all physical objects fall when released. The difference is that the first
generalization about crows is false because species of white crows have been dis-
covered. The second generalization is not subject to a counter-example in the same
way. Is it possible to discriminate between these two types of cases up front, or
must we be perpetually in a situation where the jury is still out? If the latter, it looks
as though Reichenbach's metaphor of a blind man groping about in the wilderness
might be correct.

Taking a look at Aristotle's surprisingly rich account of inductive inference puts
us in a position to see how it is that we are capable of discriminating between these
two types of cases. Building on a foundation of metaphysical and epistemological
realism we have seen Kornblith endorsing, Aristotle is able to provide an account
that should leave us largely untroubled by the problem of induction. Once we have
seen how this works, we will be in a position to see how all of this applies to the
ethical case to help round out a picture of moral epistemology.

It is worth emphasizing in passing that as much as Kornblith and other naturalized
epistemologists emphasize the role of empirical processes in knowledge acquisition,
a probing look finds a priori principles scattered about. For example, consider the
following:

> We may tentatively suggest, following Markman, that we have an innate receptivity to the
> structure of natural kinds, and that our conceptual tendencies are thus informed, from the
> very beginning, not only by superficial similarities, but also by deeper features of the causal
> structure of the world (Kornblith 1993: 67).

This commitment requires positing at least two principles known a priori in chil-
dren when they are learning language: a principle about how to group or classify
objects based on surface similarities of objects and a principle of classification based
on deeper causal features. Doesn't the endorsement of psychological essentialism,
which we have seen to be an important supposition for a key premise of Kornblith's
main argument, carry with it the commitment to a priori knowledge? Of course,
the fact that children have a priori knowledge of principles about how to classify
objects might be discovered a posteriori by doing the types of experiments that
Markham and other psychologists have done, but the type of process by which these
principles are discovered to exist should not be taken to characterize the principles
themselves.

Some might think of Aristotelian *nous* as being essentially a priori in nature,
and to the extent that it is thought of in this way, it will not fit comfortably within
Kornblith's conception of a naturalistic epistemology, which seems to leave little or
no room for a priori knowledge. But the sort of insight involved that gives rise to
a glimpse of the essence of a thing is only possible because of the epistemological
and metaphysical realism Kornblith embraces. In light of what was said above, one
could extend Kornblith's picture to include the faculty of *nous* as part of what is
essential to human beings. As long as these faculties, whatever their nature, are
discovered empirically, it looks like the naturalistic agenda could still be intact.

In the spirit of attempting to avoid an a priori element in the explanation of how induction is possible, the naturalized epistemologist might object that adding *nous* to the realist picture is superfluous. Once we give up on the infallibility of *nous*, we might genuinely wonder what real work the doctrine of *nous* is doing. If there is no way to determine whether an alleged insight into the necessity of a generalization about causal features of the world is in fact correct on a particular occasion, then aren't we still faced with the same problem *nous* was brought in to solve? The response to this objection depends on the point that the Aristotelian doctrine of *nous* amounts to simply a commitment to an act of understanding or insight that a well-functioning human mind is capable of having. It is because of the fact that our minds are designed to know the world that we are capable of having such insights. On the account of *nous* that we shall see shortly, there is nothing built into an insight that assures us whether the insight is correct or not. How does one determine whether an insight into some proposition *p* is correct? By careful consideration of *p*, by seeing what sort of explanatory power the system has in which *p* plays an important role, by seeing what can be deduced from *p*, et cetera. These features of *p*'s role within a system of beliefs do not confer inferential justification on *p*, so *p* might still be regarding as being genuinely foundational. As Laurence BonJour has argued, giving up on a priori knowledge of the sort being described here is intellectual suicide (BonJour 1998: 5). The process of inference, whether deductive or inductive, is not thoroughly empirical in character. Someone might see that some conclusion follows deductively from a set of premises on the basis of an act of insight or understanding. In a similar manner, someone might see that a generalization follows from a set of instances by a mental act that is not empirical in nature. So we must embrace a priori knowledge of some sort to make any inference possible. Allowing for a priori knowledge does not require posting an infallible power of mind or subscribing to a queer mental faculty. The doctrine of *nous* being utilized here is just a form of a priori knowledge understood in this broad way. We will say more about the infallibility of *nous* shortly.

4.4.3 Aristotle on Induction

Aristotle's remarks about induction are scattered throughout his corpus, so one has to do some reconstructive surgery, with an emphasis on the term "reconstructive," to put a theory together. Louis Groarke has done an impressive job of pulling the scattered bits together (Groarke 2009). One of Groarke's central projects is to remove the ambiguity in the notion that induction moves from particulars to universals. When Aristotle describes induction as a process that moves from particulars to universals, does the process being described involve the move from particular things to a universal concept, or is the step from particular statements to universals statements? What emerges from an attempt to answer this question is a theory of induction in Aristotle that is remarkably more complex than what one might have reasonably expected. Aristotle appears to be committed to five distinct levels of induction: (1) Induction Proper, (2) Recognition, (3) Rigorous Induction, (4)

Rhetorical Induction, and (5) Statistical Induction (Groarke 2009: 158). Let us say something about each of these levels, proceeding from the fifth level to the first, so that we are in a better position to see what will be most relevant to the moral epistemology being developed in this chapter.

Statistical induction is the type of inference most often discussed in contemporary epistemology. Statistical induction is enumerative induction, which can establish probable generalizations based on accidental features of a finite number of observed instances. We may notice, for example, that every crow observed so far has been black, and conclude from this that all crows are black. Blackness is not a part of the essence of crows, so even though it is highly likely that the next observed crow will be black based on the evidence of past observations, there is no necessity in that. Groarke argues that it is because most contemporary philosophers, following Hume, have thought of induction only in this enumerative sense that the problem of induction has retained its status as a vexing problem.

Rhetorical Induction is argument by analogy, and, like statistical induction, is based on accidental features of things. The main difference between this variety of induction and the others is that rhetorical induction focuses on human affairs, so its scope is more narrow than statistical induction. Otherwise, rhetorical induction is of the same general character as statistical induction.

Rigorous Induction is a form of induction that builds on necessary or essential features of subjects and involves inductive syllogisms with convertible minor premises. Consider Aristotle's explanation of why leaves fall from trees in the fall. Someone observes that every specimen of tree of a certain type has coagulation of sap at the junction of leaf stock and stem. Someone might proceed to observe that every specimen of this same type is deciduous. So, it is concluded that deciduousness involves coagulation of sap (Groarke 2009: 193). The inference can be translated into a valid categorical syllogism because the second premise is convertible. Once that premise is converted one has a valid figure 1 categorical syllogism.

Recognition is the second level of inductive inference based on the capacity of cleverness that Aristotle describes in the sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There cleverness is described as an intellectual skill or ability to see how to attain what is wanted. Cleverness is compared to practical wisdom, a full-fledged intellectual virtue, but it lacks the development to be classified as a virtue. Recognition is the capacity to see likeness or similarity. Recognition allows us to see that members belong to a class.

Induction Proper, the most perfect level of induction, involves the full intellectual virtue of *nous*, which enables us to grasp necessary and essential relationships. These definitional relationships provide the foundation for definitional connections and first principles in various disciplines. Groarke takes *nous* to be an infallible faculty, an interpretation that has given rise to serious objections to the type of induction Aristotle describes at this level. Restricting considerations to the role of *nous* in theoretical disciplines, if *nous* is taken to be infallible, and infallibility means that mistakes are impossible, then we should wonder what would happen if two such insights, either by the same or different individuals, result in conflicting claims.

Obviously, both insights cannot be correct, so we must either concede that *nous* is fallible to allow for the possibility of conflict, or insist that *nous* is infallible and that one of the putative insights is not genuine. The problem with the last move is that there does not seem to be any criterion available for differentiating the genuine instances of *nous* from the apparent ones. If such a criterion were available, we might reasonably ask how it is that the criterion is known. But for any criterion put forward, the same question will arise, which leads to some sort of vicious regress.

In light of these problems, it is best to avoid insisting on the infallibility of *nous,* or at least to understand the notion of infallibility to be considerably weaker than the conception that gives rise to the problems just mentioned. In other words, the weaker conception would have it that *nous* is infallible when a person genuinely has an insight that results from it, but there is no way in principle to know for certain in any particular case whether one is having one of these insights. This construal has the advantage of avoiding the regress problem mentioned above. The cost of accepting infallibility of *nous* in this weaker sense is that the conception of infallibility it operates on is pretty thin. Be this as it may, there seems to be no particularly good reason to get hung up on protecting and defending the stronger conception of infallibilty as some have. We can do quite a bit without it.

Of the five levels of induction just summarized, Induction Proper and Recognition will be most relevant to the model of moral epistemology being offered here. The thought is that these two levels of induction can be seen to complement Kornblith's ideas about how there is a fit between the mind and world that makes reliable inductive inference possible. Let us see if we can weave these ideas together to provide a sketch of how inductive inference works so that we are in a position to see how induction would operate in the moral case.

Human beings have a nature suited to allow them to know the world. The mind has innate dispositions to know the causal structures that exist in nature. When we observe certain kinds of regularities in nature, we can be warranted in drawing generalizations from these observations because of the relationship of suitability between mind and world. At this point a problem emerges. We said above that what this account leaves out is an explanation of how it is that we know that we have a correct generalization when we do. How do we know we have generalized on the basis of genuine causal properties in the world and not just apparent ones? It is obvious that only some inductive inferences are correct. There is nothing built into what has been said so far that assures that we have drawn a correct inference on any particular occasion. This is where Aristotle's first stage of induction is helpful. What *nous* is designed to do is to provide an insight into a necessary or essential connection when there is one. What the doctrine of *nous,* as it has been explained here, adds to the inductive process is the specification of a mental faculty that enables human beings to have insights into the world. Since *nous* is not self-advertizing, we cannot be absolutely sure that we are having a genuine insight into a necessary or essential feature of the world when we have one, but as we reflect on the character of the proposition that results and consider its role within a system of justification and find no evidence that overturns it, we are justified in becoming increasingly confident that the insight is a genuine one.

Why is the problem of induction not a problem for an Aristotelian? The short answer is that Aristotle had a more sophisticated and multi-layered understanding of what inductive inference is. The problem of induction, which questions our justification in believing that the future will resemble the past, is based on a relatively narrow conception of what induction is, namely, induction by enumeration. Indeed, if inductive inference is understood as being synonymous with induction by enumeration, then there is a problem to be solved.[8] But if we understand induction more broadly, as Aristotle surely did, and we take seriously intuitive induction, which involves seeing essential connections, then the problem does not arise. Hume assumed that the "secretive powers" of nature that lie behind the sensible qualities are inaccessible to us. But contemporary science has enjoyed much success in penetrating beyond the properties of the world that we perceive with unaided perception (Groarke 2009: 47).

It would be wrong to say that Aristotelian *nous* by itself is capable of penetrating into what Hume thought of as nature's secret powers. If this is how *nous* is supposed to operate, then skepticism about it is probably justified. Scientific analysis and Aristotelian *nous* can and do operate happily together. So, consider Hume's remarks about why bread nourishes. "Our senses inform us of the colour, weight and consistencey of bread, but neither sense nor reason can ever inform us of those qualities, which fit it for nourishment and support of a human body" (Hume 1995:4, pt. 2, para. 29, 33). Nutritionists have learned that bread is a good source of protein, vitamins, iron and calcium. And that whole grain breads are high in fiber, which aids healthy and balanced digestion. Were these properties of bread discovered by bare intuition? Of course not. They were discovered in a laboratory using tools from different scientific fields, most notably food science. What *nous* may enable someone to see, for example, is that digestive regularity is an effect of consuming healthy amounts of fiber, which are found in wheat bread. "Wheat bread aids digestion" is a proposition that holds for the most part in the technical sense we described in Chapter 3. If someone has a gluten allergy, such as Celiac Sprue, then wheat bread will inhibit rather than enhance digestion. This unfortunate condition does not count against the fact that wheat bread contains fiber, which is beneficial for digestion in healthy subjects. Once we have all of the relevant empirical data about wheat bread, fiber, and how the digestive system function, then *nous* is the insight that enables us to see that connection between wheat bread and healthy digestion.

Since there are causal properties of this sort in nature and our minds are capable of coming to understand these causal properties in roughly the manner just described, at least in some domains, there is no reason to think, as Hume did, that the powers of nature are secrets. Furthermore, we have the ability to come to understand necessary and essential properties of the world, and the sorts of insight that arise from *nous* are an important part in this inductive process. So there is good reason to take a more nuanced position about inductive reasoning, as Aristotle does.

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[8] BonJour's a priori solution to the problem is a promising strategy to employ.

4.4.4 Induction in Aristotle's Ethics

There is a direct application of these main points about inductive inference to the model of Aristotle's ethics we have been considering. Earlier in this chapter, two central points in Aristotle's ethical theory were highlighted: (1) that we have natural virtues and (2) that we are naturally capable of recognizing virtuous acts. Notice how these two features correlate with the recognition of real causal properties in the world and with our innate disposition to recognize and to come to know these features. (1) looks like a statement about the moral subject, but since all moral agents share the same common nature on an Aristotelian view, it will follow that natural virtues in others will be an objective, causal property in the world. With the additional idea that we are capable of recognizing at least some instances of virtue when we see them, we have the framework in place for seeing how induction in morality could be reliable.

Unlike its non-moral counterpart, induction in the moral sphere has a built-in mechanism for detecting correct actions; (2) does this work. If we have a natural aptitude for recognizing virtuous acts, then we have a built-in tendency to identify correct actions. In the non-moral sphere we said that there is no built-in mechanism for discriminating correct generalizations from incorrect ones. *Nous* is the intellectual faculty that performs this function in the non-moral sphere. It may seem initially as though *nous* is superfluous in morality because if we have the natural ability to recognize good acts when we see them, why does any more need to be said? What conceptual gap would need to be filled? Although we do have the ability to recognize the virtuous actions of others, there is a gap between this recognition and the application of this standard to our own case. *Nous* is needed to fill this gap. In other words, I may recognize a genuine instance of selfless giving as an act of generosity when I see my neighbor perform it, but not make an immediate connection to my own case because of other concerns I might have. I may realize that generosity is a good thing and that this particular act of giving is a generous act, but not realize how it is that generosity applies to me. I may be thinking that I have less to give, or that others' financial commitments are more pressing, or that saving for the future ought to be my priority. What *nous* in its practical application enables me to do is to recognize that I should be more generous. It enables me to make the move from all of the particular experiences and observations I have had, to this moral principle that applies to me.

Consider the virtue of having a good sense of humor. Some might wonder whether humor should even be classified as a virtue since its connection to the moral life is not as intimate as other virtues like courage and temperance. But Aristotle thought that wittiness should be classified as a virtue, and the social benefits alone of having a good sense of humor make it worthy of consideration as a virtue. In addition, being humorous and being in the presence of someone who has a good sense of humor is pleasant for human beings. So even though wittiness or having a good sense of humor might not be the most obvious example of a moral virtue, it is reasonable to think of it as a genuine virtue.

To better appreciate how someone might acquire a good sense of humor inductively, imagine a child who has not yet developed a sense of humor. How might a sense of humor be acquired? If what we have been saying about inductive inference is correct, then it should provide us with a plausible model for how this virtue is acquired and develops. Human children have a disposition to appreciate and express humor, and the evidence suggests that this is a species-specific property. Of course, children are not born with a developed sense of humor; this trait develops with time and maturation. What we have said thus far makes it eminently reasonable to say that human children are born with the disposition to express and appreciate humor, so let us go along with Aristotle and say that an undeveloped, uncultivated disposition for humor is a natural virtue. Traditionally, risibility is thought to be a necessary, but non-essential property of human beings. This assumption, which is reasonable to concede, implies that even if a particular individual or a large group of individuals is entirely humorless, that is, even if they seem to lack appreciation for a good joke and seem to take no pleasure in being in the company of others who do have this type of appreciation, it would not follow that such people lack the disposition entirely. What we said about holding for the most part in Chapter 3 can be applied here. It is the disposition for humor that is necessary for human beings because this disposition follows from our rational nature. It depends on the ability to understand and appreciate a particular way concepts are juxtaposed or expressed. The manifestation of the disposition may or may not take place depending on internal factors, such as the physical and psychological constitution of a particular person, or on external factors related to a person's upbringing and environment.

Although this picture of how induction works in ethics might give us a way of seeing how inductive reasoning about moral matters is reliable, it still leaves unexplained how the mind grasps the most basic ethical truths. What we have said so far about induction in the non-moral domain applies directly to the moral domain in the following way. Human beings are born with a rational nature, which partially consists of a set of natural virtues. These natural virtues are dispositions to act in accordance with the virtues under the right sorts of conditions when formed and developed in the appropriate sort of way. Accompanying these natural virtues is an intellectual capacity, a type of insight, which enables a person to form generalizations about what should be done based on observations of individual actions in particular cases.

Aristotle's doctrine of intuition, or *nous*, is most commonly thought of in theoretical contexts. There is an important passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that can be seen to support the idea that *nous* has both a practical and a theoretical application, which in turn buttresses the general case for the types of induction being considered here.

> And intuitive reason (*nous*) is concerned with ultimates in both directions, and both the first terms and the last are objects of intuitive reason and not of argument, and the intuitive reason which is presupposed by demonstrations grasps the unchangeable and first terms, while the intuitive reason involved in practical reasoning grasps the last and variable fact, i.e. the minor premise. For those variable facts are the starting points for the apprehension of the end, since the universals are reached from particulars; of these therefore we must have perception, and this perception is intuitive reason (nous) (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1143a35-b5).

W.D. Ross translates "*tes heteras protaseos*" as "the minor premise," which creates a few needless problems in trying to understand the nature of the comparison being drawn in the passage. If instead we translate the Greek phrase literally as "the other proposition," we get a clearer sense for the sort of how *nous* can have both a practical and theoretical application (Dahl 1984: 227–36). What emerges from this more literal translation of a key phrase in this passage is a way of understanding *nous* as being part of an inductive process that fits with the way Aristotle characterizes *nous* at the end of the *Posterior Analytics*. When *nous* grasps that some particular action is to be done, it can be seen to be part of a process that enables an inductive inference to a universal end (Dahl 1984: 231–2). The main contrast Aristotle draws in this passage is between a practical implementation of *nous* and a theoretical one. In both, *nous* is activated as part of an inductive process. The more familiar, theoretical employment of *nous* comes at the final stage of an inductive process leading to knowledge of basic principles of different disciplines. Experience with particulars puts a knower in a position to grasp the concepts involved in a general principle. When the relation between these concepts is necessary or essential, it is *nous* that enables us to see this necessary or essential connection. There is nothing mysterious or strange about this faculty; indeed, there is nothing particularly unusual about it. Aristotle realized that human beings have the ability to understand fundamental connections grounded in essences. He is simply identifying the faculty and giving it a name.

The practical employment of *nous* is what enables us to infer moral generalizations from particular actions we have experienced. I recognize that I ought to be honest, for example, because I find something particularly compelling about particular acts of honesty I have observed. Something seems right about honest acts I have done in the past, even though the consequences of these acts might not always be directly beneficial to me, at least in the short run. Again, there is nothing mysterious, strange or unusual about this ability human beings have to infer correct general moral principles about what should be done on the basis of particular experiences and actions. This is an ordinary feature of moral growth and development.

There are at least two types of induction important for providing a well-rounded Aristotelian moral epistemology. One takes place at the level of everyday practical morality. We are able to come to know general ethical principles because we have dispositions to become virtuous, dispositions that are grounded in our rational nature. We possess a natural aptitude for recognizing at least some virtuous acts because of these dispositions we possess as human beings. Through various types of experience, we come to a point where we are able to see that some action-guiding moral principle is true. Recognizing the truth of the moral principle is equivalent to having an insight into the necessary connection between the concepts involved in the moral principle. Aristotle describes a practical application of *nous* that fits very well with this inductive understanding of the cognitive grasp of action-guiding moral principles about courage, generosity, temperance, justice and other moral virtues.

There is a distinct type of inductive process enabling us to come to know the most fundamental moral principles of ethical demonstrations. These theoretical principles provide the foundations for all moral propositions. When we want to create a theory

about human conduct and systematize our knowledge in a foundationalist manner with the most basic, fundamental principles at the core providing deductive support for other less theoretically basic moral principles, we need an account for how the most basic principles within this framework are known. Aristotle is well aware of the need for a non-inferential account of how foundational principles are known, but what he has to say about it is somewhat sparse and incomplete. An attempt has been made in this chapter to provide an inductive account for how these theoretical principles are known, one that fits with what Aristotle says about these matters, as sparse as it is at times, and one that seems to provide a good explanation for how we have insight into necessary and essential connections between subjects and their properties.

There is a parallel between how insight works in theoretical sciences and in ethics understood from a practical point of view. In its theoretical employment *nous* is the last part of an inductive process enabling us to see that universal principles are true. In its practical employment *nous* enables us to grasp propositions indicating particular actions are to be done, which provides the starting point for grasping the universal ends of action. Propositions about what is to be done provide such a starting point because universal principles of action are implicit in the grasp of propositions stating that particular actions are to be done. In this way *nous* is part of an inductive process in practical affairs. The difference between theoretical and practical *nous* is that in its practical implementation *nous* only works on the basis of a wide range of experience with particular actions. Such extensive experience may not be necessary in every grasping of theoretical first principles, although it will certainly be necessary in some.

Theoretical *nous* is what enables knowers to grasp definitional principles, and non-action-guiding, non-definitional principles. Practical *nous* enables those who possess it to understand or know action-guiding moral principles of various types, indicating that certain kinds of actions are to be done. The propositions that theft, adultery, and murder are never to be done would be clear examples of propositions known by practical *nous*. Of course, unconditional action-guiding moral prohibitions constitute only a very small portion of the set of action-guiding moral principles. A larger set is composed of action-guiding moral propositions that hold for the most part, such as: one ought to repay debts, one ought not to willfully take the property of another, one ought to speak the truth, et cetera.

Many of the propositions needed to build the kind of deductive paradigm being offered in this book are best thought of as being acquired by intuitive induction, which is understood as a process that moves from particular instances to apprehension of necessary connections between concepts.

4.4.5 Aristotle's Theory of Induction Applied to Ethical Principles

Because the discussion of the distinction between theoretical and practical induction has been fairly abstract, let us try to make the distinction more concrete by considering two moral propositions, both about friendship, but each at very different levels

of generality. The first is one that a person could straightforwardly be said to come to know from ordinary experience: "I should be honest with friends." Our knowledge of a principle at this level of generality comes from various sources. Testimony is one obvious place. A person's parents or some other influential role model in one's life might explicitly say that being honest with friends is a good thing, especially if the authority figure observes a particular case of dishonesty with a friend that needs correction. Imagine that young Sarah has told a lie to her best friend, and wonders whether this could be the reason she feels so bad and why her friend will not speak to her. After taking all of this in, Sarah's mother might tell Sarah that she should be honest with friends, and that lying and other forms of dishonesty will harm her relationships. Young Sarah might also observe first-hand the harmful effect of dishonesty with friends when she observes one of her close friends lie to another. Or, Sarah might see similar types of situations in movies or read about them in books. All of this experience provides the basis for Sarah's acceptance of the principle that she should be honest with her friends. Being told about honesty by an authority figure might be an important way of gaining an initial grasp of the principle, but unless Sarah has further experiences of her own that confirm the principle initially accepted on the basis of authority, it is highly unlikely that the principle will be grasped by Sarah in a way that allows it to be firmly embedded in her character. In this specific case there is a type of intuition that the general principle is correct, but the intuition comes only in the wake of various experiences.

Now consider a much more general moral principle: "Friendship is necessary for flourishing." This is the sort of moral principle we do not get directly from moral experience, but from reflection about the theoretical aspects of morality. There would be several concepts that would have to be grasped before we could come to have insight into the necessary connection between the subject and predicate of this proposition. For example, we would have to have a fairly good understanding of what friendship is. We might not need any well worked-out tripartite classification of friendship like the one Aristotle has involving friendship for utility, pleasure, and virtue. Understanding that friendship involves some sort of mutually recognized regard and wishing well for another seems to be a requirement though. The predicate makes reference to human flourishing, a concept acquired from reflecting on the nature of human beings or on the character of human rationality. We might naturally wonder what sorts of activities would be conducive to human flourishing and which activities might frustrate it. At some point, *nous* would enable a person who has a grasp of these various concepts to see that friendship is a type of relationship required to fulfill the nature of a rational, social being. The various experiences we might have with friends would enable us to grasp the concept of friendship. The same might be said about human flourishing. But the ultimate justification for the proposition that friendship is necessary for flourishing comes from seeing the necessary connection between the subject and predicate of this proposition, and this is what *nous* makes possible.

With this sketch of a theory about how inductive inference enables us to have knowledge of ethical principles, we have in place a crucial element in a foundationalist moral epistemology. Since foundationalism is committed to two types of

principles (basic or foundational claims and those derived from the basic or foundational claims), it is imperative that some doctrine of how the foundational principles are known be put forward. This section of this chapter has focused on putting an account forward.

4.5 Aristotle's Foundationalism

Now that we have considered how it is that ethical principles are known in a general way, we are in a good position to examine the structure of the Aristotelian model of virtue ethics being developed in this book. This section considers Aristotle's foundationalism to see whether it offers an adequate justificatory structure to accompany the type of moral theory we have been considering.

Perhaps it would be helpful to return now to a challenge to foundationalism so that we have a clear sense for what foundationalism must offer if it is to provide a satisfactory justificatory structure. Coherentism and foundationalism are usually seen as being the two legitimate alternatives to skepticism, and some have taken coherentism to be a position about justification that overcomes the inherent shortcomings of foundationalism. David Brink represents the coherentist challenge rather well (Brink 1989). Brink's critique of foundationalism begins with the observation that there are two arguments usually used to support foundationalism. The first is a "regress argument" based on the epistemological requirement that justifying beliefs must themselves be justified (Brink 1989: 104). According to the regress argument there are just three ways to understand justification: (1) all justification is linear and inferential; (2) although all justification is inferential, it is not all linear; and (3) although all justification is linear, it is not all inferential. The regress argument challenges that (1) and (2) are inadequate accounts of justification[9]; (1) is inadequate because it involves a vicious regress, while (2) is inadequate because of its commitment to viciously circular reasoning. Neither a vicious regress nor viciously circular reasoning satisfies the requirement that justifying beliefs must themselves be justified. This leaves only (3), and (3) is the foundationalist conception of justification. All justification is linear, but not all justification is inferential because the justification of foundational beliefs is not inferential.

Brink's central argument is that foundationalism in any of its forms is untenable because there are no beliefs that are self-justifying, and foundationalists are committed to the existence of such beliefs. Brink presents his argument as follows:

> Justification is justification in believing true. In order to be justified in holding one's belief p, one must have reason to hold p to be true. But p is a first-order belief that such and such is the case and, as such, cannot contain the reason for thinking p is true. Indeed, self-justification can be regarded as the limiting case of circular reasoning—that is, self-justification is the smallest justificatory circle imaginable. And everyone—even the coherentist—regards such small circles of justification as nonexplanatory and, hence, as nonjustifying...

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[9] Ibid., p.105.

We can put the point another way. To be justified in holding p, one must have reason to hold p. If p is a first-order belief, this would seem to imply that one must base p on beliefs about p, in particular, on second-order beliefs about what kind of belief p is (e.g., under what conditions p was formed) and why p-type beliefs are likely to be true. But this shows that one's belief p cannot be *self-justifying* (Brink 1989: 116–7).

Brink's argument is clear and straightforward, making the structural observation that second-order beliefs inevitably play a role in the justification of first-order beliefs. This structural observation about the nature of justification, if correct, has at least two important implications: (i) there are no self-justifying beliefs, and (ii) all justification is inferential. Both (i) and (ii) count seriously against foundationalism. Brink regards (ii) as paving the way for coherentism. An adequate defense of foundationalism must address both (i) and (ii).

Let us look to Aristotle to see how the coherentist challenge might be addressed and to see what kind of foundationalism emerges. Aristotle makes a distinction between common principles, which are shared by different disciplines because of their generality, e.g., the principle of non-contradiction, and proper principles, which are about the subject matter of specific disciplines. Proper principles shall be our focus in thinking about a foundationalist justificatory structure since it is not clear that the common principles appear explicitly in the deductive structures within a discipline. The set of proper principles of any natural science consists of definitions of various sorts, and non-definitional discipline-specific principles, some of which hold for the most part, and others that hold unconditionally. A similar classification can be generated for principles in the moral realm, but action-guiding principles must be added.

What is needed is an account of how proper principles of these various types are known. To say that a proper principle of a discipline is immediate is to say that there is no middle term between the subject and predicate. The fact that a principle is indemonstrable or immediate does not mean that it will automatically satisfy the conditions for foundationalism, because indemonstrable principles can be inferentially justified by induction. What is needed is an account of induction that yields principles satisfying the conditions for foundationalism.

We might draw a preliminary distinction between believing that some claim, p, is true and believing that p is immediate. Given the notion of immediacy just discussed, believing that a claim is immediate requires more than believing that it is true. Aristotle's foundationalism seems to require that we cannot come to know that a foundational principle is foundational without some sort of inferential justification. To address the coherentist's challenge as it is presented by Brink, it must be shown that it is possible to be justified in believing that an immediate claim is *true* without basing such justification on second-order beliefs. The more ambitious result, that one could be justified in believing an immediate principle *as being immediate* without inferential justification from second-order beliefs, need not be shown to establish a foothold for foundationalism.

Although it may be possible to provide a response to the coherentist challenge by arguing that immediate claims need not be justified by second-order beliefs, such a response must provide an account of foundational beliefs that does not entail that

such beliefs are inferentially justified by first-order beliefs. The coherentist points to the role that second-order beliefs must play in providing justification for first-order beliefs. An adequate response cannot involve the idea that foundational first-order beliefs are justified by other first-order beliefs. If that were true, then purported foundational beliefs would not be genuinely foundational.

It is reasonable to understand the principles of Aristotelian science, including ethics, as being based on a process we earlier called "intuitive induction." The key idea is that a knowing agent moves from knowledge of particular instances to knowledge of a necessary generalization (Ross 1949; Chisholm 1966). Unlike enumerative induction, which only yields probable generalizations because the instances are used to justify the generalization, intuitive induction is capable of generating the knowledge of necessary truths since the instances used to acquire such knowledge are only an occasion for knowledge of a generalization. Roderick Chisholm finds intuitive induction so described in Aristotle, but thinks that the knowledge it provides is a priori. But what about necessary propositions known a posteriori, such as those expressing necessary features of subjects? For example, we discover by empirical investigation that human beings have the capacity to use language, and that human beings have this capacity necessarily, even though not every human being is a language user. By seeing a finite number of human beings, we might come to see the truth of the claim "Humans are language users." It does not seem plausible to characterize this proposition as an instance of a priori knowledge for someone who comes to know it by examining human behavior. Such a proposition could be known a priori, but when it is know by means of intuitive induction in the manner just described, it does not seem to be known a priori.

Whether intuitive induction is an a priori process as Chisholm and other have characterized it, it does not seem that characterizing intuitive induction as being either a priori or a posteriori is very helpful, in part because these classifications are understood differently by different philosophers. It does seem clear that the concepts involved in a proposition about empirical realities are acquired or verified empirically, including necessary propositions about empirical realities. For example, the atomic constitution of an element such as gold is not discovered by pure conceptual analysis alone. It is equally clear that the necessary connection that exists between the kind, gold, and its atomic structure, can be grasped by conceptual analysis once one has acquired the relevant concepts. Propositions dealing with abstract subject matter, such as "2=2," perhaps present the clearest case of what is ordinarily classified as an a priori proposition. On the other hand, propositions that are obviously empirically verifiable like "That person is six feet tall" function as paradigm instances of a posteriori propositions. But there is a range of propositions falling between the extremes, and many of the propositions at the core of disciplines concerned with empirically knowable subject matter contain many propositions falling within this range. "Gold has the atomic number 79," is just one example from the natural sciences. There are countless others.

Many fundamental ethical propositions are best understood as falling within this range, specifically the kind that are classified above as being non-definitional. This is to say that many of the propositions needed to build the deductive paradigm

of Aristotle's ethics we have considered are best thought of as being acquired by intuitive induction, where this is understood as being a process that moves from particular instances to apprehension of necessary connections between concepts. Let us look at what Aristotle has to offer on this matter.

Aristotle outlines four processes for the acquisition of the first principles of a science: dialectic, division, stages of definition, and induction. Although each of these processes is inferential, only induction (*epagoge*) is non-deductive. Aristotelian induction yields two distinct sets of candidates for what could count as a foundational principle. The first set is comprised of beliefs based on the data of sense perception. In order for such a set of beliefs to be foundational, it must be possible to be justified in holding such beliefs without basing their justification on second-order beliefs. The second set consists of immediate definitional principles of a science. Although believing proper principles depends on first-order beliefs based on sense data in some way, there is a way of understanding *nous*, the state in which such principles may know such principles, as providing non-inferential justification for them.

Aristotle states that the basic principles of sciences are known by induction (*Posterior Analytics*100b3–5). In addition, Aristotle claims that *nous* is the state responsible for grasping the starting points of science (*Posterior Analytics* 100b7). Can *nous* provide non-inferential justification for foundational principles, especially if it is part of an inductive process?

Aristotle outlines an inductive process in his account of the way one gains access to the principles of science (*APo* I.18, I.31, II.19).[10] At *Posterior Analytics* II.19 Aristotle lays out a four-stage process that can result in the knowledge of first principles: (1) perception of particulars, (2) retention of perceptual content in the psyche, i.e., memory, (3) experience, and (4) grasping the relevant universal, where *nous* plays its role.

In *APo* II.8 Aristotle emphasizes that it is impossible to come to know essential nature or any part of essential nature, i.e., what something is, without knowing that the thing exists (*APo* 92b4–6). We only speak of non-existing things as having essences in a derivative sense. Only real existing subjects have real essences, the knowledge of which is the object of science. Not only is knowing that something exists necessary for coming to know something about its essence, but such inquiry begins with awareness of a thing's existence. The different ways of being aware that something exists give rise to different ways of coming to know what it is. So understanding Aristotle's views about the discovery of essence requires paying careful attention to the different ways in which he thinks we can be aware of a thing's existence (Bolton 1987: 132–3). In addition, what something is and why it is are not distinct concepts for Aristotle. One way of explaining the point is to say that the

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[10] At *Topics* 105a11 it is suggested that induction is one kind of dialectic. One should keep in mind that any shortcomings or limitations that are inherent in dialectic might in some way apply to induction. At the heart of this issue is a question about whether or not dialectic is able to provide justification beyond mere coherence.

"what" of something is its definition. So grasping what something is and why it is
come together.

It is helpful to reflect on Aristotle's remark that there are cases in which we
directly perceive the essence of things so as to better understand what he could
have in mind when he describes what *nous* is and how it relates to grasping that
something is and what or why it is (*APo* 93a17–18, 29–36). Aristotle's example
involves a person who is standing on the moon during a lunar eclipse.

> . . .if one were on the moon we should not be inquiring either as to the fact or the reason,
> but both fact and reason would be obvious simultaneously. For the act of perception would
> have enabled us to know the universal too; since, the present fact of an eclipse being evident,
> perception would then at the same time give us the present fact of the earth's screening the
> sun's light, and from this would arise the universal (*APo* 90a26–30).

In virtue of her perspective, a person on the moon would perceive that a lunar
eclipse is taking place and what a lunar eclipse is simultaneously since an eclipse is
a blockage by the earth of the moon's light source. Here is an unusual case in which
someone knows that something exists and what it is simultaneously. Even though
this case is contrived, it may prove to provide insight into what *nous* is and how it
functions.

Aristotle says in this passage that "the act of perception enabled us to know the
universal" and "from this (perception) would arise the universal." Both expressions
indicate that *nous* is not identical with perception, but is closely connected to it
and probably dependent on it. Aristotle insists that perception is of the particular
(87b39–88a2) and that one cannot perceive the universal, but *APo* II.19 implies that
perception is of universals.

Emphasizing these points indicates that Aristotle's foundationalism takes beliefs
about data of sense perception as being foundational. Perception of the fact that
thunder is a noise, for example, could provide at least part of the inductive basis
for accepting the definition that thunder is the extinguishing of fire in a cloud. The
coherentist objection to classifying beliefs about sense data as foundational prin-
ciples would be that justification for even these beliefs depends on second-order
beliefs. What are some second-order beliefs that lie behind the first-order belief that
thunder is a certain kind of noise? Since the latter belief is heard, certain things about
a person's sense of hearing must be true if a person is to believe first-order beliefs
about sound. We could argue that a second-order belief required for accepting the
first-order belief that thunder is a noise in the cloud is believing that the senses
can accurately report certain characteristics about the world under certain circum-
stances. This will in turn depend on other second-order beliefs about the existence
of sense organs and of realities in the world that can affect them.

Remember that the concept of justification operative here is one that involves
giving reasons. Must we believe these second-order beliefs in order to be justified
in believing that thunder is a noise in a cloud? Not obviously. We might base our
justification for this first-order belief on second-order beliefs like those mentioned,
but we would only be expected to do so if we were defending our belief against a
challenge, possibly from a skeptic. The truth of the first-order belief requires the

truth of the second-order beliefs, and in this sense the former presupposes the latter. But it is does not seem right to say that we must believe the latter in order to believe the former. If certain beliefs are initially credible, then it is enough to be justified in believing that what we take to be an initially credible belief. We do not have to have any second-order belief for this to be true, although we might have to have a second-order belief to believe that what we believe is initially credible.

Of course, an initially credible belief could be false, and if a question as to its falsity were to arise, we couldn't then be justified in believing it without providing further justification of it. And if the questions are raised by a skeptic of a certain brand, the beliefs that we might need to be justified are likely second-order beliefs about the reliability of perception, et cetera. But in order to be justified in believing an initially credible belief we won't have to anticipate any and every question that might arise, including those of a skeptic. The burden of proof is on the skeptic.

We should understand Aristotle as advocating a type of foundationalism according to which first-order beliefs of the sort discussed are taken to be initially credible. Such beliefs are taken to be reliable, but it always is possible that such beliefs are false. Having said this, there is still a way in which proper principles of a science can be understood as being foundational in a similar way. Understanding how this could be so requires saying a bit more about what *nous* is.

We can take *nous* to be a state enabling us to see a universal in particulars, a construal consistent with empiricist characterizations of induction in Aristotle. For example, Richard McKirahan says:

> *(Induction) Epagoge* is the way we come to spot individuals as individuals of a kind. Equivalently, it is the way we become aware of universals in particulars. It can happen by argument and in other ways. The way *APo* II.19 sketches consists not in argument but in acquiring expertise at spotting relevant general features in things (McKirahan 1993: 256).

Nous can be understood as the final stage in a process of the sort just described.

Nous provides a kind of non-inferential grasp for foundational beliefs in the following way. One set of foundational beliefs consists of real definitions. We do not grasp real definitions until we "see" certain things as instances of the universal expressed in such definitions. For example, we may observe various facts about thunder—that it involves a certain kind of noise, it is typically followed by or accompanied by rain, and is preceded by lightning—and yet not know or have an idea of what thunder is. It is only when we "see" all of the things that occur when these facts obtain as instances of fire being quenched in a cloud that we have an idea of the nature of thunder that explains all of these facts. The "seeing" described here is not an inference from the observed features just mentioned. It is simply a case of seeing these facts as all being instances of a single kind of thing. Once we have "seen" this, we might be able to form what looks like an inductive inference in support of the real definition that thunder is fire quenched in a cloud, but offering such an argument presupposes the justification of rather than giving inferential justification to what was grasped by *nous*. Without such a grasp there would be no basis for any inductive inference at all.

If the non-inferential apprehension involved when we come to know a real definition is a genuine object of *nous*, then the principle involved is a genuine foundational principle because *nous* is never mistaken. However, any formulation of a real definition should only be regarded as being initially credible since *nous* is not "self-advertising" or infallible in this sense as was said earlier (McKirihan 1993: 259). It is always possible that phenomena will be discovered later that cannot be explained by what is taken to be a foundational belief. If such data is discovered, then a putative foundational belief should be replaced by another one that can explain any new data in addition to the previously observed phenomena. Dialectic can function as a means of establishing whether putative foundational beliefs are genuinely foundational, but since dialectic is an inferential process, we will only know that a foundational principle is genuinely foundational on the basis of an inferential justification. But we can be justified in believing that a foundational principle is true without such an inferential justification.

So there seem to be two kinds of beliefs in Aristotle that are not vulnerable to the coherentist objection to foundationalism. The first class includes beliefs based on the data of sense perception. The second class includes immediate real definitions. Offering an account of each kind of belief can be basic in the way indicated here leaves room for an understanding of foundationalism that does not collapse in the face of the coherentist objection. We can be justified in believing the data reported by sense faculties without appealing to second-order beliefs as reasons for these beliefs. On the other hand, immediate proper principles of a science can be apprehended by *nous* without an inferential justification. Beliefs of this sort are the foundational beliefs that underpin other foundational beliefs within a science. Since we cannot be certain about whether any such belief is actually acquired by *nous*, it is always possible that such beliefs will have to be revised.

Aristotle's foundationalism understood along these lines can satisfy conditions for foundationalism. Perceptual beliefs can be justified without appeal to second-order beliefs. Proper principles of Aristotelian science can be apprehended by *nous*, where the latter should not be understood as involving inferential justification. Since foundationalism can be defended in this way against what is possibly the most powerful coherentist challenge, nothing about the character of foundationalism should deter us from applying a foundationalist justificatory structure to ethics, particularly the model of Aristotle's ethics we have been considering.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter took up some of the epistemic issues connected with the deductive paradigm of ethics under consideration. We began in Section 4.2 with the broad question about whether armchair ethics, or ethical inquiry carried out on the basis of conceptual analysis alone, is possible. We saw that although there are good reasons for thinking much of ethics, particularly metaethics, is an armchair endeavor, there is also a part of ethics that seems to require the kind of experience we do not acquire in the armchair.

Once we saw the importance of empirical inquiry in ethics, we shifted to issues about moral self-assessment, partly because examination of moral self-assessment brings the importance of induction to the fore. Chekhov's short story "The Bet" nicely illustrates some of the features of an account of moral self-assessment that can be found in Aristotle's ethics. We saw that inductive reasoning not founded on something along the lines outlined from Aristotle's theory is not determinate enough to yield a satisfying account of moral self-assessment. For if we simply say that we acquire our moral principles through our experiences, we have no basis for saying which standards are preferable to have. We can see how such an incomplete picture could easily lead to moral relativism or nihilism. We need something determinate from a moral theory to provide the standard in light of which self-assessment, indeed assessment at all, is possible. If we think of the two points we highlighted from Aristotle above, (1) that we have natural virtues and (2) that we are naturally capable of recognizing virtuous acts, as being the skeleton for an account of moral self-knowledge, then induction might be thought of as the flesh needed to give it some shape and texture.

We next examined the nature of inductive reasoning and considered how the "problem of induction" relates to inductive reasoning as it pertains to Aristotle's theory of knowledge acquisition, especially as it pertains to ethics. We considered a theory of how moral principles are known, a theory inspired by Aristotle and grounded in his work, but supplemented with elements from contemporary epistemology that help fill out and reinforce Aristotle's rough sketch of a theory. We began with a discussion of inductive inference from outside of the moral realm. There we saw that the reliability of inductive inference could be founded on the idea that there are natural kinds and causal properties in the world and that the mind is suited to come to know these natures. Even though metaphysical and epistemological realism are required for inductive inference to be reliable, they do not come with any built-in mechanism for securing correct insights about the nature of connections about the world. Aristotle's doctrine of *nous* can be understood as the final stage in an inductive process that, at least in principle, secures the link between the mind and genuine causal patterns in the world. Some have taken Aristotle's doctrine of *nous* to imply infallibility in the sense that a person who judges something to be so by means of *nous* just could not be wrong. We saw that this commitment to the infallibility of *nous* in this strong sense comes at a high price. One can maintain that *nous* is infallible only in the weak sense that it is correct whenever someone has it, but that there is no criterion or sure way of knowing whether one is having a genuine insight in any particular case. This avoids problems and objections that must be faced by anyone who understands *nous* in the stronger sense. While it may be possible to provide a defense of the stronger interpretation, it is better to see what can be done with the weaker construal. Understood this way, there is nothing particularly ambitious about the commitment to this doctrine of *nous*. Indeed, *nous* seems to come along with acknowledgment of a priori knowledge more generally, which is required to make any form of inference possible.

We saw that recent scholarship shows that Aristotle had a sophisticated theory of induction according to which induction by enumeration plays only a small part.

Because the notorious "problem of induction" arises from a model of induction based on enumeration, it does not seem as though the problem of induction is a genuine problem for Aristotelians. They can argue that if we are willing to take seriously a genuine commitment to objective natural kinds, the idea that the mind is suited to know them, and, crucially, that inductive inference is much broader than enumerative induction, then there is a way of stepping around Hume's problem while acknowledging its force for a certain type of induction.

We turned to Aristotle to see that *nous* was part of an inductive process with both a theoretical and a practical employment. In its theoretical employment *nous* is the last stage of an inductive process enabling knowers to understand necessary and essential connections between subjects and predicates of fundamental principles. In its practical employment *nous* is an insight into a universal ethical principle based on particular experiences and actions. Since the model of Aristotelian ethics being developed in this book is based on a foundationalist justificatory structure, the theoretical employment of *nous* is crucial in understanding how we could come to grasp basic theoretical truths in ethics. On a more practical level, *nous* enables us to come to grasp the general moral principles that are used to guide and regulate human behavior on a day-to-day level.

What emerges is a moral epistemology, grounded in Aristotle and supported by contemporary considerations, according to which two important classes of moral principles are known inductively. The sorts of moral principles that govern everyday conduct will be acquired by an inductive process whereby a person comes to see how a universal is implicit in the particulars of moral experience. Theoretical moral principles, the kind that are fundamental in a foundationalist structure of justification, are discovered to be true on the basis of an inductive process wherein general principles are inferred from particular instances. Both the practical and theoretical inductive processes just mentioned involve a mental insight on the basis of which the mind moves from the particular to the general. Aristotle calls this intellectual ability *nous.*

We took a rather detailed look at certain aspects of Aristotle's foundationalism. The type of epistemic account Aristotle offers fits with the general characterization of ethics as a mixed endeavor, consisting of principles acquired by means of both conceptual analysis and empirical data. Aristotelian *nous*, when understood as the last stage of an inductive process, offers an account of how it is that we come to grasp necessary principles. We discussed the difference between theoretical and practical *nous*, and pointed out that once we identify the distinct kinds of principles that form the foundation of the deductive paradigm of Aristotelian ethics, *nous* is a cognitive capacity well-suited to give us access to them. According to this picture, human beings are capable of grasping or understanding universal principles on the basis of acquaintance with particular instances of the principles. Along with this doctrine comes the idea that universals are somehow implicit in the particulars from which they are derived. If the principles of ethics can be systematically ordered according to the type of deductive paradigm sketched in Chapter 3, then there is good reason

to think that the same type of justificatory structure underlying other theoretical disciplines would underpin the discipline of ethics when understood from a theoretical point of view.

Now that the elements of the deductive paradigm have been presented, and a sketch of an account of how we come to know its principles has been offered, we should consider more serious challenges to the model.

Chapter 5
Some Challenges to the Deductive Model

5.1 Introduction

This chapter takes up further challenges to the deductive model of virtue ethics developed in the previous chapters. The first is the particularist challenge to a model of virtue ethics grounded in ethical principles. John McDowell offers the most focused attack among different types of moral particularism to the model of virtue ethics offered in this book. John McDowell points to Aristotle's ethics for inspiration. McDowell endorses an Aristotelian virtue theory, but thinks that Aristotle's theory of practical wisdom implies that ethical principles are uncodifiable. McDowell uses for-the-most-part relations in ethics to buttress his case, which presents an excellent opportunity to apply the interpretation of for-the-most-part relations developed in Chapter 3 to see whether the analysis can provide a tenable portrait of practical reasoning underpinned by codified ethical principles. We shall see that the deductive model of virtue ethics developed in this book is consistent with practical reason playing an essential role in our moral lives.

The next challenge comes in the form of questions about the scope of the type of realist virtue ethics developed in the previous chapters. Some have argued that although the Aristotelian model of practical reasoning is powerful, it is not broad enough to generate the kinds of principles needed for a robust ethical theory. More specifically, it does not seem to some that Aristotle's virtue theory is broad enough to mandate self-sacrificial or altruistic actions. Examining the virtue of courage puts us in a position to see how a response to this objection might be developed. After an initial case is made for saying that Aristotelian virtue ethics leaves room for altruistic actions, a more general argument for altruistic actions within the context of virtue theory is offered. In view of this argument, we can say that the scope of Aristotelian virtue ethics is sufficiently broad to merit close examination as a viable ethical theory.

Another challenge arises when we wonder about whether it is possible to justify exceptionless moral precepts or inalienable rights solely on the basis of Aristotelian virtue theory. An attempt is made to see how this justification might go. It turns out that Aristotle's theory is not robust enough to make this case go through, but there are principles that can be borrowed from the Kantian tradition to help make the case for inalienable rights. The issue of suicide is at the core of this discussion. What

is said about the moral permissibility of suicide and forced suicide has significant implications for the success of the case for inalienable rights.

5.2 Particularism and Aristotle's Ethics

The introduction to a recent collection of essays begins with the sentence "Moral particularism is currently one of the most widely discussed—and hotly contested—issues in ethical theory" (Hooker and Little 2000). Not surprisingly, there is no widely accepted definition of what moral particularism is, but advocates of moral particularism usually share a resistance to the idea that general moral principles are prescriptive guides to action. Those who think that general moral principles should play a role in helping agents decide which courses of action are right and wrong are often labeled as "generalists." The hotly contested issue alluded to in the quote refers to what is at stake in the dispute among particularists and generalists about whether general moral principles play a significant prescriptive role in guiding conduct. Some read Aristotle as offering a kind of moral particularism in the *Nicomachean Ethics,* and as we shall see, there is some reason for doing so. Others have argued that Aristotle does not embrace moral particularism, even though it is often read into Aristotle (Irwin 2000).

Section 5.2 will not focus on the issue of whether Aristotle is a moral particularist, but instead on a specific particularist challenge to the deductive model developed in this book. John McDowell is often regarded as being one of the founding fathers of moral particularism, and he reads Aristotle as offering a type of particularism (McDowell 1979). Although we shall see that McDowell's central thesis about the character of moral principles and the role they play in moral reasoning is complicated, one of his contentious theses is that the inherent subtleties of a virtue-based theory of ethics cannot be captured in any set of rules or formulas because of the predominant role that particular circumstances play in determining what it would be virtuous to do. McDowell claims that a deductive paradigm cannot adequately capture how virtuous agents reason about action, in part because such a model requires a kind of precision in matters of conduct that even Aristotle warns against seeking. In addition, McDowell takes Aristotle's *phronimos* to be someone who has "a distinctive way of seeing situations" that cannot possibly be captured in any code or set of formulas (McDowell 1979: 346). If what McDowell says about these matters is right, it looks as if the deductive model offered in this book not only fails as an interpretation of Aristotle, but also fails to account for an important aspect of virtuous behavior.

5.2.1 McDowell's Objection[1]

In his discussion of Aristotle's notion of virtue, John McDowell rejects a way of understanding Aristotle's practical syllogism that attempts to provide an exhaustive

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[1] This section is based heavily on (Winter 1997).

explanation of a virtuous person's judgment about what to do by appealing to a universal principle in the major premise, and knowledge gained through sense experience in the minor premise, to arrive at a conclusion that dictates what course of action should be followed on some occasion (McDowell 1979: Sect. 1–3). McDowell indicates that this picture of the practical syllogism implies that "what the virtuous person really perceives is only what is stated in the minor premise of the syllogism" (McDowell 1979: 336). As a result, a deductive construal of the function of moral reasoning in Aristotle's ethical theory minimizes the role of virtue.

It is important for the thesis of this book that codifiable principles included in a deductive paradigm of Aristotle's ethics could generate judgments about particular actions, and that virtue is still a central part of Aristotle's ethical theory. A critical evaluation of McDowell's position may provide a way of seeing how this might be possible.

Addressing the view he rejects, McDowell remarks:

> This picture fits only if the virtuous person's views about how, in general, one should behave are susceptible of codification, in principles apt for serving as major premises in syllogisms of the sort envisaged. But to an unprejudiced eye it should seem quite implausible that any reasonably adult moral outlook admits of any such codification. As Aristotle consistently says, the best generalizations about how one should behave hold only for the most part. (See *Nicomachean Ethics* I 3) If one attempted to reduce one's conception of what virtue requires to a set of rules, then, however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong—and not necessarily because one had changed one's mind; rather, one's mind on the matter was not susceptible of capture in any universal formula (See *Nicomachean Ethics* V 10, 1137b19–24) (McDowell 1979).

McDowell has serious reservations about the idea that universal principles can play a decisive role in moral reasoning in general or in a virtue-based theory of ethics. It is important to recognize two distinct ideas at the core of McDowell's interpretation of Aristotle. The first is focused on the character of universal moral principles themselves and their justification. A second issue is how such principles may be utilized together with more specific principles to determine what course of action is morally required in some set of circumstances.

McDowell suggests that principles we might formulate involving kindness illustrate one point he wishes to make. We could formulate a principle like "One ought to be kind" as a principle that a kind person might act on, but such a principle is too general to provide any specific guidance about how to act in a particular situation. A more specific principle relevant to kindness might be: "When something will benefit someone else, and it does not cost much for one to provide it, one should provide it." A specific principle like this could, with the help of the recognition of certain particular facts, lead us to act in a certain way toward another person. However, it is also clear that for any such principle there will also be circumstances to which such a principle could be applied but where it would not be virtuous to act on it, and where it might not even be kind or considerate to act on it. Specific principles like this cannot be part of a deductive approach to ethics, on McDowell's view, because they admit of exceptions in particular circumstances. McDowell thinks that only an

entire conception of how to live can serve the function of expressing a conception of how to act that a kind person would have. We need an entire conception of how to live because the circumstances for acting kindly can intersect with any area or aspect of human life. In order to know whether and when to act kindly in each of these areas we must have a whole conception of a good life that brings in all the virtues.

McDowell can thus be understood as advocating something close to the following thesis: there are no moral principles that have a fully specifiable, determinate content that can serve as the major premises in a deductive practical syllogism, when that syllogism is understood as having a minor premise that can be determined to be true or false by sense experience, and whose conclusion is an action or proposition that a particular action on a particular occasion is virtuous or should be done. Some aspects of McDowell's view are troubling, in particular his claim that assigning a predominant role to virtue rules out the possibility of a deductive paradigm in ethics that can extend to particulars. Addressing this aspect of McDowell's view will prove helpful in setting boundaries for the scope of the deductive model of Aristotelian ethics we have been considering.

It is striking to notice that McDowell uses the phrase "for the most part" in his remarks above about how Aristotle characterizes moral principles. It seems that the sense in which McDowell understands this phrase is the statistical one considered in Chapter 3. If we understand "for the most part" in this way and attribute only this sense to Aristotle, then the argument that McDowell offers may well be correct. On this way of understanding Aristotle, many important moral propositions have predicates that do not always apply to their respective subjects and such propositions might be thought to play a significant role in moral reasoning. But it is always possible that in the specific circumstances in which someone is making a moral decision, the generalization will fail to apply correctly. The ever-present possibility of failure of the generalization to apply to the particular case seems sufficient to show that codification of ethical principles is inappropriate. The problems of capturing an entire conception about how to live in a set of formulas is another formidable obstacle to codification.

The following three claims are troubling components of McDowell's argument when taken together:

(1) Virtue plays a decisive role in Aristotle's ethical theory.
(2) There are no codifiable moral principles in Aristotle's ethics that can be action-guiding.
(3) Aristotelian ethics should not be understood from within the context of a deductive paradigm.

McDowell seems to think that (1) entails (2), and that (2) entails (3). McDowell comes close to stating matters this way:

> If [the virtuous person's] conception (of the sort a life a human should lead) were codifiable in universal principles, the explanations would take the deductive shape insisted on by the prejudice discussed … But the thesis of uncodifiability means that the envisaged major premise, in a virtue syllogism, cannot be definitely written down (McDowell 1979: 343).

These remarks are about the status of a codified major premise in a practical syllogism. But McDowell's claim, if true, seems to have broader implications. One particular implication is the inability of a deductive paradigm to capture everything involved in Aristotle's rich conception of virtue.

We shall see why (1) does not entail (2). In addition, there is good reason to think (2) is false. We shall soon consider an example of a deductively grounded codifiable moral principle that can be action-guiding in combination with a further premise. The model offered to illustrate this point, and Aristotle's practical syllogism, can be understood, at least in the case of a virtuous person, to provide explanation and justification of action. Deductions will be offered that imply that (2) is false by applying an interpretation of technical for-the-most-part relations in Aristotle sketched in Chapter 3. McDowell's position about considerations connected to one virtue being silenced in the presence of an overriding virtue requires something like the dispositions referred to in understanding technical for-the-most-part relations. There are grounds for thinking that (1) and the denial of (2) are consistent, a claim that McDowell would surely deny.

5.2.2 For- the Most-Part Relations Reconsidered

How is it that the technical interpretation of holding for the most part leaves room for the possibility that general moral principles could be codifiable and action-guiding? Let us start with a syllogism with determinate, specifiable premises. Consider the reasoning possibly employed by someone in the context of a decision about whether to return a borrowed weapon to a friend who has lost his wits:

Syllogism A

Whatever is virtuous should be done.
Repaying debts is virtuous for the most part.

Repaying debts should be done for the most part.

The minor premise and conclusion of this syllogism are good examples of propositions that lend themselves to the analysis of technical for-the-most-part relations. The analysis offered in Chapter 3 would indicate there is a necessary relation involved between the subject, repayment of debt, and the capacity or *dunamis* for the attributes expressed in both the minor premise and conclusion respectively. Moreover, there is a necessary proposition that can be formulated about the relation between the *dunamis* for the predicate and its manifestation in each case, which follows from SCP, the strong causal principle that Aristotle uses in his *Metaphysics* and the first necessary component relation of technical for–the-most-part relations (*Metaphysics* 1048a1–1048a24). Recall that according to the strong causal

principle, a natural substance realizes some capacity it has just in case impediments are absent and an appropriate efficient cause is present.[2]

Applying these points yields this analyzed version of the argument:

Syllogism B

Whatever is virtuous should be done.
Repaying debts will be virtuous unless impediments are present.

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Repaying debts should be done unless impediments are present.

The conclusion of this syllogism can then be used as a premise to generate a prescription about how to act.

Syllogism C

Repaying debts should be done unless impediments are present.
Impediments are not present.

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This debt should be repaid

Every proposition in Syllogism A or B is codifiable. Syllogism C involves a codifiable first premise, a second premise based on the sensitivity that a virtuous person has, and a conclusion about an action. If the propositions involved in Syllogism C have these characteristics, then there is a basis for saying that Aristotle's ethics leaves room for codifiable, action-guiding moral principles. If a virtuous person's sensitivity does in fact play a significant role in coming to know the second premise of Syllogism C, then assigning a decisive role to virtue does not imply that a significant part of Aristotle's ethics cannot be codified.

Someone might object that the first premise of Syllogism C is codifiable because the unless-clause in "Repaying debts should be done unless impediments are present" is not codifiable. But the unless-clause should be understood quite generally. Comprehending this proposition involves understanding what the subject and predicate are, and understanding that the essence of each brings with it the possibility that the predicate will not apply to the subject in every set of circumstances. We need not know anything about the specific circumstances under which this could happen to know that something about the essence of the subject and predicate would allow for such circumstances. If it were necessary to know all the circumstances in which the predicate would not apply to the subject, then this proposition would not be codifiable.

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[2] At *Metaphysics* 1048a1–1048a24 Aristotle distinguishes between non-rational and rational potencies (*dunameis*): "as regards potencies of the latter kind (non-rational), when the agent and the patient meet in a way appropriate to the potency in question, one must act and the other must be acted on, but with the former kind of potency (rational) this is not necessary"(1048a5–7).

The claim that the minor premise of Syllogism C is provided by a virtuous person's sensitivity carries with it the idea that there is more than sense perception involved in the recognition of the truth of the minor premise when it is true. Aristotle's ethics does allow for codifiable principles that can, together with another premise whose truth can be discovered by a virtuous person, deductively yield a conclusion about a particular action that is to be done. McDowell may grant that the major premise of Syllogism A or B is codifiable, since it is of the same general character as a proposition such as "One ought to be kind." His worry about such propositions is that they cannot be action-guiding, given their generality. McDowell would be reluctant to accept the minor premise or conclusion of Syllogism A as being specifiable because both propositions allow for circumstances in which the predicate does not apply to its respective subject. But does this imply uncodifiability?

One challenge here is to explain how a necessary relation could obtain between repayment of debts and moral virtue, or morally virtuous action, while it would not be morally virtuous to repay a debt in certain, special circumstances. Making a necessary relationship between these concepts explicit might help show how moral principles can have determinate, specifiable content while providing guidance about how to act in conjunction with recognition of particular facts. Given that Aristotle sees all of moral virtue in reference to the end, *eudaimonia*, failure to repay debts must be an action that is by nature incompatible with attaining this end. According to the analysis of for-the-most-part relations proposed in Chapter 3, there is a necessary component relation holding between a subject and a capacity or disposition in propositions exhibiting such relations. With this point in mind, it makes sense to examine the relationship between the disposition to act virtuously and the disposition to repay debts.

What dispositions are involved in virtue? Since justice is a virtue, the dispositions that come with justice will be among those that are involved in virtue. If justice involves giving a person what is due to him or her, and repaying a debt is a case of giving to someone what is due to him or her, then virtue will imply a disposition to repay debts. But it will not be just any disposition to repay a debt that will be included in dispositions that come with justice. It will at least be a disposition to repay debts, because repaying a debt is a case of rendering to someone what is due to him or her, and perhaps a disposition to repay them because rendering to someone what is due to him or her is just.

Consider the following argument attempting to establish the necessary connection between virtuous actions and the disposition to perform them with the disposition to repay debts:

P1   Necessarily, if an agent has the disposition to perform virtuous acts, then the agent has the disposition to perform just acts.

P2   Necessarily, if an agent has the disposition to perform just acts, then the agent has the disposition to give to others what is owed to them.

P3   Necessarily, if an agent has the disposition to give to others what is owed to them, then the agent has the disposition to repay debts.

C   Necessarily, if an agent has the disposition to perform virtuous acts, then the agent has the disposition to repay debts.

P1 is straightforward and easily established in view of the place of virtue within Aristotle's ethical theory. Just actions are a subset of virtuous actions, so it is not possible for an action to be just and not virtuous. Hence the conditional is necessarily true. In fact Aristotle's thesis about the unity of virtue enables us to place any virtue in the consequent of the conditional.

P2 is a necessary truth based on the essence of justice. Aristotle's discussion of justice in the *Nicomachean Ethics* places emphasis on the proportionality involved in justice (*NE* 1131a29–1131b16). It is reasonable to maintain that when someone gives a proportionate amount to another, that person gives what is owed to another. The same point would apply to receiving as well. Since there is a necessary connection between these concepts, we would expect that a necessary relation would hold between the corresponding dispositions.

The consequent of P3, repaying debts, is simply an instance of giving what is owed. Whoever is inclined to repay debts will be inclined to give what is owed. It is important to recognize that such a disposition or inclination need not always be acted on, since there may be some occasions in which it will not be virtuous to pay a debt. Indeed, the sorts of dispositions involved in for-the-most-part relations will not always be acted on. What is important here, though, is that a virtuous person will always have such a disposition, which is all that is needed for the truth of C.

Since the truth of P1, P2, and P3 implies the truth of C, a strong case can be made for the idea that a disposition to repay debts is related by entailment to the disposition to perform morally virtuous actions. There is a necessary relation between the two notions that provides the basis for a determinate and specifiable for-the-most-part relation. Both features are present in the concept of codifiability McDowell disputes.

5.2.3 Some Objections and Responses

Objections may be raised against this attempt to draw a necessary connection between the dispositions involved with virtue and dispositions involved in repayment of debts. McDowell could grant that it is for the most part true that justice involves a disposition to repay debts, but offer another interpretation of what this amounts to. Justice could involve a disposition that will be manifested in a disposition to repay debts only under certain circumstances, where it will be a mark of a disposition to repay debts, but not of a disposition to be disposed to repay debts, that we will be motivated to perform an action that we recognize as an instance of repaying a debt. Furthermore, that disposition looks like one that will resist specification.

One reason that McDowell might argue in this way is that he thinks that when a virtuous person recognizes that a consideration from one virtue is overridden by considerations that arise from another, the first consideration is silenced. Furthermore, its being silenced appears to amount to its not motivating the virtuous person at all, since according to McDowell what distinguishes a virtuous person from a continent person is that the continent person is beset by conflicting motives.

But if a virtuous person has a disposition to be disposed to repay debts under certain circumstances, and this simply amounts to the absence of any considerations meaning that it would not be virtuous to repay debts, then the disposition seems to be unspecifiable. If it is unspecifiable, then it looks as though we will not be able to rely on it to provide the basis for a specifiable principle about the virtue of repaying debts.

There are two ways to respond to this objection. The first is to maintain that even if McDowell is right, and the disposition that a just person would have is a disposition to be disposed to repay debts, there is still a codifiable principle tying justice to repaying debts that holds for the most part. The second is to defend the view that it is a disposition to repay debts that comes with justice by showing how, on this view, a virtuous person can still be distinguished from a continent person. Even if the disposition in question is a disposition to be disposed to repay debts under certain circumstances instead of disposition to repay debts, there is still a codifiable principle involved that holds for the most part. Suppose it is only for the most part true that a just person will be disposed to repay debts, where the disposition to repay debts at least includes the desire to pay a debt once a person recognizes that something is an instance or repaying a debt. Since such a disposition will be manifested only if nothing hinders or prevents it, it will still be for the most part true that just people will repay debts. Furthermore, this is all that is needed for a codifiable moral principle that holds for the most part. Nothing more is needed for it to be for the most part true that just people will repay debts.

What emerges from these considerations is a picture according to which justice might lead to a disposition that will manifest itself under certain circumstances in one of two ways, one of which is more direct than the other. According to the first and more direct way, justice carries with it a disposition to repay debts, something that will include a desire or motivation to perform a given action once we recognize that it is a case of repaying a debt. Here we would explain why a virtuous person does not always repay debts by including the recognition of features that would make it virtuous to act otherwise to be among the conditions that can hinder or prevent the manifestation of the disposition to repay debts. Nevertheless, in such a situation a virtuous person would actually be disposed to repay a debt even when it is not virtuous to do so. Since McDowell would take a person with such a conflicting motive to be continent rather than virtuous, a full response to McDowell would involve explaining how such a person can be distinguished from a continent person.

According to the second way of understanding the disposition associated with the repayment of debts that is tied to justice, justice carries with it a disposition to be disposed to repay debts, where the disposition to be disposed to repay debts includes having a desire to do an action once it is recognized as an instance of repaying a debt, and where that disposition is manifested only under conditions that include the recognition of features that would make it virtuous not to repay a debt. Here a virtuous person need not have a motive to repay a debt when faced, for example, with someone who has lost his wits and demands the return of a weapon. The recognition of these facts about the person to whom someone owes a debt is one of the circumstances that can prevent the disposition for such a motivation from

being manifested. So it still turns out to be true that just and virtuous people will have a disposition leading them to repay debts if nothing hinders or prevents them from doing so. This account also seems to give rise to a codifiable principle.

Although both of the alternative readings of the relation between a subject and a disposition seem to give rise to a codifiable principle, the first one is preferable. For this reason, something needs to be said about how, in light of it, we are to distinguish a virtuous person from a continent person. The problem here is that taking justice necessarily to involve the disposition to repay debts implies that a virtuous person will have the disposition, and hence a motivation, to repay a debt even when it is not virtuous to do so. The reason that this disposition and motivation are present is because the disposition to repay debts has all cases of debt-paying in its scope, including cases that are not virtuous because of considerations central to some other virtue. If this is true, then a virtuous person would appear to have conflicting desires in cases like the one in which a virtuous person would not return a weapon to friend who has lost his wits. But this may leave us with no way to distinguish a virtuous person from a continent one.

But what if we say the desires of a virtuous person that get overridden are like desires not there at all, because they do not provide the agent with a reason to act that then must be outweighed by stronger reasons.[3] So understood, such desires are not desires against which a virtuous person has to struggle. To make this plausible, consider a simpler case than the kind of case a virtuous person would be confronted with when he or she recognizes considerations that would override what would otherwise be virtuous to do. Someone can have a sudden curious urge to drink from a can of paint, a desire that provides no reason at all to act in accord with it since it is quite unconnected with anything else that the person desires or believes is good. Desires like this do not require reasons to outweigh the reasons that come with them, because no reasons come with them. Moreover, a person with such a desire need not struggle against the urge to drink from the can of paint in order not to drink from it. If the urge is a sudden urge unconnected with anything else that the person desires or believes is good, he or she can dismiss it as absurd and behave as though it were not there. This example indicates that we can have a desire that is present but still provides no reason to act on it. Hence we may behave as if the desire were not there at all.

How would these considerations be applied in the case of a virtuous person? Consider the circumstances already mentioned about returning a weapon. Why could a virtuous person not recognize that he or she had some inclination to return the weapon to the friend who had lost his wits, but maintain that once he or she discovers that the person had lost his wits that there was simply no question about whether to return it or not? Once this has been discovered it is as if that inclination to return the weapon is not there. Given this discovery, this inclination provides the virtuous person with no reason at all to return the weapon, and thus does not provide an inclination that the virtuous person needs to struggle against. Although the inclination is there, it is as if it were not there. So these cases provide a way of

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[3] This distinction and the examples that accompany it were offered to me by Norman Dahl.

describing how the present account can explain the distinction between virtue and continence.

We have seen how there can be codifiable principles in an ethics that has the shape of an Aristotelian science. These codifiable principles can, together with other premises, yield deductive conclusions about what is to be done. The other premises may not be premises whose truth can be discovered just by sense perception, but they are still premises that, together with codifiable principles, can yield a deductive conclusion about what is to be done. There is a further reason why McDowell should grant the existence of codifiable principles of the sort argued for here. It seems as though he needs to acknowledge the kinds of dispositions that give rise to them for his point about how considerations get silenced in the presence of a virtuous sensitivity.

McDowell explains how considerations from distinct virtues get silenced in the presence of a virtuous sensitivity that recognizes what in fact a given situation demands:

> The view of a situation which [the virtuous person] arrives at by exercising his sensitivity is one in which some aspect of the situation is seen as constituting a reason for acting in some way; this reason is apprehended, not as outweighing or overriding any reasons for acting in other ways ... but as silencing them (McDowell 1979: 335).

Is it plausible to say that competing considerations from distinct virtues are silenced in the presence of a virtuous sensitivity? There are at least two problems with this putative explanation. Where do the competing considerations that get silenced come from in the first place, and how do they affect the virtuous person in such a way that they need to get silenced? McDowell seems to require some dispositions to be associated with each of the virtues to generate considerations that get silenced when an apparent conflict between a disposition and another virtue gets decided in the favor of another virtue. The account of technical for-the-most-part relations from Chapter 3 allows for different dispositions that can be associated with each of the virtues. This account implies that each virtue carries with it a set of dispositions that will be manifested if there are no impediments, where the virtuous person's recognition of other morally relevant considerations can constitute one such impediment. These are the dispositions whose motivations to act get set aside by the exercise of a virtuous person's sensitivity. Moreover, what allows McDowell to say that there is more than one virtue? The dispositions that are part of the analysis of technical for-the-most-part relations provide a natural way of distinguishing among virtues. McDowell's account requires the dispositions that give rise to codifiable principles in ethics, and so he should grant the existence of codifiable principles in the sense we have considered.

5.2.4 Further Considerations

McDowell's central concern is that codification of general moral principles is part of a deductive paradigm that inappropriately depicts Aristotle's characterization of moral reasoning. One of McDowell's reasons for thinking that the deductive

paradigm inappropriately depicts the character of moral reasoning is that there will be cases in which the action mandated by the conclusion will be at odds with what good moral sense would prescribe: "however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong" (McDowell 1979: 336). We may extend much of the reasoning presented thus far to address this concern.

Recall that the second component relation involved in for-the-most-part propositions is one that holds between a capacity or disposition and its manifestation. The presence of intervening factors ensures that capacities will not always become actual. Recall the point made earlier about not taking the particular premise of Syllogism C to be discoverable on the basis of sense perception alone. The process of developing a moral character includes acquiring a sense about which features of a situation would constitute impediments to the manifestation of a given disposition. Different people at different levels of virtue will have developed it differently, some well, some badly. But the virtuous person will have developed it well. Virtue carries with it an appropriate sensitivity to morally relevant features of situations. The recognition of these features should provide impediments to the manifestation of a disposition associated with a given virtue and provide such impediments in a virtuous person.

In the example about returning the weapon, a person who has proper knowledge of general ethical principles would understand that the major premise in Syllogism C is true for the most part in the technical sense. There may be some factors or circumstances that would render repayment of some debts in some circumstances morally inadvisable. Cases in which a potentially dangerous weapon has been borrowed from someone who has taken a mental turn for the worse since the time the weapon was borrowed would qualify. Such a situation presents two impediments that function together—both the weapon itself and the unfortunate change of mental state are impediments under the circumstances. A virtuous person who is properly aware of the relationship between these factors and what virtue requires will simply not reach a point of tension in deriving the conclusion of Syllogism C. Since the major premise holds for the most part and a person who is virtuous would recognize the presence of intervening factors coming to play in the second premise, such a person will recognize what action is required. Thus, in the case just described, a virtuous person will not draw the conclusion in Syllogism C, because a virtuous person would not take its minor premise to be true. This decision is supported by good moral sense and what the deductive paradigm prescribes. In short, the tension that McDowell alludes to between what a deductive paradigm would prescribe and what good moral sense dictates in particular cases does not exist, if we apply the analysis of technical for-the-most-part relations in Aristotle developed in Chapter 3.

A few words about the purpose of Aristotle's practical syllogism will show that the problems being addressed here are directly linked to the interpretation of Aristotle that McDowell offers. It may look as though Syllogism C cannot be a practical syllogism, since its minor premise is a not a particular that can be apprehended solely on the basis of sense perception. It is McDowell's view that having a minor premise of this character is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a

deductive paradigm of the practical syllogism in virtue of which codifiability of
moral principles could be intelligible (McDowell 1979: 336). It is also a component
of his own understanding of the practical syllogism (McDowell 1979: 344–5).

But even if having a minor premise apprehended on the basis of sense perception
alone is an essential feature of the practical syllogism, Syllogism C and Aristotle's
practical syllogism still serve the same purpose. Both provide a model for explaining
and justifying actions of virtuous persons. It is plausible to think that Aristotle's
practical syllogism specifies what the agent thought were the relevant features of
his or her action that would justify it. Syllogism C should be understood as serving
this general purpose as well.

In short, the account of technical for-the-most-part relations from Chapter 3
presents a way of understanding some moral principles as being specifiable, deter-
minate, and action-guiding. If these features of the analysis are acceptable, then
there is an understanding of the role of principles in Aristotle's ethical theory that
McDowell should consider more carefully. Whether the explanation of Syllogism C
offered here fits precisely in all details with what Aristotle presents as a practical
syllogism is irrelevant, given that both have the same purpose.

Is it Aristotle's view that the minor premise of a practical syllogism is discov-
ered by sense perception alone? Aristotle does say things that suggest an affirmative
answer. For example, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he says that the particular facts
that are the last step in deliberation are a matter of perception, and that *phronēsis* is
concerned with the ultimate particular which is a matter of perception (*NE* 112b38–
1113a2 and 1147a27–38). But this does not mean that what Aristotle has in mind by
perception is exhausted by sense perception. For he says that whether bread is baked
as it should be is a matter of perception, and this seems to be an evaluative matter
(*NE* 1112b38–1113a2). He also maintains that the amount a person must deviate
from the mean to become blameworthy is not easy to determine but depends on
particular facts and is a matter of perception (*NE* 1109b20–24). Again, the kind of
perception he is talking about that involves particular facts is a perception of what
constitutes a sufficient deviation from the mean to constitute an act that is not virtu-
ous. This is an evaluative matter and not the kind of finding that would be delivered
just by sense perception. In addition, Aristotle talks about people whose undemon-
strated sayings we should listen to because experience has given them an eye to see
aright (*NE* 1143b11–13). Aristotle is concerned with a kind of moral perception that
requires experience beyond what is required for sense perception and allows us to
see aright in a given situation, because it allows us to recognize which particular fea-
tures of the situation are morally relevant. As a result, there is a reason for thinking
that the present proposal for understanding what can constitute a minor premise in a
practical syllogism does fit with what Aristotle says, and thus that requiring a minor
premise to be discoverable solely by sense perception is a departure from Aristotle.

What remains to be explained is how the deductive paradigm developed in this
book is compatible with what McDowell calls the virtuous person's "distinctive way
of seeing situations" (McDowell 1979: 346). McDowell rightly emphasizes the cen-
tral role a virtuous sensitivity must play in any virtue theory of ethics, especially
Aristotle's. But there is not good reason to accept McDowell's idea that a deductive

paradigm diminishes the role that a virtuous sensitivity would play in determining how to act. According to the model of reasoning presented in syllogism C, a virtuous sensitivity is required to come to know the second premise. In practice, virtue will play some role in coming to know the first premise as well. Seeing that certain impediments are present in some situation requires full recognition of how to act should the impediments have been absent. This requires the virtuous sensitivity McDowell refers to. Coming to know the second premise also requires knowledge of the relation between the otherwise virtuous action and the impediments that can introduce further considerations. The virtuous sensitivity would be present here as well. Far from diminishing the role of virtue, the account offered here requires virtue no less than McDowell's account does. To the degree that a virtuous sensitivity is essential in apprehending the second premise of Syllogism C, we must abandon the claim that the second premise can be known by sense perception alone. But, as we have seen, this need not be an element in a thoroughly Aristotelian account of applying moral principles to action.

McDowell's general view about the role that experience and perception play in providing content to the moral ends involved in the major premises of practical syllogisms is consistent with the view we have considered. This idea should be a central component of any plausible interpretation of Aristotle's view. Yet experience and perception will be required to recognize that universal moral principles are true and that impediments may affect how for-the-most-part propositions apply to specific circumstances. But this does not force us to say that it is entirely our moral practice that renders moral principles objective. Such a view ascribes a more radical indeterminacy to the ends involved in morality than the current proposal allows.

What about McDowell's view that the major premise of a practical syllogism "cannot be definitely written down?" Again, the justification for the point seems to be that the major premise embodies a virtuous person's entire conception about how to live, and that this is uncodifiable. Since we cannot rule out the possibility of codifiability, given what Aristotle says about the nature of moral reasoning, it seems reasonable to ask how the model that would provide a basis for codifiability could account for the point that the major premise would involve a virtuous person's entire conception of the good. Notice that the deductive paradigm advocated here also involves such a recognition. If a person has carried out a set of deductive inferences from some small set of foundational moral principles, these deductions provide justification for any premise that may be used together with what a virtuous sensitivity perceives. Since the entire set of deductive inferences, the foundational principles, and the conclusions generated therefrom collectively constitute a highly specific systematic articulation of the good life, whenever appeal is made to a proposition that is part of this schema, it is made on the basis of an entire conception about how to live. What distinguishes the actions of different virtuous people is not what principles the people would apply in moral situations, but the sort of perception of salient features related to minor premises. At this level practical reason plays its role, and the level of science and theory is left behind.

5.3 The Scope of the Deductive Paradigm

We shall now consider some questions about the limitations and scope of this paradigm of ethics. For example, a person might wonder about whether any virtue-based ethical theory can be comprehensive. It has been thought that Aristotle's virtue theory cannot be a comprehensive ethical theory because it fails to offer a method for deciding whose interests prevail when the projects of two or more agents conflict (Dahl 1984: 130). No virtue-based theory can make a gesture toward being comprehensive without offering some account of why benevolent or altruistic actions are rational actions for agents to perform. A case will be made that there are resources within virtue theory generally, and in Aristotle's ethics specifically, for explaining why altruistic actions are sometimes rational for agents to perform. Some have thought that it is not possible to give a thoroughly rational account for why it is good to make sacrifices for others, perhaps thinking that this component of ethical behavior can only be explained by appeal to theism or some other appeal to a supernatural cause.[4] Others attempt to provide a rational justification for altruistic actions outside of virtue theory (Nagel 1970; Searle 2003). An attempt will be made here to show what a rational justification might look like from the standpoint of virtue theory.

Before addressing this issue about the scope of the model, it is perhaps appropriate to summarize some of the main features of the model in one place and to put some of its elements together so that we have a better sense of what is being proposed. We may then be in a better position to determine how far such a theory can be taken. In addition, something should be said about the issue of moral realism again since part of the purpose of this project is to provide a defensible response to different types of anti-realist challenges.

5.3.1 Another Look at the Deductive Paradigm

Recall from the introduction that one of the purposes of undertaking the project of constructing a deductive model of Aristotle's ethics is to try to show how an ethical theory might make room for the variations and complexities of the moral life while being grounded in a set of firmly established moral principles. Many think that one of the advantages of a virtue theory is its ability to account for variation and complexity in the moral life. This advantage is often seen to come at the expense of a solid grounding in moral principles. Among other things, this book should be

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[4] A particularly poignant example is Ayn Rand who says "Now there is one word—a single word— which can blast the morality of altruism out of existence and which it cannot withstand—the word: *Why*? *Why* must man live for the sake of others? *Why* must he be a sacrificial animal? *Why* is that the good? There is no earthly reason for it—and, ladies and gentlemen, in the whole history of philosophy no *earthly* reason has ever been given...What most moralists—and few of their victims—realize is that reason and altruism are incompatible." *Faith and Force: The Destroyers of the Modern World.* PWNI 74; pb 61.

seen as making a case against the idea that the benefits of virtue theory come at the expense of grounded moral principles.

Aristotle's virtue theory as it is presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the starting point for this project. The main challenge is to show how the elements of the theory offered there are compatible with a deductive model of moral principles. If anything is clear in Aristotole's theory, it is the idea that the goal of the moral life is happiness or *eudaimonia*, and a person has the best chance of getting to this goal by leading a life of virtue, which involves possessing the kind of perception of situations a virtuous person has. How do we acquire this virtuous sensitivity? Aristotle advises us to follow the lead of the virtuous person, which is well and good, but part of the purpose of offering an ethical theory is to put a person in a position to be capable of determining what he/she ought to do in the absence of a role model. Furthermore, what if there are two good role models offering conflicting advice? How can we adjudicate between prescriptions if we rely only on the principle of following the lead of a good personal exemplar? Whether one has a good role model or not, it seems like a good ethical theory, or at least a portion of one, will be useful and possibly necessary in some cases for a person who is striving to lead a good life.

A virtuous person not only has reasons for what he or she does, but these reasons are good reasons grounded in an understanding of what perfects human beings or helps them to flourish. This theoretical framework presupposes that human beings share a determinate, rational nature and that it is possible for anyone with properly functioning cognitive capacities to, at the very least, come to understand enough about human nature to see that certain kinds of lives are better suited to its fulfillment than others. A deductive model attempts to provide of way of seeing how the sorts of principles that are part of ordering a fulfilled human life can be arranged so as to provide guidance in determining how to act.

It is not possible to offer anything like a rulebook for the moral life that a person could consult on any occasion to determine what to do. The human situation is certainly far too complex for that. On the other hand, it seems misguided to think it is possible for virtue to develop and function properly without the guidance of moral principles grounded in certain stable features of our rational nature. So, contrary to some of the current thinking about Aristotelian virtue theory, it is reasonable to think that a well-developed virtue theory is not only compatible with firmly grounded moral rules, but that such a theory actually requires them.

Saying this is fairly easy, but showing how one might go about constructing some type of systematic arrangement of such principles is challenging. The key for getting the project underway is seeing that for-the-most-part relationships are prominent in ethics and that these relationships, at least on Aristotle's account, are capable of scientific treatment, where scientific treatment concerns itself only with necessary relationships. Once we see how for-the-most-part relationships may provide a bridge between ethics and the natural sciences, the focal issue becomes one of trying to construct an account of holding for the most part in light of which propositions exhibiting such relationships can be seen to hold necessarily.

The analysis of holding for the most part provided in Chapter 3 delivers such an account. That analysis offers a tool treating a large class of ethics propositions

systematically. According to this way of understanding for-the-most-part relations, not only is the relation based on things that are strictly true, but we can still maintain that attributes of this sort hold of all members of a kind in virtue of their nature. Second, the propositions that are true in virtue of what holds for the most part are necessarily true. Nevertheless, it is a contingent matter whether what holds for the most part, in the sense of what realizes the relevant capacity, does or does not occur on a given occasion. This helps explain why someone might mistakenly think that propositions about what holds for the most part are contingent.

Once we recognize that a significant set of ethical propositions lend themselves to this analysis, we are well positioned to wonder whether other propositions in ethics express necessary relationships. The least interesting but most substantial set of necessary propositions in ethics consist of definitional relations among various ethical subjects and attributes, e.g., definitions of happiness (*eudaimonia*), virtue (*arête*), practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), et cetera. In addition, there seem to be necessary non-definitional relations, some of which are moral imperatives. Aristotle indicates that three types of action, i.e., theft, adultery, and murder, are never to be done, which furnishes a basis for thinking that there could be unconditional moral prohibitions in the context of a virtue theory (*NE* 1107a10–12). It takes some work to show what the deductive framework justifying such claims would look like. The Appendix sketches a procedure for getting started.

Once we have identified ethical axioms, like those Aristotle identifies in *Topics* III, we have in our possession all of the important ingredients of the deductive paradigm: a set of subjects and attributes that constitute a significant portion of the subject matter of ethics, definitions of key ethical terms, and a set of propositions lending themselves to the analysis of for-the-most-part relations offered in Chapter 3. Identifying and explaining what is meant by each of these ingredients and working through some of the deductive schemata offered in earlier chapters provides the basic idea of what a deductive paradigm of Aristotelian ethics could look like. At this point it is crucial to recognize that the deductive paradigm, which represents a quasi-scientific treatment of ethics, only extends down to the major premises of practical syllogisms. Derivations carried out on the basis of such claims are not about particular actions, so these derivations do not extend to the level of minor premises of practical syllogisms. Part of what is presupposed here is that major premises of practical syllogisms represent moral principles, and that it is possible to provide a theoretical justification for such principles on the basis of fundamental concepts in ethics. Minor premises, on the other hand, are seen to be true when they are true by some exercise of practical reason. Because the lion's share of the moral life consists of deliberation about and application of particular claims, which can be expressed as minor premises of practical syllogisms, the deductive paradigm proposed here does not minimize the role of practical reason in ethics. Indeed, an entire life might be lived without engaging in the theoretical enterprise of seeing how various moral propositions relate to one another. But this theoretical project is possible and this book attempts to show how it might get started. Working out the paradigm in more detail is a more involved project.

5.3.2 *Moral Realism and the Deductive Paradigm*

In what sense does this deductive paradigm of virtue ethics provide a defensible account of moral realism? In Chapter 2 it was said that moral realism expresses a commitment to the position that moral propositions are capable of being objectively true. We have seen that the set of moral propositions is complex, but there is a basis in Aristotle for thinking in terms of the following classification:
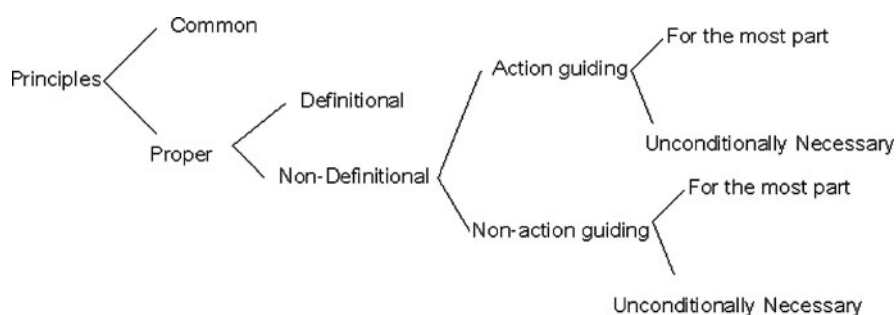
When we talk about the commitment of moral realists to the position that moral propositions are capable of being objectively true, "moral propositions" are the non-definitional, action-guiding principles in the Aristotelian schema. This set consists of propositions that are unconditionally necessary, and of propositions that hold for the most part. If propositions from either set can satisfy the standards for moral realism, then we have good reason for thinking that the moral theory providing justification for such propositions would be a good candidate for a realist theory. The case for unconditionally true action-guiding moral principles in Aristotle is a tough one to make,[5] and the issue about whether the deductive paradigm satisfies the conditions of realism does not hang on the existence of unconditionally true moral prohibitions. A less controversial case for objectively true moral propositions can be made using a similar justificatory structure to the one used in Chapter 3, but applying to moral propositions that hold for the most part. How might such a case go?

Let us consider a proposition Aristotle classifies as holding for the most part: "Wealth is beneficial." Recall that we discussed and analyzed this proposition in Chapter 3. We said there that there are plausible grounds for classifying this proposition as being a technical for-the-most-part proposition, where the latter involves recognizing two component relations. The first holds between a subject and its capacity for the possession of a necessary attribute. The second holds between a potentiality and its manifestation or actualization. Because of the possible presence of either internal or external impediments, the actualization of a power may not

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[5] See the Appendix.

occur if conditions are not suitable for its occurrence. The idea is that there is a law-like relationship that holds between the subject and the predicate in such relations whether the property attributed to the subject manifests itself or not.

Applying this analysis to the proposition "Wealth is beneficial" implies that the first component relation involved holds between wealth and the power to be beneficial. Since wealth is an external good, and external goods are necessary for a good life, it follows that there is a necessary relationship between wealth and this potentiality. Even though, as a matter of fact, wealth may not be helpful for all human beings in all circumstances, it is still plausible to maintain that wealth necessarily has the potential to be beneficial for human beings, given what wealth is. So, for example, wealth is not beneficial for a compulsive gambler. But we would say that compulsive or addictive behavior is an imperfection to which human beings may be susceptible given certain appetites they have, appetites that are essentially rooted in their matter.

All of this helps illustrate how we can understand how the technical understanding of holding for the most part applies to a specific proposition with ethical content, but it does little to help buttress the case for moral realism. In order to do that, we need to examine the justificatory structure that could be offered to support the proposition "Wealth is beneficial" in the context of Aristotle's ethical theory. We might begin with a syllogism like this:

(1) Anything that is a necessary for the exercise of some virtues is beneficial (for the most part).
(2) Wealth is a necessary for the exercise of some virtues.
(c) Wealth is beneficial (for the most part).

Since (c) holds for the most part, one of the premises must. In this syllogism, the major premise (1) holds for the most part. Since virtues are beneficial for humans to acquire and exercise, things that are needed for the virtues will also be beneficial for humans to acquire. Of course, the complexity of the human condition leaves much room for cases in which the preconditions are not beneficial for any particular individual, particularly cases in which they are not directed toward the acquisition of virtue, but even in such cases it may still make perfectly good sense to talk of the orientation or disposition. (2) is just a fact about virtues. Virtues such as magnificence and generosity require some type of surplus of goods in order to be exercised.

What justification can be offered for (1) and (2)? If the propositions that provide support for (1) and (2) can be plausibly regarded as being capable of being objectively true, then there is a strong case in the making for the conclusion that the deductive paradigm of Aristotle's ethics under consideration satisfies the distinctive condition of moral realism. Let us look at a syllogism that could be offered to support (1):

(1a) Whatever is instrumentally good is beneficial (for the most part).
(1b) Anything that is a necessary for the exercise of some virtues is instrumentally good.
(1)   Anything that is a necessary for the exercise of some virtues is beneficial (for the most part).

Since the conclusion of this syllogism holds for the most part, one of its premises must. In this case, (1a) is another for-the-most-part claim. Instrumental goods are defined as those goods that are not inherently good, but good insofar as they lead to something else that is good. So there is an obvious sense in which being beneficial is tied to what constitutes the definition of an instrumental good. But it is equally obvious that not every instrumental good is beneficial in every set of circumstances. Imagine, for example, that a person inherits a splendid, rare Samurai sword and pawns it off to support a drug habit. (1b) is close to being true by definition. If something is needed to exercise a virtue, then it is not acquired for its own sake, but rather for the sake of the virtue. If so, then such a good is only good instrumentally. So far it looks as if the claims supporting (1) meet realist conditions for truth.

How about the support for (2)? Consider this possible justification:

(2a) Possession of a supply of goods beyond one's necessities is necessary for the exercise of some virtues. (derivable from definitions of some virtues)
(2b) Wealth is a supply of goods beyond one's necessities. (definitional).
(2)   Wealth is a necessary for the exercise of some virtues.

Since (2) is not a claim that holds only for the most part, we would not expect either of the premises supporting it to hold for the most part. Any other-regarding virtue requires something beyond what is necessary for one's own survival to be exercised. It is not an act of plain and simple generosity for a starving person to give food to the poor; it would be some form of altruism instead. If a person exercises bad judgment in giving necessities away, such acts would not be classified as being good at all. These considerations should supply support for (2a). (2b) is pretty close to a definition of wealth. Again, both of these claims can be regarded as satisfying realist conditions for truth. The burden is on the anti-realist at this point to show where the case falls apart (if it does).

5.3.3 Virtue Ethics and Altruism

Virtue theories, like other moral theories, offer a rational framework for explaining how we should go about leading a moral life. For example, if we are interested in regulating our appetites for food, drink, and other bodily pleasures, we can benefit by paying attention to what virtue theories have to say about temperance. We become temperate by, among other things, identifying the actions of people who seem to be temperate and by acting as they do. By following the lead of such individuals, we stand a good chance of gradually beginning to take pleasure in the rewards of moderate consumption. It is reasonable to expect this process to produce the effect that our desire to act intemperately diminishes or disappears. Of course, following the lead of a good role model does not entail that a person will always make the correct choice, but by learning through mistakes and successes we gradually acquire the type of steady disposition that comes with any virtue.

A similar procedure would apply to the acquisition of other virtues that come to mind such as humility and honesty. These virtues seem to be aimed at enhancing

one's own situation primarily, even though others may be benefited secondarily. It is a relatively straightforward matter to show virtue theory can explain why it is rational to act temperately or honestly, because in so acting a person usually benefits him or herself, but it is more difficult to see how virtue theory can provide the resources for explaining why it is sometimes good to act for the goods of others primarily. A comprehensive moral theory should be able to explain why it is appropriate to forego our own projects for the aim of benefiting others. In fact, for the purposes of this discussion, let us think of altruistic actions as those actions done primarily for the purpose of benefiting others. Since external goods are necessary for a good life and situations may arise in which such goods are scarce, it will be possible for situations of conflict between individuals to arise. A strong form of altruism would resolve such conflicts.

In this section we consider a case for the idea that virtue theory can explain why it is rational to perform some altruistic acts—actions done primarily for the purpose of benefiting others. We shall see that Aristotle's theory leaves room for altruistic acts by examining his treatment of the virtue of courage. Having done so, we shall consider a more general argument for why it is rational for every agent to perform at least some altruistic acts.

5.3.4 Aristotle on Courage

Attending to Aristotle's treatment of the virtue of courage/bravery shows that Aristotle thought it was rational to perform self-sacrificial actions. But courage is not the only virtue involving self-sacrifice though it may present the clearest example. Aristotle considers bravery to be a type of fearlessness in the face of terrible things. Since death is, by most accounts, the worst of things, fearlessness in the face of death best exemplifies bravery. But not any kind of death will do. A daredevil who fearlessly risks his life while performing reckless stunts would not be considered brave by Aristotle's account of courage, because bravery requires that risks be taken for a noble cause. Aristotle describes the brave individual as one "who is fearless in the face of a noble death, and of all emergencies that involve death; and the emergencies of war are in the highest degree of this kind" (*NE* 1115a32–35). It is customary for Aristotle to appeal to the most extreme case to make a key point, and his paradigm of bravery as involving "emergencies of war" is no exception. The case of emergency in war perhaps calls to mind images of a soldier diving on a live grenade to save his comrades. Aristotle also mentions fearlessness in the face of all "emergencies that involve death" as involving courage as well. Let us consider an example to make this idea more vivid.

Charging into a burning building to save a vulnerable child could count as an act of bravery by Aristotle's theory and by most other accounts of courage. But further conditions must be met for the act to count as a genuine case of bravery. If a person charges into a burning building with the motive of being rewarded by the family of the vulnerable child, then such an act is not clearly an act of bravery. As with Aristotle's more general description of virtue, he mentions a number of

qualifications that must be met for an action to be classifiable as a brave one: "The man, then, who faces and who fears the right things and from the right motive, in the right way and at the right time, and who feels confidence under the corresponding conditions, is brave" (*NE* 1115b17–20). We can imagine a person charging into the building at a time when there is virtually no chance of getting to the child. If the odds of success are excessively low, charging in under such circumstances would be rash. A person who rushes into the building at the prompting of others, but who lacks the poise and self-confidence to get to the child once in the flames fails to satisfy an important condition of bravery as well.

We might notice that genuine instances of bravery are unusual because it is rare that all of the conditions that such actions must meet are met. But brave acts are surely possible and usually recognizable as being good when they occur. A person who charges into a burning building might do so knowing full well that she runs a serious risk of death. In fact, Aristotle's account of bravery comes very close to defining this risk into courageous acts. If someone risks death for another person, the first places all personal goods at stake for the benefit of another individual. It sounds very much like a brave action of this sort is rightly classifiable as an altruistic action.

Why does Aristotle think that courageous acts are good? Courageous acts are virtuous acts, and virtuous acts are good because they enable a person who performs them to fulfill a certain *ergon,* which for human beings is a life of reason. This kind of life is one for which our species is specially suited. Moreover, human beings are social animals who cannot reach fulfillment without the help and cooperation of others (*Politics* 1253a2; a30). By Aristotle's account of the matter, it is not possible for a person to achieve happiness or fulfill her *ergon* in isolation from other human beings; such a person is either a beast or a god (*Politics* 1253a32). Virtues such as courage and justice are directly connected to goods of the community, and they stem from the social nature of human beings. By contrast, temperance is a virtue that is only indirectly connected to the good of the community because its domain is perfection of the appetites of a single individual. The effect of improvements in a person's appetites for food and drink may (and probably will) benefit others, but this influence on others is an incidental effect of temperance. On the other hand, benefiting others is closely connected to the essence of more social virtues such as courage. Some virtues directly aim at perfecting the individual *qua* individual while others aim at perfecting the individual *qua* member of a political community. Courage involves sacrifices for the sake of the good of the community.

This account of the justification for courageous acts is certainly incomplete, but it does indicate that Aristotle does have principles within his ethical theory that provide the basis for a rational justification for performing altruistic actions.

5.3.5 A General Argument for Altruism

We shall now consider a more general argument for the conclusion that it is in the interest of every agent to perform at least some altruistic acts by appealing to

some more general concepts within Aristotle's ethical theory. If cogent, the argument provides further reasons for thinking that altruistic acts can be justified on strictly rational grounds. Here is the argument:

(1) If some action is a good action for humans to perform, then that action should be performed by the virtuous person in some set of circumstances.
(2) A community in which there are altruistic acts is better than one in which there are none.
(3) Altruistic acts are good actions for humans to perform (from 2).
(4) Altruistic acts should be performed by the virtuous person in some set of circumstances (from 1, 3).
(5) It is in the interest of every agent to emulate the virtuous person.
(6) Emulating the virtuous person requires acquisition of the dispositions of the virtuous person.
(7) The virtuous person has the disposition to perform altruistic acts (from 4).
(8) It is in the interest of every agent to acquire the dispositions of the virtuous person (from 5, 6).
(9) It is in the interest of every agent to have the disposition to perform acts of altruism (from 7, 8).
(10) Repeated failure to do x makes it difficult or impossible to acquire the disposition for x.
(11) Repeated failure to act on the disposition for altruistic acts destroys the disposition for altruism (from 10).
(12) It is in the interest of every agent to perform at least some altruistic acts (from 9, 11).

Premises (1), (2), (5), (6) and (10) require explanation. Let us consider each one of them. (1) is a conditional claim important for virtue theory. Aristotle begins his *Nicomachean Ethics* with the famous line "Every craft and every investigation, and likewise every action and decision, seems to aim at some good; hence the good has been well described as that at which everything aims" (10941a1–3). Later, when spelling out what the human good is, Aristotle builds on the idea that the human function is rational activity of the soul. The human good is then based on performing over a lifetime the best kinds of activities suited to a being with a rational nature. *Eudaimonia* is defined in terms of virtue (*arête*), and the latter is a state of the soul that chooses the mean in accordance with rational calculation. So, actions that are chosen by the virtuous agent, *qua* virtuous agent, are rational for human beings by definition. Since what is rational for human beings is what is identified with that is good, actions that are chosen by the virtuous agent, *qua* virtuous agent, are good. This reasoning supports the idea that if an action is performed by the virtuous agent, then that action is good. This conditional could be taken to be true by definition within Aristotle's theory. But (1) is based on a conditional that runs in the other direction. It is not true simply by definition or without qualification that if an action is good, then it should be performed by the virtuous agent. One reason this is so is that there are countless good actions that may never fall within the scope of a virtuous person's possible actions. For example, at any particular time any individual in the world would be better off by being treated kindly. Therefore, treating every person in the world kindly at any one time is good. But it is impossible for any one person to treat every person kindly at one time. However, the truth of (1) can

be established by restricting the class of good actions to those that fall within the virtuous agent's power as a human agent. In other words, (1) follows from these claims:

(a) If x is a good action for humans to perform, then there is some possible set of circumstances in which x should be done.
(b) If there is some possible set of circumstances in which x should be done, then x would be performed by the virtuous person in some set (at least the possible set) of circumstances.
(1) Therefore, if x is a good action for humans to perform, then x would be performed by the virtuous person in some set of circumstances.

Let us suppose that my cholesterol level is slightly elevated and that I have an extra $100 I could use to buy a small supply of a drug designed to bring this level down. Spending the $100 this way surely is a good for me since my health is a good and taking this medication improves my health. Suppose that I discover that my neighbor has lost his job and will be evicted from his apartment at the end of the month because he is $100 short of paying his rent. It would definitely be directly beneficial for my neighbor to have my $100 to pay his rent. What should I do in this situation? I think the virtuous person would be likely to give the $100 to his neighbor. Why? Because the virtuous agent places importance on the good of the community, and in this case it seems clear that the goods at stake for his neighbor are more significant than his own. The good of lowering cholesterol for a short period of time contributes to my health, but is not essential for my health. On the other hand, my neighbor's keeping his home could turn out to be necessary for his acquisition of a job, which is likely to lead to many other goods for him. So even though the $100 could be used for a personal good of mine, it seems like a virtuous agent would sacrifice his good for the good of his neighbor in a situation like this.

When thought of in this way the virtue of generosity becomes the center of attention. A generous person will have the disposition to sacrifice those personal goods attainable with money for the sake of the goods others might acquire by those means. Aristotle says "it is the nature of the liberal man not to look to himself" (*NE* 1120b6). It is plausible to expect to encounter self-sacrifice just about everywhere we turn when we examine virtues that are concerned with interpersonal relationships. Resolving the interpersonal conflicts involved in acquiring the virtues may provide a model for resolving the interpersonal conflicts where altruism becomes possible.

(2) is an idea that should be accounted for by any plausible, comprehensive ethical theory. It seems highly plausible to say that a community which includes self-sacrificial or other-regarding acts is better than one that lacks them. Some ethical egoists may deny (2), and to such people it is hard to know what to say. The argument is supposed to show how virtue theory can justify altruistic acts if one grants that altruistic acts are good. Egoists such as Ayn Rand move from the premise that there is no rational justification for altruistic acts to the conclusion that egoism is the only plausible moral outlook. But this premise is what is at issue in the main argument here.

(5) is a fundamental principle of Aristotle's ethical theory. "Actions, then, are called just and temperate when they are such as the just and the temperate man would do" (NE 1105b5–7). Aristotle thinks that we all have the natural ability to recognize at least some obviously virtuous and vicious acts when we see them.

(6) picks up where (5) ends. "...but it is not the man who does these (actions) that is just and temperate, but the man who also does them as just and temperate men do them" (NE 1105b7–10). How do "just and temperate men do them?" From a firm and unchanging state that reliably leads to similar future actions. Aristotle defines moral virtue as a state of the soul that chooses the mean, and acting virtuously means that one not only does what the virtuous person would do, but that one acts from the same type of internal state, an internal state that allows one to act habitually well.

(10) is closely related to (5) and (6). Having the disposition for some action means that a person will act on it in circumstances that call for it. Repeated failure to do so in the appropriate circumstances is a good sign that a person lacks the relevant disposition. Conversely, acting in a specific way in similar circumstances on different occasions is a good sign that someone possesses the disposition in question. Calling to mind the parallel between the acquisition of skill at a craft and states of character reinforces the point (See NE 1103a31-b21). Just as we can only become proficient at playing the lyre by practicing playing the lyre, we acquire a virtue by acting virtuously in the appropriate circumstances. Failure to practice the lyre repeatedly over time makes it impossible to acquire the disposition to play it well. So too with the virtues.

Intuitively, this argument shows that it is in everyone's interest to perform at least some altruistic acts because it is in our interest to try to become like the virtuous person as much as we can. Simply stated, the virtuous person has the disposition to perform altruistic acts because these acts are good for the community.

So there is a plausible rational justification for altruistic acts that is grounded in ideas central to the virtue theory of Aristotle. Aristotle's treatment of courage leaves room for altruistic acts. A stronger, more general case justifying altruistic acts can be made along the lines of the more general argument offered in this section. These results show it is possible to justify self-sacrificing actions without appeal to theism. There may be other non-theistic moral theories that have the power to justify altruistic actions. But virtue theory provides an attractive model for the justification of action independently of the issue of altruism. The fact that virtue theory can be understood to justify altruistic acts gives us further reason for considering the virtues seriously as a sound basis for a comprehensive moral theory.

5.4 A Case for Inalienable Rights and the Limits of the Model

Before us is a sketch of a model of a deductive paradigm of Aristotelian ethics, a model intended to show how moral rules can function comfortably along side judgments about what is to be done in particular cases. We considered a construal of propositions that hold for the most part that enables us to see how such principles

could be part of a deductive paradigm when a necessary relationship underpins a relation between a subject and a predicate of a moral proposition. Since we would expect ethics to be comprised largely of for-the-most-part relationships, whether we are approaching the subject matter from an Aristotelian perspective or from some other, it is crucial to provide some analysis of how for-the-most-part relations are to be understood. This is particularly true in the case of Aristotle's ethics because of the emphasis Aristotle places on holding for the most part in ethics. Although it is reasonable to expect some sort of necessity in ethics at least at the metaethical level of analysis, we might still wonder whether the practical side of ethics is entirely constituted by for-the-most-part relationships. Is there more to practical ethics than just this? Can there be unconditionally true action-guiding moral principles that could be relevant to the sorts of situations that ordinary people face in real life situations? This section will offer a response to these questions.

The Appendix attempts to construct a model of the deductive paradigm that would show how an unconditional action-guiding principle about adultery could be grounded in necessary propositions fundamental to an Aristotelian virtue theory. Does Aristotelian virtue theory understood along the lines developed here have the resources available for making the case for inalienable rights? One might think that the case made for the prohibition of adultery is unsuccessful or that Aristotle's prohibition of adultery (and a few other acts) represents an isolated case without significant ramifications. Even if the philosophical case supporting the prohibition of adultery is successful, we might still wonder about how far this sort of case might go. Are there other interesting exceptionless precepts, perhaps some with more generality, that can be justified in a similar way? The issue of possibility of justifying exceptionless precepts is closely connected to the project of constructing a philosophical case for inalienable rights.

Let us step back from the specifics of the Aristotelian model for a moment to reflect on the philosophical standing of the human rights that most of take to be so foundational to our personal and political life. Few would doubt that human beings have basic rights that should be respected and valued, such as the right to be treated fairly by others, the right to freedom from physical assault, the right to one's own life, and so on. Are any of these rights truly inalienable? Most of us would agree that, for example, it is wrong to assault an innocent person against that person's will. Is the right of an unwilling innocent person against assault unconditional, or are there situations in which transgressing this right would be justified? We can easily imagine circumstances in which assaulting a blameless person would lead to significant benefits for a large group of people. Is the right of an innocent person against assault, which might be among the most basic of human rights, absolute or is this right conditional? If every human right may be legitimately violated in some set of circumstances, then the prospects for justifying any purportedly inalienable human rights look particularly dim.

Common sense suggests strongly that there are inalienable rights. Indeed, talk of inalienable rights is deeply embedded in American culture and history, and this counts for something. But, of course, common sense by itself cannot establish the

existence of inalienable rights. The existence of truly inalienable rights seems to go hand-in-hand with the idea that there are moral principles that are true without exception. For if there are inalienable rights, then there are some actions that should never be done no matter what. But saying that there are some actions that should never be done implies there are corresponding moral principles that would rule them out. So, for example, if we all have the inalienable right not to be tortured, then there is a true moral proposition that torture is always wrong or immoral corresponding to this right. If the right is indeed inalienable, then the corresponding proposition must be true unconditionally. If we are willing to grant, for instance, that there are circumstances in which torture would be morally permissible, then we might still speak about the right human beings have not to be tortured, but it would not be plausible to think of this right as one that is inalienable.

The current of thought in contemporary philosophical ethics runs strongly against the conclusion that there are unconditionally true moral principles, which indicates that the existence of inalienable rights is not as evident as many might take it to be. Perhaps the best we can say is that human beings have a *prima facie* right against torture (Ross 1949; Audi 2004). On the other hand, common sense strongly pushes back against this current in the direction of the existence of inalienable rights. It is difficult to make a philosophical case that supports what common sense dictates on this matter. Is there a cogent philosophical argument whose premises support the existence of truly inalienable rights? Can the deductive model of Aristotelian virtue ethics developed in this book deliver the argument? In this section we shall see that Aristotelian virtue ethics is not theoretically robust enough to provide the philosophical justification for inalienable rights on its own. However, there is still a case that can be made, a case that requires borrowing some principles from the Kantian tradition. Seeing how concepts from these two traditions can go hand-in-hand to ground inalienable rights is instructive in many ways, but it illustrates the limits of the Aristotelian model on its own. Even with this acknowledged limitation, the Aristotelian model still goes quite a long way in providing the foundation for a robust ethical theory.

5.4.1 Suicide

The right to life of an innocent person is a fundamental right that underpins most and probably all others. Any specific right such as the right to worship as one chooses, the right to free speech, or the right to private property is hardly intelligible without a more fundamental right to life in place. When thinking about human rights and the moral principles that correlate with them, we should begin with the principle that it is wrong to intentionally assault innocent human beings if we wish to make a case for the existence of inalienable rights.

Some have taken the case against suicide to be the linchpin in the argument to be provided for inalienable rights (Menssen and Sullivan 2007: chap. 5). The reasoning begins with the idea that human beings have inalienable rights only if the most fundamental of those rights, the right to life, is inviolable. The case continues by

pointing out that there are situations in which a person could be better off dead, perhaps in circumstances where an individual faces slow roasting in flames (Sullivan 1999: 77–95). If we set aside considerations about glory in a possible afterlife, what earthly reasons do we have for preferring existence to non-existence in the face of a slow excruciating death in flames? If death can be rationally preferable to life in at least some circumstances, then it seems like suicide could be rationally justifiable, and hence morally permissible if the reasons of this world are our only resource.[6]

We might appeal to traditional arguments to make the case for inalienable human rights. The two most promising thinkers who appear to provide the conceptual tools are Immanuel Kant and Thomas Aquinas. A thorough examination of the rich ideas from both of these traditions falls well outside of the scope of what is appropriate to consider here, but taking a brief sampling of some ideas that have developed from each tradition illustrates that it is much more difficult to offer a clear, straight forward and convincing argument for inalienable rights than it might initially seem.

Kant's absolute prohibition of suicide is featured in his example that attempts to illustrate a perfect duty towards oneself. If this paradigm case fails, it is particularly difficult to see how the Kantian justification for exceptionless moral precepts could succeed. When Kant's example is taken on its own without the help of contemporary scholarship, it is not easy to see with any reasonable degree of precision how the prohibition of suicide is supposed to come about. When we turn to Kantian scholarship for assistance, the argument gets more precise and more clear, but not much more compelling.

Consider Alan Gewirth's thoroughly Kantian project attempting to ground inalienable rights in the generic features of agency. Glancing at only one stage in this long disputed argument, the second step in his deduction is that an agent "is committed to saying that any indispensable means to his chosen purpose is one that he 'ought' to have" (Gewirth 1978). The point is that when I will anything at all, there are certain features necessary for willing that I am committed to endorsing every time I act voluntarily. But, as some scholars have noticed, one notable problem with this step is "that the deduction fails to recognize that one can be rational in wishing that he were dead" (Hooker 1980: 13). In other words, my being alive is presupposed for me to will anything, but there is no reason for thinking that I must value the preconditions for my ends by willing the ends themselves. Preconditions for ends do not necessarily fall within the scope of an agent's willing simply by virtue of being preconditions. If this criticism is correct, and it seems to be, then possibly the foremost attempt to ground inalienable rights from the Kantian tradition falls short of its aim. If Kant or his followers cannot provide a cogent argument explaining why suicide is always wrong, the hopes for securing inalienable rights on purely Kantian grounds seem particularly dim since the prohibition of suicide is featured so prominently in the Kantian case.

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[6] Menssen and Sullivan (2007) proceed to argue that there are no earthly reasons. Still, there are good reasons for thinking that there are inalienable rights, so these reasons must rest on divine revelation. The authors make an impressive case that the absence of compelling arguments for inalienable rights helps establish the existence of God.

There have been attempts to ground human rights in characteristics of human beings connected with their flourishing as rational agents. Thomas Aquinas has developed this type of approach. We might classify attempts to develop unconditional moral prohibitions in aspects of human nature as being broadly Aristotelian in character. The theory begins with a description of some concept of human flourishing and then identifying basic features or properties of human beings required for human flourishing. We might call these latter properties fundamental potentialities.[7] Furnished with the axiom that we ought to pursue actions that promote human flourishing and avoid those impeding it, we have the rough outlines of a theory that seems as though it could ground human rights. But is this approach strong enough to support the existence of inalienable rights? Suppose that we have tension between two choice-worthy actions in some situation, and that we can promote one at the expense of the other. Imagine that a whole city can be saved if we sacrifice only one innocent person. This type of possibility can be blocked if the fundamental potentialities are incommensurable, (Finnis, Grisez, and Boyle 1987: 383) but it is extremely difficult to defend any type of incommensurability principle that is robust enough to support inalienable rights (Pannier 1987: 440–61). In addition, Aristotle argued that suicide was wrong because of the harm that it does to the community (*NE* V.11). But we can certainly imagine situations in which a person's suicide might benefit the community, or possibly situations in which the community does not notice the difference. For we can imagine that Hitler had committed suicide early in his career instead of later on, or that an individual who lives in isolation within a community commits suicide in a quiet way. Since the Aristotelian approach does not seem to possess the resources to rule out the permissibility of suicide in at least some cases, it does not appear promising to try to ground inalienable rights in a broadly Aristotelian approach.

Although there is much to be learned by looking carefully at Kantian and Thomistic scholarship, it is difficult to find an argument that straightforwardly shows how it is that we justify inalienable rights. One gets a general impression about how the argument would go in some way by studying each of these venerable masters, but nothing like a detailed case is in the offing. One might think that a secular case cannot be made at all. An ambitious argument against a secular case for inalienable rights has been formulated this way:

(1) A secular case can be made out for fundamental, absolute human rights only if a secular case can be made out that it is necessarily impermissible intentionally to kill innocents against their will.

(2) There are times when nonexistence is rationally preferable to existence unless there is a God (i.e., leaving God out of the picture).

(3) If there are times when nonexistence is rationally preferable to existence unless there is a God, then suicide—that is, intentionally killing one's innocent self—is sometimes morally permissible unless there is a God.

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[7] Finnis, Grisez, and Boyle (1987) call these properties basic goods. Referring to the properties as fundamental potentialities gives it a more Aristotelian flavor.

(4) If suicide is sometimes morally permissible unless there is a God, then it is also sometimes permissible intentionally to kill an innocent person unless there is a God.

(5) If it is sometimes permissible intentionally to kill an innocent person unless there is a God, then it is sometimes permissible intentionally to kill an innocent person when it is against that person's will, unless there is a God.

(6) If it is sometimes permissible intentionally to kill an innocent person against that person's will unless there is a God, then a secular case that it is necessarily impermissible cannot be made out.

(7) Therefore, a secular case cannot be made out for fundamental absolute human rights (Sullivan and Menssen 2008: 164–85).

This argument offers a serious challenge to anyone attempting to make a secular case justifying the existence of inalienable rights. It is particularly difficult to show how such a case might be made using only the resources within Aristotle's ethical theory. We shall soon see how Aristotle's theory does not seem to contain the conceptual tools strong enough to stop this argument. But there are ways that Aristotle's theory might be reinforced and strengthened to yield a theory conceptually rich enough to undercut a key premise in the argument.

There are many ways one might attempt to respond to this engaging argument. Let us focus on premise (5). This premise is controversial and it might even look wildly implausible as it is stated, but there are good reasons for thinking that if it is morally permissible to take the life of the innocent, then it is be permissible to take innocent life against a person's will. Imagine a case in which a soldier has second thoughts about whether he really wants to proceed into battle. Could he not be justifiably shot for his unwillingness, especially if his intransigence puts the lives of others at risk? Or picture a scenario where terrorists demand the sacrifice of an innocent person to save a city from destruction. Would it be morally wrong to give up the life of one innocent person to save a community? Lastly, imagine circumstances in which someone agrees to be sacrificed for the good of the community, but undergoes a change of mind after thinking it over more. Upon receiving the news of the volunteer's change of mind, terrorists demand that the former volunteer be shot. Would this not be morally appropriate? We can see that there is a slippery slope from conceding that ending one's own life to end real agony, to saying that we can end our own life to end impending agony, to saying we can end our life to end the impending agony of others, to saying that we can end the life of someone against his wishes to avoid the impending agony of others. So premise (5), a claim that seems at first glance to involve an inferential chasm, becomes more plausible as we consider different types of cases that narrow the gap between taking innocent life and doing so against a person's will.

Why think that the inability to rule out the permissibility of suicide makes it impossible to provide a purely rational case for inalienable rights? In the next section a case is made that the most plausible rational case for grounding inalienable rights rests on autonomy or self-determination from the Kantian tradition and on fundamental potentialities from the Aristotelian tradition. An approach based on either principle alone is not likely to be successful. A combination of the principles might adequately ground a precept that provides a basis for inalienable rights.

5.4.2 The Precept

What follows if we concede, for the sake of argument, that suicide can be justified in at least some cases if reason is our only resource? This concession seems to entail that it is not necessarily impermissible to intentionally kill an innocent person. Let us provisionally grant that there might be circumstances in which it would be permissible to intentionally kill an innocent person. What follows from this concession? We shall see that granting suicide could be permissible in some circumstances does not undermine the philosophical case for unconditional moral prohibitions related to inalienable human rights.

Let us return to the person awaiting an excruciating death by flames. Would this person be better off dead if all we have are considerations from this world to appeal to? We have reasons for thinking that the person may be. We might also wonder if it makes any difference whether the person wishes to be dead or not. It is puzzling to ask whether the person could extinguish his life against his will in this case, so let us imagine in addition that a shooter is perched in a window of a building across the street. Suppose that the person awaiting certain death screams to the shooter "Please, put me out of my misery!" causing the shooter to fire due to mercy for the victim. From the point of view of what is morally justifiable, we may have problems with such an action, but we would likely find the scenario less objectionable than one in which the victim screams that he/she does not want to be killed and attempts to evade the shooter's bullets. The shooter in this second case would be cruel and callous to fire in the face of such pleas. If the wishes of the trapped person make a difference, then whether someone wishes to be dead or not may affect our determination about the morality of extinguishing that life in a particular set of circumstances. If that is true, then agent autonomy is a relevant moral consideration that might be decisive in some cases. If so, then it might be helpful to make use of this notion in developing the case for a philosophical justification of inalienable rights.

Moral propositions vary in their generality. The most general propositions, e.g., "Do good," are not by themselves useful in directing human actions. The most specific moral propositions are too tied to particular circumstances to be generally useful. As a moral principle is specified, it becomes harder to think of possible exceptions. Of course, we might make a moral proposition so specific that we exclude all possible counter-instances, but doing so strips a moral proposition of any relevant general practical force. Consider the following list of increasingly specified propositions:

(K1) It is morally wrong to kill.
(K2) It is morally wrong to kill persons.
(K3) It is morally wrong to kill innocent persons.
(K4) It is morally wrong to intentionally kill innocent persons.
(K5) It is morally wrong to intentionally kill innocent persons against their will.
(K6) It is morally wrong to intentionally kill innocent persons against their will for amusement.

We might first wonder whether any of these principles are true unconditionally. (K1) is not because we may be justified in killing living things such as plants for our nourishment. (K2) is not because it can be justifiable to kill an aggressor in self-defense. (K3) is not because someone may not be morally blameworthy for accidentally killing someone who has done no wrong. (K4) is not if we grant that suicide might be morally justified in certain circumstances. What about (K5) and (K6)? Is either one true unconditionally? A case can be made for thinking that (K5) is. (K5) is the sort of principle useful in providing a basis for grounding inalienable rights. (K6) seems to be true without exception and unconditional, but so specific that it is not practically useful. It is surely too specific to provide a foundation for inalienable rights. (K5) does not seem to suffer from the shortcoming of being too specific though, and we shall see how such a proposition might provide support for the philosophical justification for inalienable rights that agents possess always and not only for the most part.

5.4.3 A Hybrid Approach

Autonomy is understood in many different senses. The etymology of the term suggests that autonomy is about self-legislation. But in the context of contemporary discussions about ethics and political theory, the term has come to represent self-government (Audi 1997: 196). And there are looser and stricter senses of being a self-governor. One might think that in a loose sense autonomy is just equivalent to some radical form of freedom. By this way of thinking about it, we might take autonomy to mean that each of us should be able to live our lives according to our own reasons and motives. Could a plausible moral theory be grounded in autonomy understood in this way? One serious problem with this way of going is that agents can make harmful choices, for example, wanton self-mutilation. The fact that such acts are carried out autonomously or freely according to a loose standard of self-government does not make them morally justifiable or right.

A stricter sense of autonomy would ground the notion of self-government in some type of moral principles. As Robert Audi characterizes it:

> . . .autonomy requires a kind of *principled control*. The agent must act, or at least be disposed to act, sufficiently often, by policy and not mere whim, or at least on the basis of certain (perhaps implicit) principles, ideals, or standards (Audi 1997: 204).

Tying autonomy to some sort of principles or standards seems important if the concept is going to do any heavy lifting, but even this stricter understanding of what it is to be a self-governor does not come without problems. For what if the principles that ground an agent's free decisions are deranged, perverse or callous? Perpetrators of genocide and other crimes against humanity usually act on principles. So autonomy, even when it is understood in a fairly strict sense as being grounded in principles

or standards is not enough to serve as a foundation for a moral theory. But it does not follow from this that the notion of autonomy should not play some important role in moral theory. Common sense and reflection on cases suggests autonomy is a very important moral concept. Our repulsion to rape and other forms of aggressive assault seem to be based, at least in part, on the value we place on agent autonomy. On this point Audi says:

> If autonomy is important in ethical and political discussions, that is not because it is a notion crucial for any one normative position, such as Kantianism. Far from it; the notion seems to express an ideal for which every serious moral or social-political theory should have a place (Audi 1997: 198)

Let us see what can be done by placing a spotlight on the notion of agent autonomy understood in the stricter sense in the context of Aristotle's ethical theory.

Following Aristotle, we might consider a set of potentialities that are instrumental to human flourishing such as life, friendship, health, et cetera. As was noted above, it is not clear that a theory based on identifying such potentialities is strong enough to provide for inalienable rights without some further principles about the incommensurability of these goods. But specifying some appropriate commensurability principle or set of principles is difficult and problematic. Acknowledging this, however, does not imply that appealing to fundamental potentialities is not an important part of the case underpinning precepts that hold true unconditionally. These capacities have an important role to play.

We can begin our attempt to ground inalienable rights by starting with the most obviously objectionable kinds of acts, and asking what it is about these acts that makes them so deplorable. Homicide and rape come to mind easily. These kinds of acts strike us as being clearly wrong not just because they undermine the most fundamental of human potentialities, but also because they involve some important violation of agent autonomy.

Going back to suicide, we might concede, for the sake of argument, that suicide could be permissible in certain special situations on at least the partial grounds that agent autonomy permits it. In other words, someone might freely and rationally choose to end his or her own life under the most horrendous of circumstances when there are simply no prospects left for human flourishing, such as when faced by death a slow death in flames. It seems mistaken to think that this concession should be taken to imply that the case for inalienable rights cannot be made. We can still offer an account that says that assaulting innocents against their will is always morally wrong because it involves two objectionable practices whose intersection provides a basis for fundamental absolute rights. The first practice is the violation of agent autonomy and the second involves attacking some fundamental human potentiality. So we can maintain that violating agent autonomy is wrong for the most part and that attacking fundamental potentialities is wrong for the most part, but still have the resources to ground some inalienable rights without qualification.

To better see how this might be so, consider pairs of propositions that hold for the most part whose intersection generates a much stronger principle. Take these examples:

(A1)   Taking large doses of sleeping pills is unhealthy.
(A2)   Drinking large quantities of alcohol is unhealthy.
  (a)   Taking large doses of sleeping pills while drinking lots of alcohol is unhealthy.

Or

(B1)   Inhaling ammonia vapors is harmful.
(B2)   Inhaling bleach vapors is harmful.
  (b)   Inhaling ammonia vapors mixed with bleach vapors is harmful.

The propositions in each initial set hold for the most part, and we can think of cases where there would be exceptions to each proposition. For someone who is tremendously large, it might not be unhealthy to take what would usually be considered large quantities of sleeping pills. The same would be true about large quantities of alcohol for a very large person. But it would never be healthy, even for a very large person, to take large quantities of both together. Similarly, we can imagine situations in which inhaling ammonia or bleach vapors by themselves would be the least harmful thing to do in some scenario, but inhaling them together ought always to be avoided, because the combination yields a lethal gas.

Even thought (A1), (A2), (B1), and (B2) hold for the most part and not unconditionally, there are still law-like relations that hold among the subjects and predicates of each. When the propositions in each set intersect, the result is a stronger principle, one that provides the basis for an unconditional prohibition. We can see how acts like rape and homicide might be prohibited on the basis of a pair of principles that follows a similar pattern.

(C1)   It is morally wrong to act to undermine the most fundamental human potentialities.
(C2)   It is morally wrong to seriously violate agent autonomy.

It was suggested above that neither (C1) nor (C2) by itself is strong enough to ground inalienable rights. But the combination can be. We may state a precept that results from the combination as:

(C3)   It is morally wrong to seriously attack the most fundamental human potentialities against a person's will.

Rape and homicide violate (C3), and we find widespread consensus that these acts are always morally objectionable. But suicide does not clearly violate (C2), and so we should expect that the case for its prohibition would be more difficult to make. Suicide does not violate (C3) if it is done by an individual willingly, which does not imply that suicide is not morally problematic. But acknowledging the difficultly in ruling out the justifiability of suicide in at least some circumstances should not be taken to undercut the case to be made for inalienable rights. Maybe the case against

suicide cannot be made persuasively on the basis of reason alone. It does not follow from this that we lack a reasoned case for inalienable rights. We still may be able to make a case for inalienable rights even having made this concession.

5.4.4 The Justification for the Precept

Now that we have a sketch of a hybrid approach based on autonomy and fundamental potentialities, we can provide the underpinning for a categorically true moral precept. The precept would be something like the following:

> (C3) It is morally wrong to seriously attack the most fundamental of human capacities against a person's will.

We now have to ask about the status of this precept. Can it be justified? If not, it must be foundational. An argument can be offered to support (C3) along these lines:

> (C4)   Seriously attacking the most fundamental of human capacities against a person's will violates the most fundamental aspects of moral agency in another.
> (C5)   Violating the most fundamental aspects of moral agency in another is morally wrong.

What is the justification for each of these premises? (C4) is a premise that seems to be an analytic truth in the sense that the terms in the subject and predicate are definitionally connected. Since a distinctive feature of human beings is their moral agency, we would expect the most fundamental aspects of moral agency to be fundamental human capacities.

(C5), on the other hand, is not analytically true, and does require some explanation. To justify it we first need to identify the most fundamental aspects of moral agency. What are they? The traditional philosophical response is that the capacity to think and choose are among the most fundamental aspects of personhood. These capacities are often taken to be distinctively human powers. So when someone acts so as to violate these powers in another in a serious way, such as one does in an act of rape, one thereby fails to treat another individual in a way consistent with the other's nature as a moral agent. Actions of this sort involve a type of irrationality, which should always be avoided. So far this account has a Kantian ring to it, but let us see how the Aristotelian approach complements it. As was noted earlier, the Kantian case is difficult to make on its own in part because it is difficult to spell out the irrationality involved in terms of some type of contradiction in the will of the moral agent.

Why have many thought that virtue theory cannot yield action-guiding precepts that are true unconditionally? It may have much to do with Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, which leaves a fair amount of room for flexibility in the moral life, a feature that we should want to take into account. But recall that Aristotle tells us that some actions and emotions have no mean (*NE* 1107a10–12), which strongly suggests that virtue theory could be compatible with moral precepts that are true

without exception. We should keep in mind Aristotle's comparison between ethics and medicine. Surely there are actions that are simply unhealthy for human beings and ought always to be avoided. Why not think the same could be true in ethics? Even though these types of considerations suggest that virtue theory might leave room for a theoretical foundation for inalienable rights, they don't by themselves provide the case. We should think about what that might look like now.

Aristotle's theory implies that human flourishing requires doing certain types of activities, in the right amount, and avoiding others. More specifically, there are some actions that we ought to avoid provided that we desire to flourish, and we all have that desire based on our psychological constitution. This seems to be Aristotle's point when he begins the *Nicomachean Ethics* by claiming that we all seek the good. What is the connection between moral obligation and our function as rational agents from the perspective of a virtue theory? Actions that are not to be done are actions that fail to be conducive to happiness. And actions fail to be conducive to happiness when they fail to conform with virtue. Finally, an action fails to conform with virtue when it is not consistent with our function as rational agents.

Now Aristotle does not explicitly discuss moral obligation, but since the concept is important for ethical theory, it must be closely connected to happiness (*eudaimonia)* in Aristotle's ethics since the latter notion is the foundation for his ethics. Anything that ought not be done is not conducive to happiness and anything that is not conducive to happiness ought not to be done. Since virtue is necessary for happiness, anything that fails to conform to virtue will not lead to happiness. Conversely, anything that is not conducive to happiness does not conform with virtue. In Aristotle's theory virtue (*aretē*) is understood in terms of the human function (*ergon*). A distinctive feature of Aristotle's ethics is that it is grounded in the human function, which is identified with rational activity (*NE* I,7). Furthermore, a distinctive characteristic of *phronēsis* is that it aims at rational desire (*NE* VI, 1). In two key ways Aristotle's ethical theory depends on rationality as a sort of foundation. In this respect his theory is similar to Kant's. Why are some actions rational for humans to desire or perform within the context of a virtue theory?

Serious attacks against fundamental human potentialities not only do harm to the agent who suffers the attack, but also the person who engages in the attack. Both parties are impeded from becoming virtuous by the action. Rape, for example, is not only vicious to perform because of its hostility toward justice, friendship, temperance, and other virtues, but also because it scars the victim in ways that make human fulfillment more challenging or impossible. We could say similar things about homicide, genocide and other forms of abuse from the perspective of virtue theory. But notice that the case of suicide is more perplexing from this standpoint. If one finds oneself in a situation where the choice is quick death or slow death by flames, it is hard to see how the latter choice would help one flourish. So if choosing to end one's life more quickly could be rationally preferable in that type of situation, then it is not clear how virtue theory, when understood along the lines sketched above, would rule it out. But acknowledging this point does not undermine the support from virtue theory for ruling out other types of action such as rape, homicide, and genocide, and this is all that is required to make the philosophical case to support

inalienable rights. It is not clear how either of these acts could be performed in a way that respects the fundamental powers of the victim or even of the agent. So these ideas in virtue theory should be taken as providing theoretical support for (C5) above, which is a crucial premise supporting (C3), a premise that can be used directly to justify specific inalienable rights.

Let us return to some of the cases that were provided to support premise (5) of the suicide argument.

> (5) If it is sometimes permissible intentionally to kill an innocent person unless there is a God, then it is sometimes permissible intentionally to kill an innocent person when it is against that person's will, unless there is a God.

Think of a case where a soldier has second thoughts about whether he really wants to proceed into battle. Or consider a situation in which sacrificing the life of one innocent person to save a community. Imagine shooting someone who has changed his mind about sacrificing his own life for the good of the community. If (C3) is correct, then none of these cases will establish the truth premise (5) of the suicide argument. (C3) is built upon the foundation of autonomy and basic potentialities, which are claimed to be the basis for inalienable rights. A defender of (C3) can insist that because death would be inflicted on victims unwillingly in any of these examples, none of the examples succeeds.

5.4.5 An Objection: Forced Suicide

However compelling as the above considerations may be, if there are circumstances in which someone could be rightfully forced to commit suicide, then using the previously stated combination of autonomy and fundamental potentialities in the way suggested to ground inalienable rights would not be successful, since the moral legitimacy of forced suicide would override agent autonomy. At first blush the proposal that forced suicide could be morally appropriate seems absurd; but there are situations we can imagine in which it could be seen to be the appropriate course of action. What if a spy promises to take a cyanide pill if captured by the enemy? Could someone be required to ingest poison under such circumstances, and wouldn't it be morally wrong to refuse?[8] Suppose that at the time the spy made the promise, he was given compelling statistical information showing that the vast majority of people who are tortured, even those with special training, give up information when pushed to a certain point. Even though the spy might think that he would never cave in, suppose he is convinced by the information he is given and concludes that there is a good chance he would crack under heavy interrogation. Believing this, he promises to swallow the lethal pill if captured. What this example seems to show

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[8] Thomas Sullivan offered this argument in a public lecture at University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN in the fall of 2006 in the context of a dispute about whether it is possible to know unconditional moral principles on the basis of reason alone. Sullivan argued that divine revelation is necessary to know such principles. His position is developed at length in (Menssen and Sullivan 2007: chap. 5).

is that there is a case in which an individual is justifiably forced to commit suicide, even if he does not want to at the time he does it. If death can be forced on an individual justifiably, then it looks like agent autonomy would not be decisive in grounding inalienable rights, which would undermine a key component of the hybrid approach sketched above. The precept (C3), that it is morally wrong to seriously attack the most fundamental of human capacities against a person's will, would not be absolute if there is a compelling case for forced suicide. In this case, premise (5) of the suicide argument would appear correct.

A lot hangs on the question of whether forced suicide could be morally justifiable. Let us say that suicidal acts are self-inflicted acts aimed at self-destruction. A suicidal act is carried out by the agent himself and requires lethal intentions. There is little doubt that a spy who swallows a deadly pill to avoid giving up secrets, knowing that the pill is lethal, is carrying out a self-inflicted act. Nobody is forcing the pill down his throat in this story. Does the spy have lethal intentions? It first glance it would seem so. How could someone ingest a pill they know to be lethal without intending death? Is it plausible to think that the spy might foresee death without intending it? After all, what the spy intends first and foremost is that he not divulge the secrets. That is what he sets out to accomplish when swallowing the pill, or at least we could imagine that this is his primary motivation.

To see how the reasoning is supposed to go, let us consider the easier case of a soldier who jumps on a live grenade to save his comrades. A soldier who jumps on a live grenade believing it to be a lethal act does not necessarily commit suicide even though he foresees his death resulting from the grenades explosive force. The soldier need not intend his death as such. The spy need not either. Of course, it is notoriously difficult to determine what intentions are in others, and it may be almost as difficult to know what our own intentions are. But if we imagine that the spy has two pills, pill A which is lethal and pill B which is not lethal, but wipes out portions of one's recent memory, and that the spy chooses to take pill B instead of pill A, we would not say that the spy has lethal intent. Now if he only has pill A but would take pill B if it were available, then this strongly suggests that the spy need not have deadly intent in swallowing a lethal pill. What this shows is that the spy is not obligated to commit suicide in this case. So it would not be morally justifiable to force him to commit suicide, even though he might be forced to take the pill if it is the only means available to stop him from divulging secrets. The initial agreement the spy made to take the pill was undertaken on the basis of the fact that the lethal pill was the only efficient means available to protect the secrets. The spy should not have agreed to commit suicide, only to take the pill in extreme circumstances. Taking the pill is not equivalent to suicide.

5.4.6 Conclusion

Let us review the line of reasoning developed in this section. The main aim has been to try to consider how far the deductive model of Aristotelian virtue ethics can go in providing a philosophical defense of the idea that there are inalienable human

rights. Since grounding inalienable rights would seem to rest on the existence of unconditional action-guiding moral principles, we looked very briefly at attempts to ground unconditional moral principles from the Kantian and Thomistic traditions. We saw how difficult it is to provide a straightforward secular case against suicide, which would seem to be required to justify the principle that it is always wrong to intentionally take innocent human life. Conceding for the sake of argument that suicide might be rational in certain circumstances, we considered whether this counted against the existence of inalienable rights. A hybrid approach based on autonomy and fundamental human potentialities was proposed based on the concept of autonomy from the Kantian tradition in conjunction with the notion of fundamental potentialities from the tradition that is broadly Aristotelian. This yielded the unconditional principle that it is always wrong to attack fundamental potentialities against an agent's power as an autonomous agent. Although suicide would not be ruled out by this precept, it would rule out rape, homicide and other forms of aggression against innocent victims. This result is strong enough to provide a philosophical backbone for the common sense idea that there are inalienable human rights. Although it is possible to object that forced suicide could be morally justified, which would undermine the unconditional precept, we considered a response that answered this objection. The response, in effect, pointed out that it is not at all clear that forced suicide would be justifiable, and that the principle of double effect explains how one might undergo lethal actions without fully intending one's own death. Matters are somewhat complicated at this stage in the dialectic, but if every distinction drawn and example used stands up, then we have in place a rational defense of inalienable human rights.

This defense requires at least two concepts that are not built into Aristotle's ethical theory: agent autonomy and the principle of double effect. Both principles give rise to controversy and complicated technicalities as they are discussed in contemporary philosophical literature. And the case of a purely philosophical justification for inalienable rights might hang on some of these technicalities and outcomes of these controversies. For present purposes it is not so important that these matters be resolved fully. What is important to see is that fundamental concepts from Aristotle's theory can be utilized within a deductive model to help make progress on a substantive, important issue in contemporary political and ethical discussions. Aristotle's theory is probably not rich enough on its own to provide the tools needed to make progress in resolving every issue in contemporary ethics. But it does offer a rich conceptual landscape, remarkable in its scope, exceptionally well-suited to address the problems of our day.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter was designed to consider some of the challenges that a deductive model of Aristotle's ethics of the sort developed in this book would be likely to face. The chapter began with a specific particularist challenge offered by John McDowell who claims that a deductive construal of Aristotelian ethics is untenable because of the

role that virtue plays within Aristotle's ethical theory. According to this challenge, the subtleties and complexities that accompany a virtuous sensitivity and the role this sensitivity plays in Aristotle's ethical theory speak against the prospects of formulating codifiable, action-guiding moral principles. The analysis of technical for-the-most-part relations developed in Chapter 3 provides the basis for an explanation of how ethical principles can be codifiable and action-guiding. Furthermore, this proposal would not minimize or underplay the role of virtue in Aristotle's ethical theory since a virtuous sensitivity would be necessary to apprehend the particulars that would be subsumed under codifiable premises that can be deduced from more general ethical principles. McDowell has no way to explain how competing considerations get silenced in situations where several virtues are relevant, and the alternative analysis can explain what would happen in situations of this kind. Something following the guidelines of Aristotle's practical syllogism was offered to illustrate how for-the-most-part propositions can be: (1) part of a deductive hierarchy, (2) codifiable, and (3) action-guiding. This illustration emphasizes that the deductive model Aristotelian ethics would extend from the most general universal ethical principles down to less general universal principles.

The chapter then returned to the issue of how the deductive model of Aristotle' ethics might provide a framework for understanding and defending moral realism. The proposition "Wealth is beneficial" was classified as a technical for-the-most-part proposition. Again, applying the analysis of holding for the most part from Chapter 3 offers a way of seeing how this proposition could be true by the standards of a moral realist. A justification was offered to show how this specific moral proposition might be justified deductively.

Next, some of the limitations of the deductive model were considered. We saw that, contrary to what some have thought, virtue theory can explain why it is rational to perform at least some actions done primarily for the purpose of benefiting others. Aristotle's theory can be seen as leaving room for altruistic acts when the nature of the virtue of courage is examined. A more general argument for why it is rational for every agent to perform at least some altruistic acts was offered to show it is possible to justify self-sacrificing actions. Virtue theory provides an attractive model for the justification of action independently of the issue of altruism. The fact that virtue theory can be understood to justify altruistic acts gives us further reason for considering the virtues seriously as a sound basis for a comprehensive moral theory.

The chapter ended by considering limits of the deductive model as it applies to the issue of providing a philosophical justification for inalienable rights. We saw that Aristotelian virtue ethics is not theoretically robust enough to provide the philosophical justification for inalienable rights on its own. However, there is still a case that can be made, a case that requires borrowing some principles from the Kantian tradition. But even with this acknowledged limitation, the Aristotelian model still goes a long way in providing the foundation for a robust ethical theory.

Appendix: Can Unconditional Moral Principles Be Justified?[1]

This attempt to justify unconditional moral principles in Aristotle's ethics will make use of subject matter taken directly from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but it will not rest on this material entirely. Some tools from contemporary model theory are implemented too. Constructing an axiomatic model for a portion of Aristotle's ethics is not only possible, but helpful in making explicit relationships among concepts at the core of Aristotle's theory. When its subject matter is understood from the perspective of a deductive paradigm, this Aristotelian approach to ethics offers a promising basis for a realist ethical theory. Of course, a large portion of ethical subject matter would not fall within the scope of a science of ethics, but an important set of core ethical concepts can. Seeing how these concepts relate to one another puts us in a better position to understand the nature of the subject matter of ethics.

Let us assume that it is legitimate to treat a significant portion of Aristotle's ethics deductively. With this assumption in place we can ask how far a deductive paradigm of ethics would extend and how the basic concepts within Aristotle's ethics are interrelated. The model developed below will offer a specific proposal about how we might get started.

Methodological Considerations

As we saw in Chapter 3, much of the subject matter in Aristotle's ethics could be fit within the model of science that Aristotle proposes in the *Posterior Analytics*. That specific type of model will not be developed here because of the difficulties that come with working with such a cumbersome structure, which would be distracting. A more contemporary axiomatic approach is not only consistent with an Aristotelian approach to science, but has the advantage of being easier to work with.

We shall consider a small set of principles related to concepts at the core of Aristotle's ethical theory that can be used to generate an action-guiding moral principle serving as the major premises of a practical syllogism. There is a large network

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[1] This appendix is based on (Winter 2001).

of necessary relationships holding among ethical concepts, and the principles pro-
posed below embody some of them. One of the functions of a science of ethics is to
make clear how these ethical concepts relate to one another. Since Aristotle treats
some claims about happiness as first principles of ethics, a science of Aristotle's
ethics would extend from these principles about happiness down to action-guiding
moral principles. On the other hand, a science of Aristotle's ethics would not include
minor premises of practical syllogisms in its scope since these premises are about
particulars.

Although much of the subject matter of ethics is classified by Aristotle as hold-
ing for the most part, we should wonder whether there are unconditionally true,
action-guiding claims in ethics that do not hold only for the most part. If there are,
how should we treat these claims? When deductive structures that support proposi-
tions that hold for the most part are combined with those justifying conclusions that
might be taken to hold unconditionally, the result is a rich network of inferences that
can be arranged systematically. A systematic arrangement of necessary claims from
Aristotle's ethics would provide the basis for a deductive paradigm of the theory.

Aristotle's view is that every science treats a distinct genus or definite subject
matter. In the case of ethics the subject matter involves a fairly broad class of features
related to human beings seeking their good. Human actions, emotions, dispositions,
and the like are examples of features that we would expect to encounter in a science
of ethics.

At *NE* 1107a10–12 Aristotle indicates that adultery has no mean. This is one
of the few examples of a potentially action-guiding unconditional moral principle
Aristotle offers in his ethics. In view of Aristotle's analysis of moral reasoning, a
rational agent's belief about the inappropriateness of a married person becoming
romantically involved with another should be grounded in the belief that adultery
ought to be avoided. Understanding the practical syllogism as providing a rational
justification for action gives us the following setup:

> Adultery ought to be avoided.
> *Becoming involved with x is adulterous.*
> Becoming involved with x ought to be avoided.

A science of Aristotle's ethics would include a justification for the major premise of
this practical syllogism as well as any other. We would expect concepts involving
happiness, adultery, virtue, and ideas about specific virtues to furnish a foundation
for Aristotle's idea that adultery is always to be avoided. We would expect these
same concepts to ground the explicit prohibitions of theft and murder as well.

Principles having to do with the acquisition of the human good are relevant to the
subject matter of ethics. So, for example, we could expect to find in ethics a principle
stating that what is conducive to happiness is to be pursued. Conversely, another eth-
ical principle might state that what is detrimental to happiness ought to be avoided.
Neither of these principles is spelled out directly in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,
possibly because Aristotle believes that both are too obvious to require explicit
statement, especially in view of the practical character of that treatise.

What comes below is intended to capture much of the spirit of Aristotle's notion of scientific demonstration with the assistance of a more contemporary formal approach. Again, the purpose of constructing this series of inferences is to see how we might deduce a proposition about the prohibition of adultery from principles of Aristotle's ethics. Having the inferential structure will enable us to see explicitly how such a principle is rationally grounded.

Axiomatic Approach to Ethics

We will need the following assignments:

- *Let the genus, G, of ethics be the set of all subjects of ethics*. This is a way of being explicit about Aristotle's idea that each science treats a distinct subject matter.
- *Let a subject of ethics, s, be any activity, state, desire, disposition, quality, relation, et cetera that is relevant to human beings seeking their good*. This condition is fairly broad, but the purpose of offering it is to capture Aristotle's idea that the objects of study in a genus will include any feature of substances that are relevant to that genus.
- *Let an essential set, S, be defined as the finite set of elements {e1….en} that are necessary components of a subject, s, within G.* The notion of an essential set is intended to encompass different types of definition without involving us in the complexities of sorting through these issues in Aristotle. One of the benefits of this approach is that sets of elements may be only partially specified to make deductions and demonstrations possible. A partially specified set will be an incomplete list of elements that are related necessarily to a subject. A completely specified set will include as a subset all elements that would constitute the essence of the subject. An optimally ordered set would be a complete set that begins with features closest to the essence moving toward those features more remote from the essence.
- *Let an element of a subject be any member of G.* This idea is based on Aristotle's essentialist metaphysics.

  - *Let **P1–P4** be a subset of the principles pertaining to G.*
    P1: For any two subjects s and s*, s is *inconsistent* with s* iff some element in the set S is the negation of some element in S*.
    P2: x is not conducive to happiness if and only if x ought not to be done.
    P3: x does not conform with virtue if and only if x is not conducive to happiness.
    P4: x does not conform with virtue if and only if x is not consistent with the human function.

Let us say a bit about each of **P1–P4**. **P1** makes explicit a notion of inconsistency that will be needed to show that two ethical concepts conflict with one another. This notion of inconsistency is defined in terms of subjects and essential sets as stipulated above. The intuitive idea is that two ethical concepts are inconsistent with

one another just in case a necessary feature of one is incompatible with a necessary feature of the other. [2]

We might illustrate this point with an example outside of Aristotle's ethics. Kant claims that making a lying promise is irrational because lying involves an insincere intention that conflicts with the sincerity underpinning the institution of promising. Assuming Kant is right, if we treat both a lie and a promise as subjects of ethics, then correctly specifying elements in the essential set for each notion should make clear that the two concepts are inconsistent, because some element in the essential set of one is inconsistent with some element in the essential set of the other. The notion of inconsistency as it is defined here is not spelled out explicitly in Aristotle, but it is useful for a more systematic treatment of the justification for ethical principles.

P2 is taken for granted in Aristotle's ethics. It seems fair and appropriate to treat this principle as an axiom, provided we understand the notion of an axiom broadly enough to cover principles specific to a subject genus. Aristotle does not explicitly discuss moral obligation, but since the concept is at the core of any ethical theory, it must be closely connected to *eudaimonia* in Aristotle's ethics since the latter notion is the foundation for his ethics. Anything that ought not be done is not conducive to happiness and anything that is not conducive to happiness ought not to be done.

P3 rests on substantive features of Aristotle's virtue theory. It is plausible to understand it as a theorem, rather than as an axiom. Since virtue is necessary for happiness, anything that fails to conform to virtue will not lead to happiness. Conversely, anything that is not conducive to happiness does not conform with virtue.

P4 is based on the fact that *virtue* (*aretē*) is understood in terms of the human function (*ergon*). A distinctive feature of Aristotle's ethics is that it is grounded in the human function, which is identified with rational activity. Acts failing to conform with virtue will fail to fulfill our function as human beings. And anything that is inconsistent with our function will fail to conform to virtue.

P2–P4 imply that conformity with the human function will be the basis for moral obligation in Aristotle. Intuitively, **P1** will be used to show how some ethically relevant concepts fail to conform with the human function. Once it has been determined that a given subject does not conform with the human function, we can deduce a moral principle indicating that we ought to avoid it from **P2–P4**.

Now that we have a basic formal model in place, we can begin to consider specific subjects to generate some deductions. Again, it is appropriate to try to provide an Aristotelian justification for the claim that adultery is never to be done since he makes a claim to this effect in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. So let our first subject be

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[2] Ordinary propositions said to be inconsistent with one another, not subjects in the sense I discuss here. But for any two subjects that are allegedly inconsistent with one another in the sense I stipulate, it is possible to formulate a proposition stating their inconsistency. For example, for two subjects *a* and *–a*, we can say "*a* is inconsistent with *–a*." If this proposition is consistent in the ordinary sense, then *a* and *–a* are consistent in the sense I stipulate.

adultery. One of the advantages of our procedure is that we need not specify all the elements that define this subject to get underway. Even though Aristotle does not offer a specific definition of adultery, a plausible partial specification of the elements in the set that constitutes this subject might look like this:

$$\textbf{\textit{adultery}} = \{\text{deliberate, dishonest, extra-marital sexual relation} \dots\}$$

This seems to be a fair partial specification of this set even though the notion of adultery in the ancient world is different from our own. For example, a sexual encounter between a married man and a slave was not illegal in classical Athens, but acts of adultery were punishable by law (MacDowell 1978: 124–5). In light of this fact and in view of this specification above, we might say that the Greeks had a different conception of what an honest marital relationship was. If both partners understand up front that sexual relations with slaves do not violate the marriage, then it would not be dishonest to engage in such acts, even though we would rightly judge such acts to be immoral.

Next, let us consider what the essential set of the subject *human function* since this is surely an important ethical subject for Aristotle, one that will be related in some way to most others subjects in the discipline.

$$\textbf{\textit{human function}} = \{\text{rational activity}, \dots\}$$

Although this specification of the human function is obviously incomplete, we have made reference to one necessary feature of the human function – that it involves rational activity. We can continue by seeing what is involved in the subject *rational activity*:

$$\textbf{\textit{rational activity}} = \{\text{wisdom (\textit{sophia}), practical wisdom (\textit{phronēsis})}, \dots\}$$

Specific types of rational activity are not mentioned here. Surely *sophia* and *phronēsis* are related necessarily to rational activity since each of the former would make reference to the latter in their own definitions.

Next let us focus on some of the necessary features of *phronēsis*:

$$\textbf{\textit{phronēsis}} = \{\text{aims at treating others fairly (justice), aims at treating others honestly (friendship)} \dots\}$$

It is reasonable to think that both friendship and justice would be related necessarily to *phronēsis*, particularly in view of Aristotle's unity of virtues thesis. Indeed, we might go on listing each of the moral virtues in the above specification.

Having done this much work, we are in a position to see that the subject *adultery* conflicts with *phronēsis*. Aristotle does classify adultery as an injustice (*NE* 1130a1701130b5, 1134a17–1134a23; *MGNA* 1196 a20). We can see why when we consider that dishonesty is related necessarily to the adultery while treating others,

especially one's spouse, honestly is related necessarily to justice. Since one element is the negation of the other, these two subjects are inconsistent in the sense defined above.

Let us now use this information to set up a chain of inferences.

1. Adultery is inconsistent with *phronēsis*.   **P1**
2. Adultery is inconsistent with rational activity.   **P1**
3. Adultery is inconsistent with the human function   **P1**
4. Adultery does not conform with virtue.   **3, P4**
5. Adultery is not conducive to happiness.   **4, P3**
6. Adultery ought not to be done.   **5, P2**

This series of deductive inferences is the basis for an explanation of why adultery ought to be avoided.

Now that we have the justification in place for the claim that adultery ought not to be done, we can see the role that this claim might play in a practical syllogism about action:

6. Adultery ought not to be done.
7. Becoming involved with x is adulterous.
8. Becoming involved with x ought not to be done.

Since science is concerned only with universal claims, a science of ethics will only encompass a justification for (6), but not applications of this claim. Applications of (6) depend on particular applications of *phronēsis* in its practical application.

There are not many unconditional moral claims like (6) in Aristotle's ethics. Much of Aristotle's ethics focuses on claims that hold for the most part. Considering the set of demonstrable for-the-most part claims with the set of those that hold unconditionally along with the deductive chains upon which they rest, allows us to see the possibility of constructing a rich network of claims that can be organized to from a science of Aristotle's ethics. Having such a science at our disposal would not only help us better understand the foundations of ethics, but might help us determine what we ought to do or avoid in some situation. It is in at least this sense that a science of ethics may have practical applications.

Is the Model Aristotelian?

Although there are features of the justification of (6) that mark a departure from the strict rules for scientific demonstration delineated by Aristotle in the *Organon*, we might consider whether the level of conformity is substantial enough for this approach to be classifiable as Aristotelian. Let us consider how well the axiomatic approach to ethics outlined above conforms to Aristotle's prescribed model for science.

Although Aristotelian syllogistic forms are not utilized in the procedure above, inferential rules are utilized in the axiomatic approach that preserves truth. This is the aim of Aristotelian syllogistic. So, if rules of inference involving conditionals and biconditionals allow us to move beyond the limitations of working only with the simple single subject/attribute sentences that Aristotle focuses on in the *Organon*, then it is sensible to make use of the rules of inference with broader range.

One of the distinctive features of the premises of Aristotelian demonstration is that they express per se relationships. Aristotle uses single subject/attribute sentences to explain and illustrate the first and second modes of perseity in the *Posterior Analytics*. These modes of perseity are designed to capture different kinds of necessary relationships among universals (McKirihan 1993: 83–84). The notion of an essential set developed above is intended to provide a tool for dealing with all of the necessary relationships among subjects within a genus. Aristotelian demonstration is set up to ensure that we start with more fundamental attributes of subjects within a genus, so that we proceed from features that are closer to the essence. But we need not utilize the tools of Aristotelian demonstration to ensure that this happens. An optimal ordering of necessary features within each essential set can create a high level of correspondence with the type of inferential movement Aristotle has in mind in the *Posterior Analytics* because a properly ordered set would begin with necessary features closest to the essence.

In addition, the axiomatic approach sketched above has each of the following features:

– It deals with a specific subject genus, which is founded on the idea that there are substances with essences.
– It is based on a foundationalist ontology.
– Specifying subjects in terms of an essential set captures the spirit of Aristotle's criteria for definition.
– The axiomatic approach is not concerned with particulars, but with universals.

Even though the axiomatic approach proposed here might appear to some to depart sharply from an Aristotelian approach at first glance, further reflection on these and other common features of the two approaches indicates substantial areas of overlap.

We can reasonably wonder whether Aristotle's prescribed model from the *Posterior Analytics* is workable for subject genera that involve enmattered subjects and attributes. The strict conditions laid out in the early chapters of Book 1 of that treatise appear to be intended for matterless subjects and attributes like those found in mathematics. Moreover, subject genera involving enmattered subjects and attributes involve relationships that hold only for the most part, but we have seen that Aristotle thinks that such relationships are genuinely scientific. How will such relations be treated if we allow for only propositions expressing per se relations in the first and second mode? Are the first and second modes of perseity the only modes for scientific predication, or does the fourth count as well?[3] We should resolve these

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[3] Ferejohn (1991) treats the fourth mode as a mode of predication.

questions and a number of others to provide a workable Aristotelian scientific framework for many subjects that will be treatable as sciences.[4] There may be ways to deal with each of these problems, but it is better to begin with a cleaner and more efficient model that captures the spirit of Aristotelian science without having to deal with each of these concerns.

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[4] Lloyd (1996) offers good reason for thinking that Aristotle has different models of scientific knowledge, and that different models will be appropriate to apply depending on the discipline in question.

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