UNDERSTANDING BERNARD WILLIAMS'S CRITICISM OF ARISTOTELIAN NATURALISM
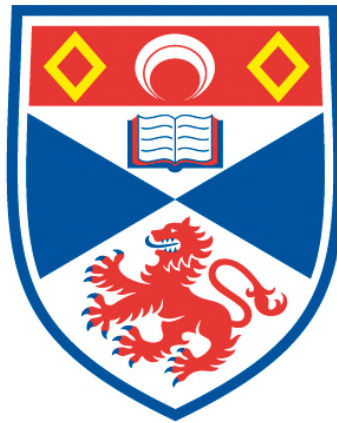
Michael Addison

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil
at the
University of St Andrews

2015

Understanding Bernard Williams's Criticism of Aristotelian Naturalism.

Michael Addison
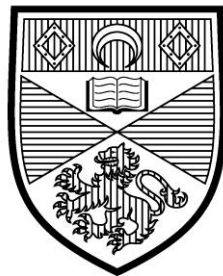
University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of

MPhil

at the

University of St Andrews

19th November 2015

Abstract:

In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (henceforth *ELP*) Williams claims that holding a naturalistic Aristotelian ethical theory is no longer an option for us—we cannot believe what Aristotle believed about human beings. It is the purpose of this thesis to understand what Williams means by this claim and to evaluate whether or not it constitutes a pressing argument against Aristotelian naturalism.

The modern Aristotelian (represented here by Martha Nussbaum, Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse) seems to be untouched by the claim as presented—they do not have to hold Aristotle's view of human nature. The Aristotelian approaches human nature, not from an "outside" perspective, like the scientist, but from an "inside" perspective—from the point of view of an ethically engaged agent. The method does not seek to use a theory-independent notion of human nature to vindicate the Aristotelian claim that the properly functioning human being is virtuous. Rather, the Aristotelian is engaged in a project of using the notions of virtue that we already possess, to paint a picture of the kind of lives that we can all identify with, and endorse as properly functioning.

However, there is a reading of Williams's claim, which I draw from his replies to Nussbaum (in *Mind, World and Ethics*) and his essay "St Just's Illusion", according to which he accuses the Aristotelian, who attempts to reach human nature from the "inside", of forgetting, that part of that reflection from the inside, will constitute a consciousness of oneself as an evolved creature. Understanding that human beings are evolved creatures, a "bricolage of powers and instincts", should temper one's reflection on the idea that any one life could constitute proper human functioning, as it must make us aware of the many lives that it is possible for a human being to lead.

For Cayt.

Acknowledgements:

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION:

In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*[1] (most prominently but also elsewhere[2]), Williams claims that holding a naturalistic Aristotelian ethical theory is no longer an option for us because the assumptions about human nature that undergird Aristotle's own ethical thinking are false[3]. It is the purpose of this thesis to understand what Williams means by this claim and to evaluate whether or not it constitutes a pressing argument against Aristotelian naturalism.

In section 1, I will begin by giving a sketch of Williams's view of Aristotle, as seen from *ELP*. In this section, I will briefly give a characterisation of the Aristotelian method with regard to "Aristotelian categoricals"[4] and the notion of the proper human functioning. I suggest that we read William's primary critique of Aristotle in *ELP* to be that Aristotle's picture of the natural world makes no differentiation between the world as viewed from the "inside"[5]; the world seen with a view towards one's own action within it, informed by one's thick concepts (i.e concepts which can only be properly understood by understanding the way of life of which they form a part—concepts such as marriage, tax and charity[6])- as opposed to the view of the world from the "outside"[7], i.e from the viewpoint of detached science which Williams understands as characterising the world in terms of

---

[1] Williams B (1985) Henceforth *ELP*

[2] See "Acting as the Virtuous Person Acts" in *Aristotle and Moral Realism* (1995) Heinemann R ed, "Replies" in *World, Mind, and Ethics* (1995) Altham J. E. J. And Harrison R ed, "Making Sense of Humanity" in *Making Sense of Humanity*, "Evolution, Ethics and the Representation Problem" in *Making Sense of Humanity*.

[3] It should be mentioned from the start that the opinion that Williams holds of Aristotelianism seems to shift at least a little over time. From the stern assertion that we can no longer hold an Aristotelian ethical theory due to characterisation of Aristotelian naturalism that he produces in *ELP*. However Williams later, in his reply to Nussbaum in *Mind, World and Ethics*, weakens this assertion to a suspicion of the impossibility of such a project. This shifting of viewpoints should not however be regarded as a difficulty for the present project, it remains the same, one of identifying and assessing Williams argument, regardless of what consequences he takes it to have.

[4] Foot P (2001) p30

[5] Williams B (1985) p51

[6] Williams B (1985) pp140-141

[7] Williams B (1985) p51

"thin"[8] concepts, such as number, volume and extension. Science, thereby, allows us a perspective on the world which Aristotle's ethics seems to overlook—a view of the world in which the universe itself has little, if anything, to say about the correct way to live one's life. According to Williams, therefore, we cannot share Aristotle's conviction that the life of the properly functioning human being *must* be the life of virtue.

In order to try, as Aristotle does, to single one life out uniquely among all others as a life which uniquely meets the needs of human beings, one would need to see this life as being a life which could be understood from the "outside" to have an intrinsic appeal to all human beings. However, when viewed from the "outside" perspective, any ethical viewpoint—being as it is, constructed from the "inside" of the human beings who live within it— appears to us as one possible constellation of thick ethical concepts possessed by a specific collection of human beings, appealing to them, as it does, on the basis of their own unique conditions and history, rather than as intrinsically appealing to human nature in general.

In section 2, I will put forth a response to this line of argument from Martha Nussbaum[9]. Her thought is that the Aristotelian does not need to assimilate the "inside" view to the "outside" view, in order to think that the life of the properly functioning human being is the life of virtue. I shall begin by outlining Nussbaum's approach to thinking of human nature from the "inside", via reflection on the kinds of life that one could imagine oneself leading. This mode of reflection does escape the argument put forward in *ELP*, which Williams concedes[10]. However, in the latter half of section 2, I shall suggest a problem with this Aristotelian method of identification, drawn from Williams's paper "St Just's Illusion"[11]. The problem is, that while the method of interpretation can show that we must share with others a form of life (which poses a set of shared, basic problems), it does not thereby show that we must share with them a common ethical outlook—a common response to the shared form of life. That is, the method of interpretation cannot be used to attribute thick concepts to human beings *a*

---

[8] Williams (1985) pp140-141
[9] Nussbaum M (1995)
[10] Williams B (1995)
[11] Williams B (1991)

priori, which makes the Aristotelian project of interpreting proper human functioning as the possession of the virtues untenable, if the virtues are thought of as thick ethical concepts.

In section 3, I will consider how one might think that Nussbaum's Aristotelian method could emerge untouched from the considerations put forward in section 2. Nussbaum appeals to a notion of proper human functioning drawn from cross cultural coherence[12]. There are two steps to Nussbaum's Aristotelian method, first, a "nominal" sketch of the virtues where we identify spheres of life common to human beings and further, within those spheres, what human beings regard as virtue and vice. Second, we "fill-in" those nominal virtues and emerge with a specification of the true virtue.

I shall argue that we can make sense of the first "nominal" step in the theory, but that problems arise with the "filling-in". The problem that we face with the "filling" is the role which our understanding of our own biology plays in our reflection upon ourselves from the "inside"—namely that reflection on our nature as evolved creatures reminds us that no set of thick ethical concepts can be uniquely singled out as embodying proper human functioning.

This is problematic for Nussbaum. If the cross-cultural consensus that she hopes to build is aimed at the definition of proper human functioning, by revealing how human beings get what they need, then Nussbaum will have to make strong assumptions about how thick ethical concepts relate to human need. That is, she will need to assume that one set of thick ethical concepts, embodied in the cross-cultural consensus, could provide an appropriate response to the needs of all human beings. However, the appropriateness of any given response to a human need is itself among the thick concepts which form an ethical viewpoint. Therefore, the picture of proper human functioning that the cross-cultural consensus gives, will only appeal to those who have been taken into account in the consensus. This does not present a problem to the thought that we may be able to come to cross-cultural ethical agreement with other cultures, and indeed further come to share a conception of virtue. However, it is problematic for Nussbaum's conclusion that the resultant consensus reveals, and must be predicated upon, shared and essential human values.

---

[12] Nussbaum M (1993)

In section 4, I will consider Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse's[13] Aristotelian method, which attempts to establish that we cannot make sense of the possibility of a genuinely ethical viewpoint, the considerations of which we do not recognise as genuinely ethical. This questions whether we can make sense of the idea that we see possibilities for a human life which might be worthwhile, other than the life of virtue. Foot and Hursthouse do not need to deny that there are other ways of living than our own in order to do this. However, they deny that the fact there are other ways of living, should have an impact on what we see as proper human functioning—if we cannot see any good reason to live as the others do.

The argument is essentially Wittgensteinian, and relies on the notion that we cannot make sense of the possibility of a different ethical viewpoint arising from the shared material of human life, given the ethical concepts that we currently possess. However, as Jonathan Lear[14] points out, this kind of Wittgensteinian method is problematic when applied to ethics. The possibility of other viewpoints in ethics is not only theoretical. It is necessary to understanding human beings at all. This suggests Hursthouse and Foot confuse the common human form of life, which makes possible practices such as mathematics, with the particular picture of human life that virtue presents. One cannot imagine properly functioning human beings who have a completely different set of mathematical concepts from oneself, because that is incoherent, but one can imagine human beings who have a completely different set of ethical concepts from us, because that is what anthropology and the historical record show.

Unless the two can be kept separate, we risk losing our grasp on the thought that human beings, who live without the thick concepts of virtue, are human beings at all. Here the considerations from "St Just's Illusion" become relevant again, because, if the Aristotelian wishes to say that it is a condition of interpreting some creatures or other as human beings, that we must share with them the virtues, then they will fall foul of the arguments Williams put against the 'strong thesis'.

---

[13] Hursthouse R (1999)
[14] Lear J (1983)

1.WILLIAMS ON ARISTOTLE.

Understanding Williams's argument will require, first of all, an understanding of Williams's conception of the Aristotelian project in a schematic way. This understanding will be primarily drawn from *ELP,* because *ELP* contains Williams's longest sustained discussion of the issue. What my discussion will not be, is a thorough examination of the validity or otherwise of Williams's interpretation of Aristotle's work as a reply to the *Ethics*. This is not to say that I will be completely un-critical of Williams's interpretation. However, the purpose of this thesis is to test Williams's critique of Aristotelian Naturalism, and the purpose of this section is to outline that critique as it is presented in *ELP*—not to challenge the validity of that critique as a response to Aristotle himself.

In this first section, I aim to lay down the groundwork for what follows, by explaining some of Williams's fundamental assumptions about the shape and structure of Aristotelian naturalism.

I shall begin, in subsection (i), by sketching an account of the objectives of Aristotle's ethical theory—as aiming to vindicate the life of virtue as the life of the properly functioning human being. In subsection (ii), I shall then move on to discuss what Williams takes the shape of that ethical theory to be.

For Williams, the specific view Aristotle took on human nature is inseparable from the structure of his ethical theory. Williams thinks that there are features, inherent in the structure of Aristotelian naturalism, which render its application fundamentally unsuitable to the present day, regardless of what one considers the particular first order, ethical pronouncements of the theory to be. Williams argues that the Aristotelian thesis is flawed, insofar as it attempts to give an account of the real interests of human beings in general in terms of their shared human nature. For Williams, human nature is something identifiable from the perspective of natural science. Williams supposes Aristotle thought this too, however, for Aristotle (as Williams takes him), part of scientific enquiry was an attempt to understand the proper role and station of any given organism in a hierarchical universe. Our science, however, does not conceptualise the universe in this way; we have a "disenchanted" view which does not assign purpose to organisms other than survival and reproduction. Therefore,

according to Williams, our science cannot be used to construct a theory of best interests in the same way Aristotle's could. It is this argument with which subsection (iii) will be concerned.

(i) Aristotle's Conception of Ethics:

Aristotle believed that ethical philosophy should aim to give an account of what dispositions describe the life of the properly functioning human being. The result of a successful inquiry into that life, for Aristotle, would be to show that the life of virtue is the life of the non-defective human being. That is, if Aristotle were right, then human beings are *supposed* to be virtuous.

The notions of "proper functioning" and "defect" here need some explanation. Philippa Foot presents us with a way of understanding this claim in *Natural Goodness* : the thought is that it is possible to capture human nature in a set of "Aristotelian categoricals" which together define the proper functioning of the human being. An "Aristotelian categorical", to use Michael Thompson's phrase[15], takes the form "*X*s characteristically are/have/show *y*". Aristotelian categoricals are typically used to capture general facts about the life course of living creatures[16]. The Aristotelian categorical is in part normative; it defines what the *X* should have, if it is to be a non-defective *X*:

> "Thompson suggests that the relation between the Aristotelian categorical and the evaluative assessment is very close indeed. In fact, he says that if we have a true natural-history proposition to the effect that S's are F, then if a certain individual S—the individual here and now or then and there—is not F it is therefore not as it should be, but rather weak, diseased, or in some other way defective."[17]

The use of such categoricals is clear in sentences such as "the human being has 32 teeth" or "the mayfly mates at dawn"; they capture features which do not necessarily apply to all members of a given type of object or creature (not all humans have 32 teeth), but are characteristic of that kind of

---

[15] Tompson M (2004)
[16] Tompson M (2004). Aristotelian categoricals are typically applied to living creatures, but they are as well applied to machines or other purposed objects; "car engines propel vehicles" or "drinking glasses hold liquids".
[17] Foot P (2001) p30

object or creature. That is to say, that if an individual member of a species does not conform to the Aristotelian categoricals true of that species, then that need not throw the validity of the categorical into question.

What differentiates Aristotelian categoricals from mere judgements of generality like "most apples are red" is that the nature of Aristotelian categorisation is teleological. That is to say, Aristotelian categoricals are true or false, depending on the teleological features; the ends of that to which they are judged to apply. As Foot explains:

> We could say, therefore, that part of what distinguishes an Aristotelian categorical from a mere statistical proposition about some or most or all the members of a kind of living thing is the fact that it relates to the teleology of the species. It speaks, directly or indirectly, about the way life functions such as eating and growing and defending itself come about in a species of a certain conformation, belonging in a certain kind of habitat. This is why the noise made by the rustling of leaves is irrelevant in this context while the development of roots is not. And this is why Aristotelian categoricals are able to describe norms rather than statistical normalities. It *matters* in the reproductive life of the peacock that the tail should be brightly coloured, whereas our assumption has been that the blue on the head of the blue tit plays no part in what here counts as 'its life'. And this is why the absence of one would itself be a defect in an individual whereas that of the other would not.[18]

Aristotelian categoricals describe general facts about a species which are important to the life of that species. If a creature fails to live up to the Aristotelian categoricals that are predicated of it, its life is in some sense defective. The full set of Aristotelian categoricals true of a species (or kind of object) therefore describe the proper functioning of that species or kind of object.

This teleology gives rise to speaking of "well" and "badly", or "good" and "bad" in conjunction with the way an individual of a kind is living up to (or failing to live up to) their function. For a creature to live up to its proper function is for that creature to "flourish"[19]. A tree with strong, healthy roots we might call a "flourishing" or "good" tree, because it is a tree whose roots are performing their function

---

[18] Foot P (2001) p31
[19] Foot P (2001) p46

of holding up the tree and providing it with nutrients well. On the other hand, a tree with weak or diseased roots is "failing to flourish" or "bad" as a tree, because it is not getting what trees need from their roots.

It is this feature of Aristotelian categoricals which gives rise to the thought, that among the Aristotelian categoricals applied to human beings, there are a set describing the ethical dispositions proper to the human being, on the basis of which one can make judgements of human flourishing.

The transition between describing proper animal function in these terms, and describing proper human function is not, however, trivial. Human beings possess a form of reason animals lack, we are, we hope, responsive to reasons, and do not act on mere instinct. We have goals and aspirations animals lack. Animal function can be judged with respect to their survival and reproduction[20]. In some sense, human beings must be judged as functioning well or poorly on the basis of such criteria, but it would be a bleak and pessimistic view that took a good human life to involve survival and reproduction *only*.

Foot attempts to bridge this gap with the notion of the "Aristotelian necessity"—Anscombe's notion[21] of something that is necessary, in so far as another good hangs upon it:

> Men and women need to be industrious and tenacious of purpose not only so as to be able to house, clothe, and feed themselves, but also to pursue human ends having to do with love and friendship. They need the ability to form family ties, friendships, and special relations with neighbours. They also need codes of conduct. And how could they have all these things without virtues such as loyalty, fairness, kindness, and in certain circumstances obedience?[22]

The virtues, for Foot, represent the only way of getting many of our human needs fulfilled—our needs for family, society and justice, for instance. The needs, which the virtues are supposed to respond to, are needs which human beings have because they possess reason.

---

[20] Foot P (2001) p43
[21] Anscombe G.E.M (1969) p68
[22] Foot P (2001) p44

The thought then, is that virtues are dispositions which are present in the properly functioning human being, because, without them, we could not get what we need. For now, I should like to leave Foot[23] while taking forward what I have used her work to say about the connection between virtue and proper human functioning in Aristotelian naturalism. To return to Aristotle according to Williams, when put together, the dispositions that are the virtues describe the life of the properly functioning human being—the virtuous. This kind of life, so the Aristotelian story goes, would be the kind of life that any human being at all would have good reason to live.

There are various ways of expressing the Aristotelian thought that all human beings have good reason to live the life of the virtuous. Williams uses two in *ELP*, and I shall follow him in this in order to make the argument easier to follow. One way of expressing the thought is to say that such a life could provide reasons "for everyone", that is, that every person is such, that the life in question represents a life that they have reason to live. According to Williams, this is the kind of account of the ethical life the ancient Greeks were involved in trying to give:

> "He [Plato] thought that an account of the ethical life could answer Socrates' question, and combat skepticism, only if it showed that it was rational for people to be just, whoever they were and whatever their circumstances."[24]

What Williams calls "Socrates' question" is the question "How should one live?". Answering this question requires that a) if one seeks to answer it, one gives reasons in favour of leading some or other life, and b) the reasons one proffers are such that any rational agent could recognise them as reasons which apply to themselves. The alternative is to leave open the possibility that elements of the ethical life, say justice, could be disregarded by some agents on the grounds that they were not suitable to

---

[23] The discussion will return to her in section 4.
[24] Williams B (1985) p31

their present situation. To give a reason "for everyone" in this form then, is to give an account of what kind of person it is rational to be[25]— a properly functioning human being.

The second way in which we can elaborate the point is to say that Aristotle suggests that ethics should be concerned with giving an account of the "real interests" of an agent. That is, an account of which dispositions it is in the interests of every agent to have, as every agent has an interest in functioning properly.

To say that one has an interest in something or other, is to say that one values that thing, has a stake in it or wishes to pursue it—and everyone has an interest in getting what they need. The notions of "having an interest in φing" and "having a reason to φ" are very closely related and there is much to be said about where they come together and where they might be pulled apart. However, there is not the space to have that discussion here. For our present purposes, it will be enough to say that when it is in one's "real interests", as opposed to one's apparent interests, to φ, one has a reason to φ. Understood in this way, Aristotle's suggestion becomes a claim to the effect that the philosophy of ethics should concern itself with investigating which dispositions are in our real interests to cultivate, which dispositions best embody a life that we all have reason to lead.

(ii) Williams's View of Aristotle:

Williams regards the possibility of coming to see the life of virtue as a viable aspiration only within Aristotle's ancient teleological worldview, a worldview that we now know to be false[26]. The fact that Aristotle's worldview was mostly false does not immediately suggest, however, that all Aristotle's ethical thought must be consequently false. It is, I hope, an uncontroversial thought that the ignorant or misinformed about physics, chemistry and biology can lead lives which are not marred by faulty ethical thinking. Even if we cannot agree with the particulars of what Aristotle thought about women or those he regarded as natural slaves, why should that reflect badly on Aristotle's philosophical

---

[25] Williams B (1985) p31 "The demand to show to each person that justice was rational for that person meant that the answer had to be grounded first in an account of what sort of person it was rational to be."
[26] Williams B, (1985) p44

approach? According to Williams, the reason that we can no longer accept Aristotle's method is because that method can only be supported by a particular conception of human nature.

According to Aristotle, we are essentially rational animals, our soul being composed of two aspects[27]—one that we share with all other animals, the nutritive, and another that we possess alone that separates us from the animals, the rational. That rational aspect of the soul cannot be cleaved from the nutritive aspect, and for Aristotle, this means, that when we are considering human nature, we consider the human in total, body and mind. This fact means that he thinks that practical reason— the kind of reason humans express in action, both individual and social—was essential to the life of reason:

> "Aristotle makes a basic distinction among the powers of reason, so that the intellectual faculty central to the ethical life, practical reason, is very different in its functions and objects from theoretical reason, which is what is deployed in philosophy and the sciences. He did indeed think that the cultivation of philosophy and sciences was the highest form of human activity, but he supposed that the exercise of practical reason in a personal and civic life was necessary to this, not only in the (Platonic) sense that such activities were necessary in society, but also in the sense that each individual needed such a life."[28]

For Aristotle, then, practical reason is essential to "flourishing" or as he terms it *Eudaimonia* as, in order to function properly as a human being, one's practical reason must take a certain form. According to Williams in Aristotle's teleological world, to be a human being was to have an inner nisus towards the life of *Eudaimonia*:

> ...in Aristotle's teleological universe, every human being (or at least every nondefective male who is not a natural slave) has a kind of inner nisus toward a life of at least civic virtue...[29]

---

[27] Aristotle (2009), 1102a line 27 onwards.
[28] Williams B, (1985) p35
[29] Williams B (1985), p44

That is, in order to function properly as a human being, in Aristotle's view, one had to possess the kind of practical reason that would lead one to lead the life of virtue. This life may not be available to those who did not have the proper education, or those who were constitutionally unsuited to it, but it is just those facts which make those people defective, in Aristotle's view.

Whatever is supposed to be included in the life of virtue must provide a reason for every individual agent, if it is to be regarded as an answer to the question "how should one live?". The way in which Aristotle, according to Williams, couches the reasons he gives us, is to speak of the virtues as excellences of living. Now, for Aristotle, the process of learning these excellences was one of habituation—one comes to have virtue by internalising the proper dispositions. Since correct reasoning about ethical matters issues from these dispositions, those who are not in possession of those dispositions cannot properly partake in ethical reasoning.

The person who has the correct dispositions is at the correct starting point for ethical reasoning[30]— and presumably therefore, someone who does not have these dispositions, is not fit for ethical reasoning[31]. This seems to suggest that one will not be able to reflect on the dispositions that form the basis of one's own practical reasoning— one does not learn to accept those dispositions by rational argument, but rather by inculcation into them— they have been in a sense beaten into one without rational argument. Williams suggests[32] that this makes it look as if someone who has acquired virtue has no need of the moral philosophy Aristotle offers us. Socrates' question has been answered already— by the moral education one received as a child. If this is the case, why do we need an enquiry into that answer? :

"He makes it seem as though you might review the whole of your life and consider whether it was aimed in the most worthwhile direction, but, on his own account, this cannot be a sensible picture. He shares with Plato the idea that, if virtue is part of human good, then it cannot be external to the ultimately desirable state of well-being: that state must be constituted in part by the virtuous life. But

---

[30]Aristotle (2009), 1095b line 3 onwards.

[31] This is supported by Aristotle's remarks on the unsuitability of the youth to hear lectures on ethics (Aristotle (2009) 1095a line 2). His thought seems to be that without the proper ethical training being firmly in place (a firmness made uncertain by the wild oats of youth) higher levels of ethical reasoning than continuing with training are "vain and unprofitable" for the young.

[32]Williams B (1985) p39

this is not a consideration that one could use to any radical effect in practical reasoning, as he seems to suggest. One becomes virtuous or fails to do so only through habituation. One should not study moral philosophy until middle age, Aristotle believes, for a reason that is itself an expression of the present difficulties—only by then is a person good at practical deliberation. But by then it will be a long time since one became, in relation to this deliberation, preemptively good or irrecoverably bad. (Only the powers of practical reason are in question here; it is consistent with everything Aristotle says that someone's life might be radically changed by other means, such as conversion.)"[33]

The purpose of the ethical enquiry seemed initially to be one of self-improvement, so that we might compare our conduct with the best kind of conduct and change ourselves accordingly. It looked as though we might come to a conclusion on what the good life is, and set ourselves on the track towards it. However, we will only be able to get a sensible account of the good life if we are already, in a sense, living it, and at that point, we do not need such an account. As Williams says, "the answer to Socrates' question cannot be used by those who need it most"[34].

However, as John McDowell points out in "Deliberation and Moral Development", no one who wants to follow Aristotle (nor Aristotle himself) need see the virtuous as entrenched this way in an unreflective and unquestionable understanding of their ethical upbringing. It may well be that, in the course of one's ethical education, one has to begin without questioning the basis of that education, learning first what McDowell, following Aristotle, calls the "*that*" of the ethical tradition one is born into—that stealing is wrong, or that charity is good, for instance. However, while these ethical starting points may provide the basis for an ethical education, it is possible to come to reflect on them at a later point in that investigation and question whether or not they have a justification in light of the rest of the ethical system—what McDowell calls the "*because*":

> It is open to us to suppose that reflection towards the because, aimed at an accrual of
> intelligibility from seeing how elements of the that hang together, might issue in a reasoned

---

[33] Williams B (1985), p39
[34] Williams B (1985), p40

modification of an inherited outlook. Elements of what has hitherto passed for that might not hang together satisfactorily, on reflective consideration in which one tries to integrate them so as to equip them with a because.[35]

The notion of reflective consideration brings into play ideas of internal coherence in an ethical belief system, to which I will return in section 4. It will suffice for now to take McDowell's point that we need not think of Aristotle as proposing that the basis of one's ethical education must go forever unquestioned—it is possible to change the ethical dispositions one has in later life.

However, even though Aristotle need not make that assumption, he must still say—as Williams reports— that ethical inquiry presented to those who have a bad upbringing presents them with their defects as human beings, even if they cannot see from their current position that they are defective:

On Aristotle's account a virtuous life would indeed conduce to the well-being of the man who has had a bad upbringing, even if he cannot see it. The fact that he is incurable, and cannot properly understand the diagnosis, does not mean that he is not ill. The answer Aristotle gives to Socrates' question cannot be given to each person, as we have seen, but it is an answer *for* each person.[36]

The point of ethical philosophy then, is to diagnose the illness from which the vicious suffer, to show what it is about the bad person that makes them bad. Ethical philosophy will, if successful, show this also to the bad person themself.

In effect, Williams presents Aristotle's ethical philosophy as attempting to show us how we are to avoid the defects of those who have had a bad upbringing—how to avoid their "illness". It is as though, what is attempted here, is to show what has gone wrong in the development of some badly functioning organ. It *should* be perfect, standing in its station and doing its job, but it has gone wrong, and we can identify how it has gone so wrong:

---

[35] McDowell J (1996), p56
[36] Williams B (1985), p40

> We are not simply saying that we find him [the person of bad character] a dangerous nuisance (if we do), or that he is statistically unusual (if he is). We are saying that he lacks certain qualities characteristic of human beings which are necessary for creatures to live a life typical of human beings. But we have to say more, if we are to make the point essential to Aristotle's philosophy and to any like it, that it is *this man's* well-being and interests that are in question. We have to say that this man misconceives his interests and, indeed, that his doing so is a main symptom of what is wrong with him.[37]

Because the unfortunate in question has been brought up badly, or he did not take the teaching of virtue correctly, he has become disconnected from virtue. He is defective, he has been badly brought up, so as to mistake their proper functioning, and he is, in some sense, suffering for it. He cannot live the good life so long as he does not lead the life of virtue, it will be forever outside his grasp, either because he is not going for it at all or because he is constitutionally unable to get at it with his current ethical dispositions.

Williams's thought here is that Aristotle is suggesting that the badly brought up do not have a correct grasp of their proper functioning—what is in their real interests. In having such a poor conception, they thereby fail to recognise good reasons for pursuing the good life.

(iii) Williams's Objection to Aristotle:

For Williams, however, the question remains as to what it is that the vicious have got wrong when they mistake their best interests?. Williams suggests that there are three ways in which we can make sense of the notion of a difference between "real interests" and perceived interests, such as to render the mistake intelligible; (a) the agent lacks the correct information. For instance, one might make a mistake about one's own interests, on the basis of false information—someone with a headache might

---

[37] Williams B (1985), p40

take a pill of arsenic to be an analgesic (either by ignorance or misinformation), and thereby mistake one's real interests as to the swallowing of it.[38] (b) the agent fails to be rational[39]. For instance, one might know that there is a pill of arsenic in one's hand and know that swallowing arsenic is a bad idea, but attempt to do so anyway. [40] Or (c) one might be suffering from some general incapacity that is getting in the way of their seeing things as they should see them. Depression might have pushed one to the position where swallowing some arsenic looked like a good idea. When suffering mental ill health in this way, one's rational capacities are not operating properly.[41]

If it is to be considered a real general incapacity, for Williams, that lack has to be such that it is not "tailor made" for the change in beliefs that its cure will bring about. The notion of "tailor making" here is somewhat vague, but it seems to mean this:

If x changed their life such that p they would see that y was in their interest.

y just is changing one's life such that p.

The general incapacity must be shown by something other than a simple lack of something which is recommended in the change. That is, a charge that someone is suffering from a general incapacity must be predicated upon more than the fact that they do not share the same beliefs as oneself.

There must be, as Williams says, "wider implications", however, that is a frustratingly vague locution. There are many ways one might read that recommendation. One might take these wider implications to be that the removal of the incapacity would allow the agent wider freedom of action, or that the agent's incapacity must show up elsewhere in his life—perhaps in a pattern of faulty reasoning.

---

[38] Williams B (1985), p41
[39] Williams allows that there is a debate to be had about what properly constitutes constraint on reasoning. This is due to his internalist theory of reasons, which he takes to have implications on how we are to understand the rationality of agents who do not share our reasons. For an understanding of how Williams sees these issues see Williams B (1996) "Values, Reasons and the Theory of Persuasion" in (2008) *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline* Moore A.W ed.
[40] Williams B (1985), p41
[41] Williams B (1985), p43

There are many possibilities, however. It would surely not be too far from Williams's thought here to suggest that the "wider implications" are that one is not suffering from any defect which somehow gets in one's way of being able to see the truth. That is, I suggest we understand a "general incapacity" as a defect in the Footian sense— the incapacity stops us from getting what we need. We can see some support for this reading in the fact that Williams hangs this point on what he calls a "normative" notion of human nature; a normative understanding of how human beings are supposed to function[42].

Specification of human nature seems, then, to matter to Williams as it does to the Aristotelian, in as much as there are some defects that, for Williams, will stop human beings from seeing their real interests. Williams considers the normative specification of human nature to relate to the proper functioning of human beings in a biological sense, rather than in an ethical sense of doing what one ought to do—for Williams, the question of whether or not one is defective is not itself an ethical question, but a medical one. We can see this by his statement that the normative conception of human nature implies a language of "cure" and "symptom" in its connection to incapacity[43].

Given the picture Williams has painted of Aristotle so far, it looks like a position with which Aristotle might well agree. Williams is saying that a general incapacity is, in some sense, a failure to function as a human being—and this can cause us to mistake our real interests. This seems to render intelligible the idea that the vicious have mistaken their best interests by failing to live up to their nature—they are suffering a general incapacity that does not allow them to appreciate their proper functioning as human beings. So why does Williams not go further and agree with Aristotle that those who do not lead the life of virtue are defective human beings?:

> If we are going to bring in these notions eventually, why not do so earlier? Why not just say that a change is in someone's real interest if the result of that change would be to bring him closer to normal human functioning? The answer is that not everything in someone's interests is necessary to his

[42]Williams B (1985), p43
[43]Williams B (1985), p43

human functioning, or is something that he *needs*. What he does need are the capacities, including the basic patterns of motivation, to pursue some of the things that are in his interests.[44]

We might think, that when we bring in the normative conception of human nature, what we get is a fully fledged idea of proper human functioning, in the sense Foot and Aristotle suggest; a conception of human functioning which assigns vice to human defect. However, William's conception of human nature does not extend that far; it allows normative judgements of defect only in so far as it allows that biology could render such judgements.

Aristotle does not separate out interests from biology in this way. Proper functioning defines one's real interests, and that proper functioning is, for every human being, the life of virtue. However, as Williams suggests, what modern scientific thought cannot do, if it has not already become ethical in character by being fused with ethical theory[45], is to provide us an account of that in which "well-being" must consist. This is because, according to Williams, there is implicit in modern science, a distinction between two perspectives on the human being; the view from the "inside" and the view from "outside". These different perspectives have consequences for how we must see the relationship between biology and ethics, and why we cannot see the relationship between them in the same way Aristotle did.

The perspective on the world one possesses by virtue of one's ethical dispositions, Williams dubs the "internal" view. The "internal" perspective is the perspective possessed by an ethically engaged actor. It is concerned with the practical questions of living e.g "What should I do?" and "How should I live?". In deliberating on these questions, one must draw on the resources of one's ethical upbringing, as well as one's knowledge of the world and one's own reason. From this viewpoint, the ethical dispositions one possesses can be justified in terms of those dispositions representing aspects of the good life[46]. If one accepts that kindness is a virtue, and that a life best lived is a life of virtue, then one must see that to possess the disposition of kindness is in one's own

---

[44] Williams B (1985), p43
[45] Williams B (1985), p52
[46] Williams B (1985), p51

interests, because its possession is part of the good life (that does not mean that this must be the *only* good one sees in it), and living the good life is in one's own interests.

On the other hand, the "external" viewpoint does not engage with practical questions of how to act, but instead engages with questions of how things work, their composition and their behaviour as it is now. From this perspective, human nature and the ethical dispositions we possess, are not attributed any particular significance, other than their role in determining the behaviour of human beings. Much as a biologist might note that lionesses must have a disposition to teach their cubs to hunt[47], they might also note of human beings that they need certain dispositions, including some ethical dispositions, in order to function properly.

When one takes up this "external" position and asks why one possesses certain ethical dispositions, one will not find an answer that presents a justification of those dispositions, rather, the answer will be presented in terms of what causes those dispositions. That is, a list of facts about human beings which not only make ethical dispositions possible, but which are necessary to their existence in the first place—needs, desires and powers characteristic to our species.

Science, and the "external" perspective it embodies, is in one way supportive of naturalistic ethical theory, and in two ways disruptive of naturalistic ethical theory. First, science supports naturalism by putting a natural limit on what may be considered a coherent ethical theory. A good ethical theory must be the kind of theory which it is possible for human beings to internalise, given our natural limitations, at pain of asking of us the impossible. Natural facts about our nature are then of central importance to any coherent ethics.

 However disruptively, the external perspective of science may show us that there may be dispositions in human beings, naturally, that conflict with our internal conception of those dispositions which make up the good life. It may be that we find, from the outside, that it is impossible for certain dispositions identified as virtues to exist together in harmony—or one might discover that some disposition thought to be a vice is in fact a necessary part of human nature.

Further, the external perspective may show us that dispositions that we, from the inside, consider to be central to a good human life are, as a matter of fact, contingent aspects of the human

---

[47] Foot P (2001), p15

life cycle. We come to see from the "outside", that the dispositions that we regard as forming the good life, are just one constellation of dispositions among many viable alternatives. The dispositions required in order to live under a harsh autocracy, such as that practiced by the pharaohs of ancient Egypt, or the feudal lords of medieval Europe (varied and differing in severity as those rulers may have been across history), are not the same as those required to live in a modern Western democracy. We are disposed to speak where they were silent, disposed to protest where they would obey and thus our lives under such regimes would be short. Further, we do not share our ancestor's concerns with honour, martial prowess or the divine right of rulers, which undergirded their regimes.

Yet, the ways of living embodied in the histories of those societies are, from the "external" viewpoint, no less viable than our own. Human life continued under those systems of government, which persisted for hundreds of years; the human life cycle was not brought to an end by human beings lacking in virtue. From the perspective of science, the fact that human life was not brought to a halt, shows that a virtuous ordering of society is not a necessary part of what it is to be a human being.

For Aristotle—as Williams takes him— , however, this gap between the "inside" and the "outside" perspectives does not appear:

> For Aristotle, the virtuous agent would find no such conflict [between the "internal" and "external" perspectives]. He could come to understand that the dispositions that gave him his ethical view of the world were a correct or full development of human potentiality. This was so *absolutely*, in the sense at least (Aristotle no doubt meant more) that the best possible theory of humanity and its place in the world would yield this result... Aristotle's theory means that when the agent reflects, even from the outside, on all his needs and capacities, he will find no conflict with his ethical dispositions.[48]

When we look at human beings from the perspective of natural science, from the "outside" we see a creature which has evolved in order to survive in a variety of circumstances and situations. The result of our evolutionary history is that, like all animals, humans are (to quote Williams elsewhere) a

---

[48] Williams B (1985), p52

"rather ill-assorted bricolage of powers and instincts"[49]. From this perspective, the dispositions of thought and action, natural to human beings, are whichever dispositions allow for survival and reproduction, in whatever situation the human being is placed. What we see from the "outside" is the possibility of many and various different kinds of human life, none of which come recommended by the universe.

For Williams, the fact that we perceive a gap between the view from the "inside" and the view from the "outside", makes Aristotelian naturalism untenable. It is essential to any coherent ethical position that it must maintain the possibility of seeing human life from the "outside" –that is, that we can make sense of what natural science has to say about human beings—and how it might conflict with our conception of the good life— from within that ethical position.

We can no longer think of ourselves as creatures who have set aside for them a place, embedded in the structure of universe itself, which demands a particular kind of ethical life—it is a truism that the universe itself is amoral. That means we can no longer think of human beings as creatures who are necessarily defective *qua* their functioning as human beings, if they do not lead the life of virtue.

However, that need not mean that we must give up the idea that what one does see from one's own ethical perspective is indeed valuable—it simply suggests that we cannot appeal to human nature to attempt to show *a priori* that our ethical viewpoint, by necessity, must appeal, and be suited to, others who do not share it. That is, we cannot build our own ethical viewpoint into a description of what it is to be a human being, such that, if some human being lacked that viewpoint, they would be in some sense a defective human being, or not one at all.

For Williams, it is certainly true to say that it is in any human's real interests to eat, sleep and wish to be mentally healthy— to get what one needs. What it is one needs, Williams regards in a similar manner to Foot, as somewhat broad[50]. Not simply bread and water, but also perhaps social structures, or relationships with others, are what human beings need. However, there are many ways

---

[49] Williams B (1995), p199
[50] Williams B (1985), p45

of satisfying those needs, and while the life is virtue is certainly one way of meeting those demands, the space of possible ways of living is far wider than the space of what is necessary to proper human functioning.

The view from the "outside" leaves open the possibility that there are lives to be lived by properly functioning human beings (where that notion is taken biologically) which are not the life of virtue. Therefore, Williams's Aristotle cannot show us that we must see the life of virtue as being identical to the life of a properly functioning human being. He cannot show us that all humans have reason to live that life, if they are functioning properly.

(iv) Summary

When one takes the "external" viewpoint on the human being, that is, the viewpoint of modern science, one does not see human beings as having an innate need for virtue. One who possesses this viewpoint can therefore identify a gap between the human being, as viewed from the perspective of the ethically engaged actor, the "internal" view, and a scientific understanding of biology. Recognising this gap casts doubt on the thought that our own ethical perspective must be the ethical perspective natural to all human beings, a view characteristic of human flourishing.

While one is licensed to see other ways of living lives as nasty or base, lacking good reason to adopt for oneself, one is not thereby licensed to say that the life of virtue is the life of the properly functioning human being. There are many different kinds of human life made possible by the biology of the human being, many different ways of getting what one needs. Therefore, different kinds of ethical perspective need not be thought of as simply defective versions of the viewpoint that we currently hold. This presents a problem for Williams's Aristotle, as his brand of ethical naturalism requires that those who do not see the life of virtue as being in their best interests, as providing reasons for them, are defective human beings.

2. ST JUST'S ILLUSION

One might wonder why Williams thinks that the Aristotelian must rely on a notion of human nature drawn from biology in order to establish that the life of virtue describes the life of the properly functioning human being. Rosalind Hursthouse makes this point forcefully:

> "Everyone who is taking the Aristotelian Naturalist line takes it as obvious that they are not pretending to derive ethical evaluations of human beings from an ethically neutral human biology, but are already thinking of human beings in an ethically structured way."[51]

This thought suggests that the Aristotelian might instead approach the question of human functioning at the level of human values. That is, the Aristotelian could argue, that implicit in our understanding of what it is to be a human being, are not only certain biological characteristics, but also a characteristically human structure of values. If this could be successfully argued for, then Williams's objection to Aristotelianism could be effectively circumvented.

The modern Aristotelian might suppose that the fact that one is a human being implies that there are some values one has to share with all other human beings. That is, the Aristotelian might try to show that one can only come to see another's life as being characteristically human only if one can see them as rationally oriented towards certain values embodied by the virtues. Thus, Aristotle's idea that the properly functioning human being is virtuous can be seen as not concerning biological or animal function, but about how it is rational to live. This would form a picture of human nature drawn from reason—what it is that humans rationally value. A picture of this kind would be a picture drawn "from the inside", from the perspective of a human being deciding how to live. This stands opposed to a picture drawn from a scientific investigation of what dispositions of value human beings are given to develop. This would maintain the difference between the internal and the external view on the human being.

---

[51] Hursthouse R (2012), p174

In this section, I shall suggest that an Aristotelian argument of this form must be seen as a species of Davidsonian interpretation argument[52]. Furthermore, I shall argue that this kind of argument from interpretation will not work as a defence against the concerns expressed by Williams in the previous section, by virtue of the responses he gives against such a mode of argument in his essay "St Just's Illusion"[53]. In that essay, Williams attempts to give an argument against the assumption that all human beings share a system of values, a shared ethical human nature.

Williams argues, that while there is a truth to the interpretation argument, it fails when it is applied to values. He thinks it does so because our values are "thick"[54]. That is, the values that one possesses are partly a matter of the history of the society into which one is born and raised. Instead Williams suggests, that what human beings necessarily share, is a set of "basic problems", such as the needs to and drink, as well as the desire to do what one wishes to do unimpeded[55]. These "basic problems" cannot in and of themselves act as justifications, and thus lack that essential element of values. In order to be elaborated into values, these basic problems need to be placed into a structure of justification, which arises from the conditions in which human beings find themselves, which are different everywhere. The elaboration of the basic problems into values thus renders them thick, appropriate to different times and places, finding purchase where they do because of the local, intellectual and physical conditions.

The variation of these conditions is assured in part by the fact that human beings are a "bricolage", allowing for a multiplicity of solutions to the basic problems of living. Thus, Williams argues, if one wants to show that the notion of an common human nature drawn from common values is coherent, one has to make a number of very strong assumptions about human beings—namely that the human being is such, that its proper biological function is the possession of the dispositions which undergird the virtues.

---

[52] Davidson D (1973)
[53] Williams B (1991)
[54] Williams B (1985), p141
[55] Williams B (1991), p136

This reflects back to Williams's argument against Aristotelian naturalism in *ELP*. Williams's Aristotle makes exactly those assumptions, which we cannot share by virtue of the fact that we cannot collapse the "internal" and "external" viewpoints on human nature.

I shall begin in section i), by giving a Aristotelian response to the points raised in the previous discussion of *ELP*. That response is essentially that the Aristotelian can attempt to establish that the life of virtue is the life of the properly functioning human being without having to rely on a specification of that nature from the "outside". Instead the Aristotelian can attempt to do so via a view of the human being "from the inside".

I shall move on in section ii), with a sketch of the "argument from interpretation" mentioned earlier. I shall take it to be possible to take the argument in two forms a) weak interpretation: there must be some shared material of human life, which we see in others, allowing us to interpret them as human beings, or b) strong interpretation: there must be some determinate set of shared, thick ethical concepts which we see in others and thereby allows us to interpret them as human beings. I shall further argue that, if the Aristotelian wants to approach the question of human nature from the "inside", then they are committed to the truth of b).

In section iii), I will raise Williams's doubt about the notion that one can identify one's own thick ethical concepts in the members of other societies without empirical research. One might think such identification suspect, because thick ethical concepts imply a history, which one rightly comes to know via empirical research, not *a priori* philosophy. I shall finish in section iv) by tying this argument to the argument I drew from Williams in chapter 1. I shall argue that, if we properly understand the "inside" / "outside" considerations from *ELP*, we shall come to see that they elaborate precisely the concern that Williams expresses in "Saint Just's Illusion", that, while one might have to see the lives of others in terms of one's own thick ethical concepts, it would be wrong to suppose that they must share the dispositions one possesses because of that fact.

(i) Ethics from the Human Perspective

In *ELP* ,Williams remarks that "...it is hard to believe that an account of human nature—if it is not already an ethical theory itself—will adequately determine one kind of ethical life as against others."[56] It is interesting that he does not seem to be entirely concerned about the possibility of an account of human nature that was already itself an ethical theory. This is perhaps because he regards the project of the Aristotelian as one of propping up some ethical theory or other by reference to something objective and external to itself, which is to say, human nature. However, one might consider human nature in the way which Williams does not seem to consider, as already embodying an ethical theory.

In "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics"[57], Nussbaum considers just such a conception of human nature as an explicit counter to Williams argument. Human nature enters into her theory as a normative concept itself, subject to cultural difference and interpretation. She characterises Williams's objection to Aristotle as containing three assumptions about Aristotle's work:

> (1) Questions about essential human nature are, for Aristotle, matters of natural scientific fact, not of ethical value. They can be grasped from outside practices and the point of view that guides them, from the totally external viewpoint of the neutral observer -- from, as *ELP* puts it, "an absolute understanding of nature.... (2) Questions of essential nature are (for Aristotle) uncontroversial in a way that ethical questions usually are not... The fact that they are matters for scientific inquiry means that they can, in principle, be settled in a more satisfyingly decisive way than questions of ethical value judgement. (3) The discovery of the essential nature of human beings does important work in reaching normative ethical conclusions. Its source in the external viewpoint provides us with fixed points that effectively rule out certain ethical alternatives... In this way, a human nature inquiry contributes to the resolution of our most troublesome normative disputes.[58]

---

[56] Williams B (1985), p52
[57] Nussbaum M (1995)
[58] Nussbaum M (1995), p88 (Formatting mine)

Nussbaum's thought is that these assumptions represent a misunderstanding of Aristotle. All three assumptions contain a notion of human nature as viewed from the "external" perspective, that is, viewed from the perspective of scientific investigation. This is what Nussbaum means when she refers to the "an absolute understanding of nature"[59] (Nussbaum also calls this a "top down" view). We may call this an external view on human nature because it is supposed to come from a completely impartial perspective.

Nussbaum's Aristotle needs no such "external" conception of human nature, and according to Nussbaum never assumed this model of external validation of the ethical. She suggests that the notion of human nature that Aristotle was working with was one of the kind employed in the reflexive language of praise and condemnation in a normative context—for instance when one call murderers animals or one praises a simple act of empathy as touchingly "human". Nussbaum's Aristotle takes this talk to have a distinctive content which delimits the extent to which we extend or retract the predication of humanity to some kind of life or other.

So, when one says that a murderer is an animal, for Nussbaum's Aristotle, what one is doing, is retracting one's assent that their kind of life should be considered a distinctively human one. Of course, one does not, thereby, come to see the murderer as not *biologically* human, but rather as an ethically defective human. It is only because they are human that one holds them culpable. If one thought them genuinely animals, then one would not judge them murderers at all. Rather, what they do is awful because they are human beings acting like animals.

This raises the question; "Why should it matter whether or not we assent to a life as being characteristically human or not?" Human nature, after all, is not something that is assented to. One typically thinks of it as a description of the kind of thing one is, not as the kind of thing one chooses to be. Well, one might think that *reflection* on that nature is important in as much as it sets the kinds of goals and projects one can take to be one's own. Nussbaum asks us to consider this passage from Aristotle:

---

[59] This is Williams's phrase, see Williams B (1985) p52.

It *seems likely* (*eoiken*) that it [friendship] belongs by nature (*phusei enuparchein*) to the

parent towards the child and the child towards the parent; not only among human beings, but even

among birds and most animals; and that it belongs also to members of the same nation towards one

another, especially among human beings. This is why *we praise* those who love and benefit other

human beings (*tous philanthropos*). And *one might also observe* in one's travels to distant countries the

sense of recognition and affiliation that links every human being to every other. It *seems likely* that

philia holds cities together as well (1155a16-23)[60]

She then comments that:

If this were put forward from the outside, as a neutral anthropological observation, it would

have little force or relevance for an interlocutor whose behaviour exhibits a different pattern. But   as

an invitation to each reader to consider, within him or herself, the depth of certain evaluative beliefs,

and their implications for his project of continuing as a member of a certain kind, it has considerable

force.[61]

The subject of reflection here may be human nature, as considered from the perspective of natural

science, but the product of that reflection certainly is not—it is a concept of what the agent takes

themselves to be. That is to say, reflection on oneself— which must be reflection on the lived

experience of a human being— produces a concept of "human nature" which enters into one's sense

of self, one's personal identity and the kinds of life one can see oneself as living. The product of the

process of reflection will be a notion of human nature tinted with the already existing ethical

viewpoint of the one who carries out the reflection. Such reflection must be "internal" in Williams's

sense, as that reflection seeks to combine the values that the agent holds dear with the facts of their

physical existence.

This is a not a conception of human nature which can be accessible through natural science

alone. Being inaccessible to natural science alone, this conception is, thereby, not answerable to it

---

[60] Nussbaum M (1995), p104
[61] Nussbaum M (1995), p104

alone. The truth or falsehood of propositions about our internal conception of human nature is not demonstrated by natural science. Indeed according to Nussbaum, Aristotle's conception of human nature is answerable to ethical concerns and is not, therefore, to be drawn upon to deduce the correct ethical outlook. One's ethical outlook is taken to shape one's normative conception of the human being, not the other way round.

Having arrived at a specification of human nature "from the inside", one might wonder "how could such a conception of human nature do any ethical work for Aristotelian *naturalism*?" The Aristotelian idea I presented in the first section, seemed to suggest the Aristotelian must be able to show that human beings are in fact only functioning correctly when their lives are shaped by virtue. What it was to be a properly functioning human being was to be decided by an objectively accessible picture of human nature.

However, Nussbaum is asking us to re-consider proper human functioning in terms of our own reflections upon human nature. One's reflections upon human nature may indeed show one that one thinks, that to function well as a human being, is to strive for virtue. However, the question remains "why should one suppose that anyone else's, let alone everyone else's reflection must take the same course?"

To say this, however, would be to misunderstand the notion of reflection Nussbaum employs. Reflection on oneself need not merely be a project of looking inwards; it can involve discussions with other people. Aristotle's method, according to Nussbaum, is to be used as a way of justifying social and political principles—and so its conclusions must be appropriately social, born of discussion. Ethics has a social function, that of justification. Proper ethical reflection cannot simply consist of some, isolated, Sunday afternoon, chair-bound reflection.

Ethical reflection must draw on the experiences and conceptions of the community to which it aims to speak, and so, if it is to be conducted properly, it cannot be done resting only on what one values oneself—it must allow for a plurality of voices in the community. The thought is, that we do not carry out the necessary reflection on human nature on our own, but rather, because the subject matter of ethics is fundamentally social, the proper form of ethical reasoning consists in conversation between ethically engaged people.

Works of art, fiction, oratory and other sources create a general culture in which we come to understand ourselves as human beings. It is in this way, one comes to have a conception of the good life, eudemonia, by discussing what it would be to lead a good human life with other people, and changing our conception of ourselves in order to orient ourselves towards it. This, Nussbaum takes to be implicit in Aristotle, because she regards it as a widely accepted fact in the "tragic" society of ancient Greece:

> In speaking of human nature, they [the Greeks] deal with beliefs that are both evaluative and, in the broadest sense, ethical— beliefs about what is worthwhile, worthless, liveable and not liveable. They are matters for communal judgement and decision, not for independent investigation and discovery. They are internal to the community, and they serve to explain it to itself.[62]

This kind of investigation is an examination of what is choice-worthy from an ethically informed perspective, the results of which may be expressed as forming a normative conception of human nature. That normative conception of human nature becomes itself an ethical tool, employed in justifying our ethical beliefs, an exhortation to others on the basis of a common set of shared concerns, to see what one has seen oneself as choice-worthy as choice-worthy as such.

Given that the Aristotelian task is social, community oriented, it will only succeed if this exhortation includes, not only what is choice-worthy for ourselves, but choice-worthy for all[63] (within the society to which one is appealing). While this appears mysterious at first, that mystery soon disappears when we consider that an ethical project is by nature a social project, and it must involve discussion with others which will shape the course of our reflection on ourselves.

We may then say that, whatever falls outside of this range of action does not constitute part of a "truly human" (truly choice-worthy) life, as it is not a life anyone in the community (considered here as the community of all humankind), could see themselves living, while remaining themselves. It is from this perspective, a defective life, a life where one who leads it does not get what they need.

---

[62] Nussbaum M (1995) p101
[63] It seems that for Aristotle this choice-worthiness "for all" would not have included what was good for women or slaves. However, Nussbaum need not be held to this conviction.

The virtuous understand virtue, and with that understanding, therefore, they come to see certain values *as* human values. When that gaze is turned on the human being, they will therefore see in that human being certain values—they cannot fail to if they understand virtue. This is not an imposition of ethical thought on the realm of biology and empirical science, but rather a judgement on human beings, rendered from the perspective of the virtuous; supported by their understanding of virtue and the worthwhileness, or otherwise, to be found in human life and action.

Against Nussbaum's picture of Aristotelian naturalism, we can see that Williams's objection from *ELP* fails. As Nussbaum shows, the Aristotelian need not be engaging in the project of which they seem to be accused in Williams's criticism; an "external" derivation of virtue from biology. Nussbaum's idea is not to discover, from an examination of the biology of the human being, a proper functioning which upholds the life of virtue— it is to construct a notion of proper functioning by first-personal and social reflection on human nature. The Aristotelian need not be concerned that Williams's thought that the "outside" view of the human being presents us with a picture of an evolved creature to which only minimal teleological features (such as basic needs), can be applied.

Knowing the facts of one's biological human nature, does not change the fact that one attributes importance to certain values over others, or that one find certain actions and ways of living to be acceptable or unacceptable. For the Aristotelian, the question is not one of re-thinking that biological nature in order to replace that biological conception with a normative one, nor can the concept of the biological human nature replace the normative conception.

The viewpoint of ethics is the viewpoint of an ethical agent asking the question "What do I have reason to do?", and that question requires answering by concepts that can move those who hold those concepts to action (or ideally should move them so), those concepts will be recommendations concerned, not with prediction, but persuasion, rational or otherwise. The biological notion of a human being, as an evolved primate, is still vitally important to this second exercise, because it represents one's best understanding of what one is, biologically speaking; determining the physical possibilities of action and the fact of one's finitude. The Aristotelian can quite comfortably accept that what we are might have many different instantiations and caveats. However, that fact itself, is one

among those that can be ethically reflected upon, so that one might come to an understanding of how people different from oneself can live rational, choice-worthy lives *in certain circumstances*.

Williams comes to agree upon this point on in his "Replies" in *Mind, World and Ethic[64]s*:

> I do not now want to claim that the Aristotelian enterprise requires a 'top-down' derivation of ethical conclusions from a scientifically respectable account of human beings... I grant that the enterprise may be understood in coherentist or hermeneutical terms.[65]

Williams concedes that the Aristotelian may come to have a conception of human nature which is predicated on a hermeneutic process of reflection. However, he cryptically adds that this process would be easier within the confines of an Aristotelian cosmology:

> ...I still think that, in leaving behind Aristotle's cosmology, the modern world has left behind elements necessary to making his style of ethical theory as a whole plausible, however many useful thoughts we can quite certainly gain from it.[66]

 The reason for this is not entirely clear. Without the necessity of predicating their account of proper human function on a teleological conception of biology, the need for any Aristotelian cosmology seems to have dropped out of the Aristotelian's argument. Thus, Williams's worry seems to miss the point. For the remainder of this section, I will attempt to give some sense to his cryptic qualification.

(ii) Interpretation and the Aristotelian Method:

The Aristotelian, then, wishes to identify proper human functioning with the life virtue via the identification of certain ways of living as worthwhile. This argument is a Davidsonian interpretation argument. Davidson's interpretation argument concerns languages. Davidson posits that we cannot understand any behaviour as a language unless we can come to see that behaviour as being capable of

---

[64] Williams B (1995)
[65] Williams B (1995), p200
[66] Williams B (1995), p201

expressing true sentences. Thus, understanding any given behaviour as being language behaviour depends upon that behaviour being able to express at least some core set of concepts that we can understand. Exotic languages may lack our concepts of weight or number, but we could not come to understand them as languages unless they could express the concept of individuated objects.

This mirrors Nussbaum's explanation of the Aristotelian method:

> "He [Aristotle] is asking what transitions are such that they create a form of life that is not human at all, and so, *a fortiori*, not liveable by a person whose identity includes humanness as (at least) a necessary element."[67]

Aristotle's thought, as expressed by Nussbaum, is that the shared problems that human life presents to human beings mean that we can only understand, as a truly human life, a way of living which involves values oriented towards easing those shared problems. Any life which lacked values aimed at the amelioration of human need is thereby not in the running for a life we could identify as that of the properly functioning human being.

I shall be assuming, for purposes of this piece, that the interpretation argument, when applied to human life, expresses a truth. One can, however, hold the conclusion to be true in either a strong or a weak form, depending on how determinate one imagines the process of attributing shared values must be.

In a strong form of the conclusion, the values attributed would have to be a determinate set of values. These values would then become part of the definition of what it is to be a human being—by virtue of the fact that nothing that lacked those values (in lieu of defect) could be a human being. I shall call this position the "strong interpretation thesis".

A weak formulation of the conclusion, on the other hand, need only claim that we must interpret other human beings as having "some" values we share, without pinpointing exactly what the values that we must share are. That is, the weak formulation need not name a set of values which are

---

[67] Nussbaum M (1995) p92

definitive[68] of what it is to be a human being. There is, of course, still a definitional claim about human beings contained in a weak formulation of the conclusion; human beings must share some values, but which values human beings must share, is left undetermined—this leaves open the possibility that one might share some values with one group, and other values with another. I shall call this the "weak interpretation thesis".

To say that proper human functioning consists in virtue, is to come down on the strong side of the thesis. The possession of the virtues implies the possession of certain values. A compassionate person must value human life, and a wise person must value knowledge. According to the Aristotelian, the virtues are essentially human—their possession defines, at least to some extent, what it is to be a properly functioning human being. That is to say, it is natural to, and characteristic of human beings to come to possess the virtues. Hursthouse presents this as the "Aristotelian claim about the virtues"[69]:

'(The) virtues arise in us neither (i) by nature nor (ii) contrary to nature, but (iii) nature gives us the capacity to acquire them and completion comes through habituation.'[70]

She takes this claim as analogous to the claim that, it is natural and characteristic of human beings to learn language:

The claim above is made up of three bits, and, in the case of language it goes (i) language does not arise in us by nature; each of us has to be taught to talk. But (ii) it does not arise in us contrary to nature either ... And (iii) we suppose that, far from being blank slates as far as language acquisition is concerned, we are naturally able to receive language/have a natural capacity to learn a first language – any first human language – through initial training, and to complete the process ourselves. Given a training by our elders in our early years, we babble away, and after a time, we've got it.[71]

---

[68] By definition here I do not mean to suggest a sufficient condition, but a necessary one.
[69] Hursthouse R (2012)
[70] Hursthouse R (2012), p169
[71] Hursthouse R (2012), p170

The thought then, is that, much as it is part of the life of a well-functioning human being to be taught and learn a language, so it is a part of the life of a well functioning human being to be taught and learn the virtues.

One might take this to suggest that if the Aristotelian is committed to any interpretation thesis, then it must be the weak thesis—what human beings must have is the capacity to develop the virtues, not the virtues themselves. By analogy with language, there need be no one language that the properly functioning human being learns, but the properly functioning human being certainly has the capacity to learn language.

The virtues, however, are not like language in some respects. The virtues as defined by Aristotle are a specific set of dispositions that appear in certain characteristic forms, unlike language which may appear in many different kinds and types. On the one hand a language may consist in words, written symbols, hand gestures or any number of other means of expression, so long as they make the speaker intelligible to others. On the other hand, to come to possess the virtues is to learn to adopt a certain set of values and to connect those values to particular modes of action. There may be many different kinds of bravery, but they all consist in the same thing, to be able to stand one's ground against fear in the name of some good. This implies not only a behavioural disposition on the part of the agent who possesses the virtue, but also a proper appreciation of the good:

> One way in which people just do vary is that they are more sensitive to the sorts of considerations cited in the X reasons of one virtue than they are to those cited in another. But the virtues do not thereby become completely discrete, isolable character traits, for not only do the ranges overlap but the same sorts of judgements about goods and evils, benefits and harms, what is worthwhile and what is unimportant crop up all over the place.[72]

By "X reasons", Hursthouse refers to those reasons for which virtuous action is chosen—"he chose to rescue the child from the burning building because the child was in danger". The virtues do not

---

[72] Hursthouse R (1999), p130

involve only the possession of dispositions to act, but also dispositions to act for certain reasons[73]—the appreciation of certain values.

If then, the Aristotelian wishes to suggest that the virtues are natural to human beings, they must suggest that certain ways of valuing action are natural to human beings. That is, that it is part of what makes a human being a human being to adopt a particular set of values which make possible the virtues. As I have already mentioned in section 1, for Foot, human life could simply not go on unless it is natural to human beings to possess certain virtues. They are as definitive of us as the fact that trees gain nutrients through their roots is definitive of what it is to be an oak tree.

Foot, Hursthouse and Nussbaum wish to get at this definitional claim not via the teleological biology dismissed in section 1. Rather, they wish to make a claim about interpretation- that we cannot see a human life as non-defectively human, unless it includes the virtues. In this view, it is impossible to see any given being as a properly functioning human being without understanding them as possessors of virtue and the values that the virtues imply—because we could not intelligibly interpret them as such.

Thus Foot, Hursthouse and Nussbaum must be committed to some form of the strong interpretation argument; it must be that properly functioning human beings possess the virtues, where the virtues are a determinate set of dispositions towards action, which go along with the valuing of various aspects of human life.

(iii) St Just's Illusion; Problems with Strong Interpretation:

Williams's essay "St Just's Illusion" is concerned with showing that the strong thesis is untenable. Since Aristotelian naturalism of the kind just discussed, implies a form of the strong thesis, if the strong thesis is untenable, then the Aristotelian project will not be able to establish that the properly functioning human being must possess the virtues via the interpretation argument.

---

[73] The virtuous man recues the child because the child is in danger, the vicious man rescues the child because he expects praise and fame for the feat.

It should be noted that Williams's argument is not intended to show that the strong thesis is, as a matter of fact, false—it is intended to show that one cannot establish the strong thesis *a priori*. This has the consequence that if Williams is correct in his criticism of the strong thesis, then it would be impossible to establish Aristotelian naturalism *a priori*. In order to understand Williams' argument in "St Just's Illusion", it will be necessary to commit to some exegesis of the piece.

The paper begins with, and indeed the title of the paper is derived from, a reference to the work of Marx and Engels. The details of Marx and Engel's philosophy are unimportant here—however, the general idea is that one's structures of thought, including one's thoughts about value, are shaped by one's material conditions. St Just's Illusion was to take the material conditions of one time as being fertile grounds for the ideas of another time. Williams agrees with the general idea and makes the point with respect to the value of freedom:

> ...the extent to which a specifically political freedom can satisfy the need for freedom is itself something that varies with historical conditions. What is necessary for freedom and what is sufficient for it may reasonably and honourably be understood in different terms in different historical circumstances.[74]

This raises the question as to how we are to understand the notion that it is specifically the concept of the value freedom that is changing, and not simply a succession of different values which are given the name "freedom" in different times and places. That is, we might ask ourselves what item we actually pick out when we speak of any given value, and whether there is one such item, which then has different necessary and sufficient conditions in different historical circumstances.

The question that Williams raises is that, if there are different conceptions of the value of freedom, how are we to understand the ways in which those conceptions are related—this will then cast light on what Marx and Engels called an illusion, the mistake which St Just is supposed to have made:

---

[74] Williams B (1991), p136

One obvious suggestion is that in order to understand the relations between ancient and modern liberty, we should look to a tradition, a historical narrative, in terms of which the earlier ideal was transmuted into the later. On such an account, it will be this transmutation that Saint-Just overlooked, and it seems he did do so, since he overlooked the world that must have contained it: as he memorably said in his condemnation of Danton, 'the world has been empty since the Romans.'[75]

We might try to make sense of the idea of a single concept of freedom, or indeed any given value concept, by giving a historical account of those values which have passed under their name. Ideas change over time, this is a fact of history; there is no reason why we should think value concepts as exempt from this process. We might then try to understand the mistake that St Just made as ignorance or misinterpretation of the historical changes to the concept of freedom across its history. We could detect a mistake like this by looking at the historical record, taking note of the debate about the notion of freedom as it evolved over time.

Williams, however, identifies a problem with thinking of the connection between those conceptions of value as being purely historical. That problem is that historical connection cannot explain the motivational effect of the concept in different historical settings. That is to say, there is a question as to why there is any historical connection at all. If the concept of freedom expresses a value, and that concept is indexed to a particular time and place, why use that concept to express a different value in a different time or place—why not simply ditch the concept?:

A historical account is necessary, and in principle it could be enough. Yet it is hard to believe that these conceptions do not have some more intimate connection with each other than is revealed simply by giving a historical derivation. Indeed, how could the supposed revival of the ancient conception have been announced to modern people, above all by Rousseau, with such electrifying effect if it did not speak to something which in their actual circumstances they wanted under the name of freedom?[76]

---

[75] Williams B (1991) p136
[76] Williams B (1991) p136

There must be some common thread that holds the conception of a value together across time. Williams's thought is that this common thread must be something that is wanted by those who want freedom—some invariant core of the concept that can be understood through all ages, which presents itself as being valuable.

For the Aristotelian, this invariant core is the function that the value plays in human life. Since the human beings of the past were also human beings, what is good for us was also good for them and vice versa. That is, although a value is re-interpreted in different times and places, there remains at its core some good that human beings want and use the concept to express.

This would be, however, in Williams' words "to confuse the rhythm and the dance"[77]. He concedes that there must be some invariant core to a value which allows us to understand it across time, but he identifies that primitive core as a shared human problem. Williams calls this the "basic or primitive conception" This primitive core allows us to make sense of other beings as human beings because we can see it as structuring what they value, as well as what we value :

At the root of both ancient and modern liberty there is one basic or primitive conception of freedom: this is freedom as power, action unimpeded, in particular, by other people.[78]

This commits Williams to what I have called the weak thesis. We share these "primitive conceptions", or "basic values" with others, and it is that fact that allows us to understand ourselves as striving for something similar to our historical ancestors when we strive for the values they held dear, such as freedom.

Williams, however, does not think that, in identifying this primitive core, we do very much. Although identifying the primitive conception, in some sense, gives us an insight into the good that people strive for when they, say, desire freedom, what wanting that good means *must* be filled out in detail. The specification of basic freedom which Williams gives is "action unimpeded, in particular, by other people"—but this still leaves us a great number of questions: Whose action? Mine or the

---

[77] Williams B (1991), p136
[78] Williams B (1991), p136

action of others on my behalf? Unimpeded how? Merely not interfered with, or actively supported? Unimpeded by which others? By one's family? By the government? All of these questions must be answered—and the answers one gives must be justified:

> ...primitive freedom is not in itself a political value at all, perhaps not even a social one. A social value implies a social space in which that value can be intelligibly claimed, and to claim freedom must always involve more than simply claiming power. It is no news to anyone ever that people want the means to do what they want to do. If I make a claim in the name of freedom, then I must do more than say that I want power. I must provide some reason why specifically I should be able to do some certain thing to you, or you should not be able to do some certain thing to me.[79]

Williams thinks, of course it is the case we all want to be free, but what it means to be free at any time or in any place will differ. Williams's thought seems to be that a primitive value must come to have, aggregated around it, modes of justification that appeal to the society in which the claim of that primitive value is being made, if it is going to be intelligibly claimed at all. That is, a justification of one's action or policy in the name of freedom can only be sensibly be made in a context where there is some shared idea of what it is for someone to be free, or to lack freedom. There must be some shared understanding of what it is for someone to be free—perhaps that they are not persecuted by the law, or that they are not physically restrained etc.

The primitive value represents something deep about human beings; it is a need or a want that we share, but that primitive conception is not itself a value which can be used as a justification. In and of itself, it constitutes a claim to power, and that claim must have a context and circumstances in which it is recognised as justified if it is going to serve as a value. This Williams calls an "elaboration" of the basic idea:

> ...every conception of freedom as a social or political value is an elaboration in political or social terms of that primitive idea of freedom as power; it involves, for instance, an interpretation at the

---

[79] Williams B (1991), p137

level of social experience and argument of the frustrations and resentments involved in the obstruction of power. The question of what is involved in what I have too easily called 'an elaboration' is of course enormous, and much philosophical and historical work is concerned with that question: work, for instance, on the varying conceptions of oneself as a public or a private person.[80]

Contained in this notion of "elaboration" is the idea that there is some underlying problem which finds different expressions in different times and places—in the case of freedom "the frustration and resentments involved in the obstruction of power". That is the basic stuff of human life, but it does not come ready-made for social and political discourse; it must be interpreted into the appropriate shape to be a value. The primitive conception of a value must be made "thick", in order to have a role to play in action oriented reasoning.

The illusion Saint Just was labouring under, by Williams's reckoning, was to take an elaboration of a primitive idea to apply to a time and a place where it did not fit; where the conditions which connected that elaboration into a social and political world, in which the claims it made could be justified, were no longer present. The mistake was to assume that the elaboration of a primitive idea, taken from a time long past, could be unproblematically transplanted into the present. What allowed that elaboration to function depended on the material circumstances of the time in which it was presented.

The possibility of identifying such a disconnect must be predicated on the possibility of the "outside" view that Williams spoke of in *ELP*. The elaborations of primitive ideas that one accepts as justified are dependent upon the ethical upbringing one has acquired, which in turn depends upon the social and intellectual circumstances in which one is brought up. An "outside" view allows one to see that the social or intellectual circumstances in which one lives, in which one makes claims on the basis of elaborations of primitive ideas into a system of rational justification, need not be the social or intellectual world of others. Circumstances are very different all over the world—and that suggests that many values may differ all over the world. Williams uses St Just's Illusion, as explained this way,

---

[80] Williams B (1991), p137

in order to mark a divide between values that we recognise and can engage with, and those that are alien to us:

> Saint-Just's illusion marks the meeting-place of two spaces that we naturally treat differently. One is the space of our actual social and political life, within which we encounter various political and ethical demands and ideals, argue with them, adapt ourselves to them, try to form a conception of an acceptable life within them. The other space, of which we may be conscious only in a very shadowy way, is of other conceptions and ideals and world-pictures that human beings have had, may perhaps still have elsewhere, which are not part of our social and political space, are not even starters for a life we might now lead, and are – strictly in that sense – alien to us.[81]

The alien conceptions are those that propose that we live a life that we cannot[82]. No one can now live the life of a Roman senator any more than that senator could live the life of a member of the British Parliament. Williams proposes this as a "strict sense" of alien, because those alien conceptions of value are still *human* conceptions of value—they can be, or were, held by human beings. On the other hand, any life which we *could* lead, is not alien to us-it is a possibility for our living. This is the space of "actual social and political life". If however, the fact that we cannot see any reason for someone's holding something valuable does not render what they value alien, then what does?:

> Saint-Just's conception was alien to late 18th-century French society, just because it was drawn from a world in which the social structures, economic forms, and people's needs, were very different... A set of values might be more alien than this. It has been a concern of philosophy to ask how alien they might be, and still be recognisably human values. Consider a society which, at least when we encounter it, has no relation to our history: an isolated, small, traditional society on the other

---

[81] Williams B (1991), p139

[82] The distinction Williams makes here between conceptions of values that are alien to us, and those that are not, is very similar to the distinction he makes in "The Truth in Relativism" between notional and real conflicts between systems of belief. This will be discussed later in this section. Williams B (1975) "The Truth in Relativism" in his (1985) Moral Luck, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

side of the world. The people of this society seem to have beliefs, practices and values very different from ours, which are certainly in no way candidates for adoption in the world we live in.[83]

Both ways in which Williams suggests a conception might be alien to our own are essentially the same thing "that value does not relate to the world in which we live". However, there are two importantly different ways in which this might be so.

In the first, we can make some sense of the conception in light of the fact that it is drawn from our tradition. It offers up a solution to a basic problem which our tradition has offered many solutions to—however, the solutions it offers are not the kind which we can actually apply, or would if applied, not solve our problems. The application of Roman values to the modern day, if it is to be done in such a way that those values are not re-interpreted to fit the world in which we live, can offer us no answer to our contemporary questions. The works of Seneca, understood as Seneca understood them, cannot hold answers to the question of the justice or otherwise of zero-hour contracts. Conceptions like this are not suited to our world, in as much as they address a world that has disappeared.

The other way in which a conception might be alien to us, is that we could not even identify it as being part of our traditions. Such conceptions might be part of a different tradition, addressing different problems and in different ways. These conceptions do not address our world, because they address another world. That is not to say that any of these conceptions do not concern the lives of human beings on the earth, but rather, what is meant by 'world' here appears to be something like 'social world', the world considered, not as the totality of facts, but rather the space in which we justify ourselves to others.

This thought raises questions of the interpretation of other cultures, and just how far away from our own conceptions we can coherently consider their conceptions to be:

> It is a familiar idea that we are not merely given the beliefs, values and so forth of such a society: faced with their activities and utterances, enjoying (or otherwise) their company, we have to interpret these things. We are also familiar with the idea, developed powerfully in philosophy by

---

[83] Williams B (1991), p140

Donald Davidson, that we could not come to understand these people without building into our interpretation at a structural level some assumptions about the ways in which their experience and thoughts resemble ours.[84]

To interpret someone else, so that they make sense to oneself, means one must assume that they share a general conception of the world with oneself[85]. That is to say, that if it is possible even to interpret some kind of creature as a human being, then one must be able to think that they have a conception of, say, objects, of a similar kind to the one's own (or to be able to provide reasons for thinking that they could if they were not currently suffering some incapacity—such as being new born, seriously injured etc.)

In order to make sense of the idea that other human beings are engaged in action, as one must if one is to make sense of them as human beings, one must be able to see them as having some values—and those must be some values that one shares. As I have already said, without *any* shared values, one would not be able to see what others were doing as being in any way worthwhile, and, at that point, one would have to doubt their identification as human beings at all. As it stands, all that one needs is the weak thesis. So far, one could recognise others as human beings if one could see in them human needs, which they took comprehensible steps towards meeting. In identifying in them human needs, one could make sense of at least some of the other's actions—one sees that they desire water, food and shelter or even justice.

Virtues are thick ethical concepts; they can only be seen as reason giving by those who possess them as dispositions (barring cases of akrasia—inaction on, or failure to find motivation in, what knows one there to be reason for). Thus, the Aristotelian postulates, that properly functioning human beings learn a set of the same reason giving concepts—they come to value things in the same way. This proposes not only a shared set of problems, by which one can understand that others are human beings, but rather a shared set of answers to those problems which one can identify as the correct ones across cultures.

---

[84] Williams B (1991), p140
[85] Davidson D (1973), p19

Williams's response to this is not to deny it, but rather to claim that one cannot argue for it *a priori*:

> I am sure that in interpreting other people we have to take it that they and we have a good deal in common; it may well be, further, that some of what they and we have in common must be, if in a schematic form, some values. But we cannot be compelled to think, it seems to me, that the requirements extend as far as this argument claims, or that all human beings must share in some more or less determinate form the materials of an ethical life. It is not so much that I do not believe it to be true. It is rather that I cannot believe that it has to be true, that reflection on the demands of interpretation should be able to lead us to so substantive a conclusion. If it could, then philosophy would now have succeeded in doing what social anthropology and its intellectual ancestors over several centuries have failed to do.[86]

If it *had* to be true that properly functioning human beings shared the virtues (or other structuring considerations which would result in a shared structure of human ethical life), then the concept of "human being" would be defined in part by those ethical considerations. For Williams, this is an unacceptable conclusion, as it would not only intrude into the territory of the anthropological sciences, but also succeed where those sciences had failed.

Williams distinguishes two levels of question about human nature:

> One is the general level, at which we ask what are the basic psychological and social concepts that are needed to interpret both our own and other human activities. A second and more specific question, the question raised by the argument I am considering, is to what extent those concepts are both specific and ethical: how far, for instance, it is true that we shall be able to understand another culture's ethical practices only if we interpret them in terms of a range of virtues and vices that are familiar to us.[87]

---

[86] Williams B (1991), p141
[87] Williams B (1991), p142

At the basic level there are questions of human nature which may be answered by psychological and social concepts, and at a different level there are questions of to what extent those concepts actually capture the other societies we describe with them.

The problem, then, seems not to be the use of one's concepts in describing others—one describes the world in part on the basis of the thick ethical concepts one possesses— but the extent to which those descriptions are adequate in the description of the action of others who may not share those concepts. Williams picks out in particular the language of virtue and vice with regards to this— and one might question the extent to which our language of virtue and vice provide an adequate way of describing the ethical life of others.

One way to understand this thought is to speak of reasons. One might wonder, then, whether or not the virtues, as one understands them, really do appear as reasons other groups of human beings, when one describes their action in terms of the virtues?

In order not to prejudice the argument against the Aristotelian, we may leave aside for the moment whether or not the virtues do, in fact, provide reasons for other groups of people, whether they recognise them or not. All that this argument will require, is that at least some of the virtues that the Aristotelian wishes to include in an account of the properly functioning human being, are actually present in an account of human nature. The question, then, will be whether or not others actually possess the considerations that we predicate to them—whether or not bravery exists, as the virtuous understand it, in all societies.

One can see this in Williams's argument when he speaks of the basic value of justice. Williams concedes that justice is a social value that seems to be present in all societies, but even though it is present in all societies, one might wonder whether or not justice is the same thing everywhere:

> It may be that if we examined more interesting and more specific suggestions, and reached a better understanding of the basic forms of the need for justice, we shall come to see that we do need to

ascribe to human beings in every society a particular sentiment or disposition, something like a sense of fairness.[88]

What Williams thinks is necessary for establishing a shared ethical human life, is for one to be able to attribute to human nature a shared set of sentiments or dispositions. Hursthouse defines the only candidates for those dispositions, which might be virtuous, in a similar way, as "character traits". She takes these to be "strongly entrenched"[89] dispositions towards thought and action.

A disposition is something identifiable from the "outside". The classification of the dispositions native to human nature are to a large degree the subject matter of the social sciences. If the virtues are going to be a part of the life of the properly functioning human being, the dispositions that ground the virtues, must be a part of that life also—and their presence in human nature will be visible from the "outside" perspective.

An important aspect in understanding and explaining why others act in the way they do, is understanding what dispositions they actually possess. If one accepts the characterisation of virtues as dispositions, then one must accept that that same disposition need not be present in everyone who acts in a way which looks, from one's own perspective, like virtue.

Hursthouse suggests that what is necessary to someone's acting virtuously is not only that they possess the correct dispositions to action, but that they also possess the correct sensitivity to reasons[90]; sensitivity to reasons can be thought of as having dispositions to reason in certain ways. This opens up a space of the possible misidentification of the nature of another's action, by the use of the concepts that one has to employ in comprehending another's action.

Anyone who wishes to explain the behaviour of human beings must walk a line between understanding other people and understanding them, as they understand themselves[91]. The understanding of human nature, sought by Nussbaum, is of an ethical life, common to human beings,

---

[88] Williams B (1991), p143
[89] Hursthouse R (1999), p12
[90] Hursthouse R (1999), p131
[91] Williams quotes Clifford Geertz on this point, that the social sciences must approach other cultures: 'so as to produce an interpretation of the way a people lives which is neither imprisoned within their mental horizons, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a witch, nor systematically deaf to the distinctive tonalities of their existence, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a geometer' Williams B (1991) p143.

which may be seen via introspection of our own ethical attitudes. If one is to understand the behaviour of others, why they go for some things and avoid others, then we must use the concepts that we apply to ourselves. The concepts that we use may well be those of virtue. In understanding why it is that others and their societies do what they do, we may have to classify what they do as representing kindness and justice, bravery or temperance.

There is, however, a wide gulf between having to see the behaviour of others in terms of the thick ethical concepts we use, and that behaviour actually being explained by those others possessing the dispositions or character traits implied by the thick ethical concepts we possess. It may be that one must attribute virtues to others, who are motivated to action on the basis of considerations that one would not count as reasons (or the right reasons), because that is how one understands one's own action. But that does not mean that the disposition that is actually present in them, and which causes them to act, is actually what we would identify as a virtuous disposition. What counts as a virtue, and what does not, can be understood in terms of an intellectual tradition in which those virtues have been debated and discussed. This intellectual tradition and context might be called a 'worldview' and the worldview of another may lead them to act in ways that are, in many ways, similar to our own patterns of action, but the dispositions that ground those patterns need not be the same.

Describing the worldviews of others is the purview of the social sciences, anthropology and sociology, not philosophy (in so far as philosophy remains non-empirical in its research). While the social sciences are, to a large extent, soft sciences (this is not meant as an insult to them), and therefore their subject matter does not completely ignore everyday human concerns like ethics or politics (the kind of consideration that are irrelevant to the structure of a particle), they are, for all that, empirical sciences. They deal with empirical data and appropriate answers to their questions are justified by the use of the kind of empirical data which philosophers, for the most part, do not produce[92]. There is, therefore, the question of "with what warrant does the philosopher seek to answer these kinds of questions about human nature?"

---

[92] I am unclear what Williams would say about experimental philosophy, although what is written in "St Just's Illusion" would seem to support it, when the philosophical question concerns human nature. In any case, experimental philosophy is not the kind of philosophy that is engaged in by the Aristotelians in question here, and is therefore not relevant to this argument.

One must, as a philosopher, acknowledge, *a priori*, that we share something with other groups; human nature as seen from the perspective of biology. That shared life one must understand as containing shared basic problems which form the basis for human social and political life. As I have already said however, to identify a shared basic problem, is not to identify a shared way of living—a proper human function. There are many possible elaborations of the basic problem into social and political life, and that process of elaboration renders the basic problem into a thick ethical concept. To understand others, as they understand themselves, one must understand their thick ethical concepts and the dispositions which make possible, and result from habituation into, their way of life.

It may be that, as a matter of fact, there is such a thing as a common ethical human nature which allows one to understand all human societies and ways of life as springing from the same set of character traits or dispositions. Furthermore, it may be the case that there are thick ethical concepts that all human beings share and cherish as virtuous. However, if it is so, it must be shown to be so via empirical methods. We cannot do history and sociology *a priori*.

(iv) ELP and "Saint Just's Illusion":

The previous argument can be seen in the terms of *ELP*, in as much as we can see the difficulty that Williams is pointing to in "St Just's Illusion", is the question of how to harmonise the view of the human being from the "inside" and the view from the "outside". From the perspective of one who possesses the virtuous dispositions, it is necessary to make sense of others on the basis of those dispositions. However, there is still a question which may be posed from the "outside" as to whether the dispositions of others are, as a matter of fact, the dispositions which we possess that we must attribute to them.

In doing away with Aristotle's metaphysical biology, Nussbaum, instead, moves to an understanding of human nature drawn from those lives that we can identify as human lives, lives that we could see ourselves living. "Saint Just's Illusion" raises an important question against this method;

whether or not this method of interpretation can allow one to attribute to the proper functioning of the human being, the thick ethical concepts involved in allowing us to see one way of life as worth living against others?

The possibility of the "outside" viewpoint, coming to see that our ethical dispositions only make sense within particular social structures which have been made possible by a social and intellectual history, should cast doubt on that notion. It is true that all human beings share certain needs or basic problems, however, if one understands values in terms of their social role, one must understand that values that one possesses are not merely given by those basic problems. In different societies there are different ways of getting what one needs, and furthermore, there are different available conceptions of how those basic problems are properly elaborated.

In the previous chapter, I characterised one of Williams's objection to Aristotelianism to be that the space of human interests extends further than the space of proper human functioning. Now, I can put forth another way of understanding that claim; the basic human problems that we share with others, which allow us to see them as human beings, underdetermine what form the elaboration of those basic problems must take. Thus, these basic vales cannot be used in an attempt to establish that the life of virtue is the life of the properly functioning human being.

Williams holds open the possibility that we could come to identify a common, ethical, human nature—but we certainly cannot assume it, and it is that fact which makes sense of his opposition to Aristotelian naturalism. From his perspective, the Aristotelian's philosophising about human nature looks similar to a philosophical attempt to establish, *a priori,* that all properly functioning cars run on petrol.

(v) Summary:

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that the Aristotelian might avoid the force of Williams's objections to the method in *ELP,* by attempting to arrive at the claim that the virtues represent proper

human functioning from the "inside". In doing so, the Aristotelian may avoid Williams's charge that they are attempting to derive the virtues from human nature.

I have also argued that an attempt to do this will constitute an argument from interpretation. That is, an argument which posits that, in order to interpret a being as a human being, we must attribute to it some values which we share.

One can hold this conclusion in two forms, the 'strong' form or the 'weak' form. The 'strong' thesis posits that we must share with others a particular set of values (in this case, the values given by virtue), while the weak thesis posits only that we must share some values with others, in order to see them as human beings. Williams concedes that the 'weak' thesis must be true. On the other hand, he takes issue with the strong thesis. Williams understands values as essentially social objects which have histories, and which, in order to be identified in others in more than a schematic form, the dispositions from which they arise must be empirically identified.

3. NUSSBAUM'S ARISTOTELIAN NATURALISM

We have seen that modern Aristotelians object to Williams's criticism of Aristotelian naturalism in *ELP*, on the grounds that it represents a misunderstanding of the Aristotelian method. Williams, as I have already said, does concede some ground to the Aristotelian on this account. In spite of this, however, Williams remarks in a reply to Nussbaum:

> The Aristotelian approach takes for granted ... a strong view of the harmony among themselves of human capacities and needs. This assumption does, I must confess, seem to me more plausible if you can help yourself to an Aristotelian cosmology, than if you regard it as an open question whether the evolutionary success of humanity, in its extremely brief period of existence, may not rest on a rather ill-assorted bricolage of powers and instincts. [93]

Williams seems to suggest here that the Aristotelian attempt at arriving at a conception of human nature from the "inside"—that is without regarding human nature as rendering substantive ethical conclusions from an ethically neutral standpoint – is still, in some sense, relying on a view of what it is to be a human being that we cannot accept. In attempting to describe proper human function in terms of the life of virtue, according to Williams, the Aristotelian is committed to what I described as the 'strong thesis' (the thesis that a truly human life necessarily involves the values given by virtue). They will have to erode the boundary between the "inside" and the "outside" view on human beings, as Aristotle did.

In this section, I shall consider a way in which the Aristotelian might be thought to avoid the "strong thesis" by considering, in detail, Nussbaum's attempt at arriving at a conception of human nature from the "inside" in more detail. In subsection (i), I will show how Nussbaum attempts to establish that the life of virtue is the life of the properly functioning human being via cross-cultural coherence between conceptions of virtue. In subsection (ii), I will present an objection to Nussbaum's

---

[93] Williams B (1995), p199

cross-cultural method, to the effect that Nussbaum's method does not require, nor benefit from, associating virtue with proper human functioning. That is, that Nussbaum would be better off without naturalism. In subsection (iii), I will further argue that Nussbaum's conception of common human need cannot, in any case, play the role of determining that proper human functioning is identical with the life of virtue.

(i) Proper Human Function as Revealed by Cross-Cultural Coherence:

In her 1993 paper "Non-Relative Virtues"[94], Nussbaum argues that we can arrive at a conception of human nature from the "inside" that could render conclusions on virtue which are conclusions, in principle, acceptable to every human being. Her aim in the paper is to provide an account of the Aristotelian naturalism which allows it to lay claim to that universal applicability, without having to rely on a biological conception of human nature. In order to do this, she must show, against Williams, that the virtues are valuable in all human lives.

Human biology may be a bricolage of powers and instincts, however, one might think that, even though this is true, it need not mean one should give up on human nature as a focus for ethical reasoning. There are facts that no human being can ignore, and human problems which without solutions for, one cannot live. Nussbaum's strategy is to use the universal facts of human need with which all humans must deal, in order to create a conception of virtue which relates primarily to human responses to those needs. Regardless of the conflicts inherent in our nature which might lead us to hold different ethical positions, one cannot be neutral on one's needs:

> Everyone has *some* attitude and corresponding behaviour towards her own death; towards
> her bodily appetites and their management; towards her property and its use; towards the distribution of
> social goods.... No matter where one lives, one cannot escape these questions, so long as one is leading
> a human life.[95]

---

[94] Nussbaum M (1993)
[95] Nussbaum M (1993), p247

That is, one cannot be neutral on one's own needs if one wishes to live a life that is distinctively human—the only kind of life a human can rationally wish to live. When Nussbaum says "so long as one is leading a human life", she is thinking of the considerations put earlier in the previous chapter—that it might be possible to lead a life that one could not endorse as "human". If one is engaged in attempting to live a life that one can identify as a human life, that life must certainly include getting what one needs.

Nussbaum's thought is that one's experiences of these central human problems, and the means by which human beings have constructed solutions to them, constitute a body of empirical evidence for the practice of ethics. The work of ethics, for Nussbaum, is to sort through these experiences, to give them their proper hearing and place, and to draw from them conclusions about what behaviour could be considered virtuous from any ethical perspective. This would provide one with a set of increasingly robust reassurances, on which to hang our values, enabling one to always point back to human nature, as viewed from one's particular ethical standpoint, as the shared material out of which any good ethical theory must be built.

There are two overarching movements to her argument. The first aims to make sense of how we can think of the virtues in abstract enough terms, to cover the lives of all human beings (allowing judgements of virtue to be appropriately universal), while allowing that these virtues are sufficiently specific that we can speak about them in connection with our experience of life. The second movement takes the abstract account of the virtues and attempts to show that one can build that account into a substantive account which can show us what the shape of a virtuous life looks like.

The first movement of the argument is, I think, sound. Nussbaum supposes that the similarity of the problems human need must pose to human beings, must impose certain similarities across human experience. These similarities in human experience, Nussbaum argues, Aristotle captures in his categories of virtue:

> What he does, in each case, is to isolate a sphere of human experience that figures in more or less any human life, and in which more or less any human being will have to make *some* choices rather than others, and act in *some* way rather than others.[96]

The list of the virtues and vices is constructed from these spheres of human experience, and then naming what it would be to choose well in that sphere, a virtue, and what it would be to choose badly, a vice. To be clear, that is not the end of the work, but the start of the process—one's judgements about what is virtue and what is vice, within the sphere, are part of the evidence one provides, but they will be thrown together with the judgements of others, who may see things differently, and questioned in the course of the investigation.

This allows talk of the virtues to be exceptionally abstract, in some respects. The concept of virtue here is not yet a thick concept that has been connected to some practices and dispositions or other, of which one can give a list and set aside as reason giving. Instead the virtues here are a stand in, whatever practices or dispositions allow an agent to choose in a way they consider "well" in any given area of life. This is abstract because, so far, it tells one nothing about the nature of virtue, but instead tells one the kind of thing that may be conceptualised under the heading of "virtue".

From the perspective of the agent who accepts Nussbaum's formulation so far, they are the possessors of virtue, in so far as they think they choose well in some important area of life. They are possessors of vice in as much as they think they choose badly in these areas. One must speak of the perspective of the agent here, because as per Nussbaum's Aristotelian method, this understanding of virtue must come from the "inside". However, speaking of the perspective of the agent here might make the whole argument look like it is sitting on the precipice of triviality. "Of course", one might think "if we think that we choose well in some area of our lives, we think we choose virtuously."

However Nussbaum's point here, is simply reassurance that, whenever one discusses virtue with another who does not share one's own conception of virtue, one has in mind at least the same subject matter as the other—even if one has different ideas about what dispositions, in the end, are virtuous:

---

[96] Nussbaum M (1993), p245

> People will of course disagree about what the appropriate ways of acting and reacting in fact *are*. But in that case, as Aristotle has set things us, they are arguing about the same thing, and advancing specifications of the same virtue. The reference of the virtue in each case is fixed by the sphere of experience—by what we shall from now on call the "grounding experiences".[97]

This approach cuts off some fairly simple objections to Nussbaum's project. We might think, on the basis of the material presented in "St Just's Illusion", that we could not be certain that we were even speaking about the same things when we spoke ethics with an alien culture—that the accretions of culture built up around the protean facts of human nature obscured those issues from view.

This certainly cannot be true when we are speaking of virtues at this level of abstraction. No one, regardless of culture or creed will, once the basic concept has been translated, doubt that, to act justly, is to make the appropriate decisions about, say, how to treat a thief or a murderer. Given this, one can certainly give Nussbaum her next point:

> On this approach it, does not seem possible to say, as the relativist wishes to, that a given society does not contain anything that corresponds to a particular virtue.[98]

This much I believe Williams would accept as being generally true. It corresponds to the "weak thesis" on interpretation.

The abstract conception of virtue alone, however, gives the Aristotelian little succour. What has been established so far is that there are areas of human life in which one must make decisions, and one can appraise our decisions in those areas with the language of virtue, however, Nussbaum has not yet established the criteria by which one is going to judge these decisions—let alone which best embody human reason. Nussbaum has established what is going to form the body of the debate about virtue, but the process of judgement has been left open. Indeed, Nussbaum has not yet established that the process of judgement must be the same for all human beings encountering the point of decision.

---

[97] Nussbaum M (1993), p247
[98] Nussbaum M (1993), p247

As a prescription for ethical thought, this is certainly not viable— trivially so, given it rules no disposition out as a possible virtue.

How does Nussbaum think it is possible for us to move from this abstract specification of the virtues, to something substantial enough that we can all agree on it? Nussbaum lays out the transition thus:

> ...we can understand progress in ethics, like progress in scientific understanding, to be progress in finding the correct fuller specification of a virtue, isolated by its thin or "nominal" definition. This progress is aided by a perspicuous mapping of the sphere of grounding experiences.[99]

The abstract virtue, then, is a sort of functional, "nominal" stand-in for a more developed account of the virtue. The idea being that there is some grounding experience or other, which refers us to the sphere of choice the abstract virtue term stands for. She compares this to the Aristotelian example of naming thunder:

> We begin with some experiences—not necessarily our own, but those members of our linguistic community, broadly construed. On the basis of these experiences, a word enters the language of the group, indicating (referring to) whatever it is that is the content of those experiences. Aristotle gives the example of thunder. People hear a noise in the clouds, and they then refer to it, using the word "thunder". At this point it may be that nobody has any concrete account of the noise... But the experience fixes a subject for further inquiry.[100]

It might be objected, at this point, that it is not really possible to refer to such an experience before some reflective understanding of it has been achieved. That is, one might not think it was possible to refer to the sound of thunder, until one has in place some concept of what it is that we are talking about. In the ethical case, one might say that one could not really refer to a sphere of choice in life before one had some concept of that sphere—and that seems to threaten that there will be some

---

[99] Nussbaum M (1993), p248
[100] Nussbaum M (1993), p248

cultural relativism at this level; that one will not have any warrant to assume that the spheres of life identified and inhabited by oneself, are the same as the spheres of life another might identify and inhabit.

I think this response would, however, get the approach wrong. What is important is, not what word one uses to capture the experience of thunder, but the fact that we all hear the same sound. It is by virtue of the fact that one hears the sound that there is anything to talk about at all, and that any reflective understanding of that sound can come into place. In the ethical application of this example, what is important, is that human beings all share the same sorts of bodies, and that these bodies pose everyone problems[101]. It is enough to get the theory off the ground that one can point to common things these bodies do (like die if you don't put water in them), and build one's conceptions around those facts.

Now, the profoundly deaf cannot hear the noise we call thunder, and so a society of the profoundly deaf could not even talk about it. We must assume, then, that human beings are not profoundly deaf to human need and, therefore, human beings must have a body of experience surrounding human need to draw from and consult in identifying the abstract virtues. These experiences will fix what one is talking about when one speaks of virtues, but they must also presumably be exercised in one's inquiry into those virtues— just as one investigates thunder by putting one's experiences of thunder together with the experience of others. This amounts to a sort of ethical empiricism, where one put one's ethically informed experiential beliefs about need together, to come to ethical conclusions:

> When we understand more precisely what problems human beings encounter in their lives with one another, what circumstances they face in which choice of some sort is required, we will have a way of assessing competing responses to those problems, and we will begin to understand what it might be to act well in the face of them.[102]

---

[101] The problems I point to here are of the most general kind, things like "if one does not eat then one will die". In subsection (iii) I will argue that identifying shared problems may not be so easy, as what constitutes a problem and a solution to it, is a culturally "thick" affair.
[102] Nussbaum M (1993), p248

The thought is that one must go and look at the ethically informed experience of agents and take seriously what they take themselves to need and what they conceive are the right ways to go about this. The thought is that, in looking at other cultures and viewpoints to see how they conceptualise virtue and vice, one shall come to see that there is a good deal of coherence between those viewpoints. The abstract conception of the virtues allows us to identify similarities between one's own viewpoint and other viewpoints, by presenting all viewpoints in terms in which they can communicate. The hope is that by identifying similarities between viewpoints, one can construct an ethical viewpoint that puts the similarities in those viewpoints into a coherent whole.

How can one make sense of this cross-cultural coherence? I imagine that one could do so thus: Imagine a world with only two ethical viewpoints on human life S_1 and S_2[103]. These correspond to what Nussbaum calls the "nominal" definitions of the virtue. They embody different accounts of virtue and vice in the sphere of N (which we take to be a sphere of human need), by virtue of the different ethical experiences in the sphere of N possessed by those in S_1 and S_2. One might further imagine that there were possibilities of action—that is to say ways of satisfying the need— in N, a and b. It is obvious that there are more than two possibilities of action in any given sphere of human experience[104], however, for now, it will be useful for the purposes of abstraction to imagine that there are only two in N.

According to S_1, a is virtue while b vice; according to S_2, b is virtue and a vice. In S_1 then, a represents proper human function and in S_2 b represents proper human functioning. What Nussbaum would want in this world, is a new ethical viewpoint S_3 ,which allows us to see S_1 and S_2 either as two parts of a coherent whole, which could serve to explain both of them, or which comes down on the side either of a or b by putting together experience of N from S_1 and S_2 into a coherent whole.

---

[103] This mode of expressing a cross-cultural confrontation is borrowed from Williams's "The Truth in Relativism". Williams B (1975) "The Truth in Relativism" in his (1985) Moral Luck, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

[104] Indeed it is more complex than this S_1 and S_2 might not even share the same concept of what constitutes action, or indeed what constitutes a human possibility and in having different concepts of action will imagine the space of possibilities for action in N differently. I am assuming in this example then that there has already been some discussion between adherents to S_1 and S_2 , which has resulted at least in a common identification of that which can be done in N.

The thought is then, that this S_3 could resolve the question of whether a or b is proper human functioning. S_1 and S_2 disagree on the virtue of a and b, and it is at the point where the conversation between them begins that this abstract thought experiment is no longer helpful; the shape of S_3's opinion on a and b would have to be given by a discussion between holders of S_1 and S_2, the substance of which would consist in comparing and contrasting the ethically informed experiences of a and b, with respect to N, possessed by holders of S_1 and S_2. The holders of S_1 and S_2 might come to see that a and b were suitable in different contexts, or that holders of S_1 were only in favour of a because they had been ignoring some feature of a which made it unacceptable to S_2 holders, of which they come to appreciate in conversation—in any case, the important thing is that, there is such a conversation, and that all parties are talking about the same thing.

It is possible to infer, on the basis of what was explained in 2(i), that this ethically informed experience must rely, for Nussbaum, on the agent's possession of a normative conception of human nature— the experiencing agent possessing some conception of what they can imagine as a life befitting themselves and things like them (as mentioned earlier, this is the way that Nussbaum makes sense of the possibility of ethics in general). Without such a conception in play, it is difficult to see how an agent's experience of human need could count as the kind of experience that could do ethical work for Nussbaum. This can be seen in Nussbaum's summary of her position:

> Here, then, is a sketch for an objective human morality based upon the idea of virtuous action—that is of appropriate functioning in each human sphere.[105]

An experience, which was not already ethically informed, would not suggest that any action within a sphere was more appropriate than any other (so long as the need was met)—appropriateness implies a normativity absent in the mere satisfaction of needs[106].

---

[105] Nussbaum M (1993), p250
[106] There are many ways in which to satisfy one's needs. If I am hungry I can buy food or I can steal it—both satisfy the need, but the need itself does not tell me which course of action is appropriate. My stomach cares only for its fullness.

This rules out, at the start, questions about theoretical immoralists, and their contribution to the whole—they are simply ruled out of consideration. After all, this is an investigation from the "inside". So, for Nussbaum, one's possession of a normative conception of human nature is absolutely central to the possibility of cross-cultural coherence, as it lends one's beliefs the correct character to enter ethical consideration. To be clear about the second movement of the argument, its force relies upon the fact that all human beings share the same needs, and, in sharing the same needs, there is a common basis for the conceptualisation of solutions to those needs into virtues.

Because human beings share the same needs, different groups of people will often cultivate the same sorts of dispositions in response to those needs—dispositions, the possibility of which, anyone will need to acknowledge as forming part of a fully human life. The hope that Nussbaum holds out is that, in discussing everyone's responses to needs, one can come to generally acceptable conclusions about them, generally acceptable conclusions about virtue. These generally acceptable conclusions will "fill out" abstract specifications of the virtues in terms of spheres of human experience, in which some decision is needed, by putting together the viewpoints that one already possess into some coherent whole.

As so stated, Nussbaum's theory seems to escape Williams's claim that the Aristotelian is illegitimately attempting to show virtue as the best expression of human reason by assuming that the virtues define of normal human function "from the outside". There is a sense for Nussbaum, as I have currently pictured her, in which the virtues define proper human functioning, but they do so because they are constructed in order to present a cross-cultural understanding of solutions to human need.

The virtues are a part of proper human functioning in as much as they are designed as solutions to human need. That is, in order for us to be functioning properly as human beings, we must find solutions to our human needs, solutions provided by virtue. A theory like this would not seek to suggest that human reason is best encapsulated by a set of already existing, determinate, thick ethical concepts. Instead, it would seek to engage in a conversation whose theoretical end-point would be thick ethical concepts that everyone could accept. It would start out with the abstract notions of virtue, and use them as tools in a debate about virtue, the hope being, that this debate would eventually—

with the participation of all interested parties—result in all of those parties coming to accept some single thick interpretation of the virtue.

However, if that is the approach, then the proof of the pudding lies in the eating, and it is rather too quick to suggest that our conception of virtue constitutes an *already* universally accepted theory. As Nussbaum is keenly aware, all too often, public debates leave out the testimony of those who are marginalised in society—and if the idea is to build a consensus, then we can hardly assume that these marginalised voices have been heard. What the theory holds out is a hope that it could be a universally accepted ethical theory, because everyone could, in principle, come to hold it as true[107].

The virtues are supposed to emerge by investigation and discussion—and their claim to universality comes through their universal acceptability. This means that the filling in of these abstract virtues will shrink their scope to the point of those people who *have actually been asked* their opinion on the thin virtues, and to lend a hand in filling them in. Nussbaum is bound to run into trouble if her theory merely assumes that the discussion is going to have a determinate course, of which we are already in possession of the broadest outlines, so that we can already justify our ethical considerations in a cross-cultural manner, by appeal to human need. We have not, as a matter of fact, engaged in a general forum with every culture of the world, with them identifying commonly recognisable spheres of human experience, sharing our experiences of those and coming to generally applicable conclusions of what constitutes a good response to human need[108].

What fact about us gives us the confidence to say that our own viewpoint provides us with the rough outline for what everyone else's, after reflection, must be? Well, one might think that one has to start from where one is currently, and that there is no sense in losing faith in our current ethical outlook simply because there are others.

---

[107] It would be necessary that such agreement was unforced. That is to say, that all those who professed to hold it did so in actuality, and not because they were coerced. The reason for this is that someone who has been coerced has not been asked to contribute their opinion to the great debate. This leads to interesting questions about how to bring up children, whether moral education constitutes coercion, and the limits of what we should regard as unforced consent. All these ideas are too complicated to be discussed here, but Williams provides an interesting discussion of them in Williams B (unpublished) "Realism and Moralism in Political Theory" in Hawthorn G ed. (2005) In the Beginning was the Deed, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

[108] It might be argued that the United Nations is in fact just such an organisation and forum, its many and various declarations on human rights constituting the conclusions of the discussion.

(ii) Williams's Rejoinder:

This would be a most sensible thought. However, even with this said, one might worry about the structure of Nussbaum's Aristotelian theory. Nussbaum replied to Williams's worries initially by suggesting that the process of reflection that produces the normative conception of human nature was social. That is, by looking at other cultures and identifying in them aspects of an ethical life with which one can sympathise, one might come to share, with them, an understanding of proper human functioning in terms of a set of ethical dispositions. However, without the substantial specification of human function, from "the outside", should we not lose confidence in the notion that the life of virtue really does represent proper human functioning, and its lack, a defect?

It is here that a second reading of a Williams's quote presented in the previous section becomes relevant. Let me give a fuller quotation from *MWE*:

> If we are to honour the special requirements of a human life, the argument goes, we must look not just for any structuring use of reason, but for one that could itself form the basis of a social life; the use of reason in the life of the wicked or self-indulgent person is not an example of this. This line of argument is not as simple as it may look. ...Glaucon and Adeimantus , agreeing that humans are essentially rational and that they essentially or typically live in society , could still deny that human reason is displayed at its most effective in living according to the restrictive requirements of society. The Aristotelian approach takes for granted, against this, a strong view of the harmony among themselves of human capacities and needs. This assumption does, I must confess, seem to me more plausible if you can help yourself to an Aristotelian cosmology, than if you regard it as an open question whether the evolutionary success of humanity, in its extremely brief period of existence, may not rest on a rather ill-assorted bricolage of powers and instincts.[109]

---

[109] Williams B (1995), p199

In the previous quotation of the passage, I gave only the lines closest to its end, where Williams announces that the Aristotelian view is more plausible, if one can help oneself to an Aristotelian cosmology.

I would now, however, like to show the lines preceding the remark about Aristotelian cosmology; Williams's invocation of the *Republic*. In the course of the dialogue, Glaucon and Adeimantus hold a position which concedes that human beings are essentially rational, but disagree that the best uses of human reason aim at a harmonious social world. Bringing this up as an example would make no sense if Williams were engaged in the rather simple point of calling Aristotelianism anachronistic— pointing out that the Aristotelian conception of human nature is not our own. He would have been much better served simply quoting Aristotle's natural science, if that was his aim.

The point, I think, is better understood as a more complicated one about the relation of the agent to their concept of themselves and others in ethical reflection. That point seems to me to be that any Aristotelian naturalist has to assume, in reflection upon themselves, that there is such a thing as the "best" way for their rational capacities to be expressed, and that the best way is virtue. However, the Aristotelian naturalist must make this assumption in the face of a vast array of different ways of living compatible with a biological conception of human nature which must also factor into that reflection.

The point could be put like this; What argument could Nussbaum give to Glaucon and Adeimantus to persuade them that the life of virtue, and not a life of vice in which all human needs are met, is the life of the properly functioning human being?

She might attempt to appeal back to the aforementioned shared spheres of life, but they did not themselves determine what virtue and vice was within them. The problem is that Nussbaum's theory does not assume that there is any body of fact outside of anyone's S which will settle the question of what counts as virtue or vice—the project of cross-cultural coherence proceeds from the inside. The shared spheres of life do not settle the question; they merely puts forward the space of possibilities that allow both parties to make sense of their conversation having the same subject matter.

Human nature is shaped by the demands of natural selection, and it is therefore not absurd to think that many different kinds of human life are viable (in the sense I used in section 1). Whatever one must regard as human function, is shaped by evolutionary demands, which have resulted in the panoply of different ways in which human beings live. If one follows Nussbaum's naturalism, one must, in one's own ethical reflection on human nature, come to the worryingly contradictory conclusion that all those who do not share the life of virtue are defective and biological human nature cannot single any one, viable, way of human life out as privileged above the others.

What this worry should open up is the question of whether, in the end, the notion that virtue is proper human functioning can be aligned with human nature? Reflection upon this question could undermine confidence in the possibility of synthesising any kind of ethical viewpoint which will bring the facts about human nature into line with the viewpoint of virtue. This reflection should remind one of the gap between the "inside" and the "outside" perspective, and the gap between what one values and the facts about what human beings need to value, in order to live viable lives.

It is a fact about human beings, that ,for some humans, war has the same appeal as a game of strategy, that humans sometimes enjoy the suffering of others, and that the promise of power and victory can displace from one's thoughts everything else—can we be so sure that none of these features of human nature do not feature in a true account of human nature? Being so presented with the "crooked timber" of human nature and its internal contradictions, should serve to shake one's confidence in the possibility of calling the life one holds dear "the life of the properly functioning human being".

Furthermore, this is not a worry that must be presented from the outside. It is one's own ethical reflection, one's own nature as an "ill-assorted bricolage of powers and instincts"[110] which raises the difficulty in responding to Glaucon and Adeimantus. These worries are apparent from the first person perspective on a human nature—in one's reflection on one's own nature one is presented with conflict between one's biology, circumstances and one's value, such as the knowledge that one may only be able to live happily at the expense of others (as we do so in the West right now), or the knowledge that one may have to compromise one's health, in order to do the job one loves.

---

[110] Williams B (1995), p199

If Nussbaum is without an effective response to Glaucon and Adeimantus, Williams might well agree with her thought that our ethical viewpoint is best constructed by a process of cross-cultural conversation, hopefully resulting in a viewpoint acceptable to all. However, he might reasonably doubt Nussbaum's idea that reasoning ethically "from the inside", on the basis of human need, must result in a conception of virtue as proper human function.

(iii) Human Need and Ethical Reflection

One response that Nussbaum might give to Glaucon and Adeimantus is that the substantial account of the virtues represent the only genuine way of getting one's human needs met. In that case, the substantial account of the virtues one achieves through cross cultural-coherence would ,indeed, be the best expression of human reason—proper human functioning—they are the only expression of human reason up to the task of meeting human need. I said earlier that Nussbaum would run into trouble, if she assumed that the discussion which produces the specification of the virtues had a determinate course. I should now like to expand upon that thesis.

In identifying the "filled in", substantial, specifications of the virtues (which one gleans via ethical investigation) with proper human functioning, it looks as if Nussbaum will have to say that the virtues which we come to agree on in conversation with others are *really* shared by all human beings. That is, that the process of conversation is not constructive of the virtues, but revelatory of them. One might cite in evidence of this passages like:

> ...the Politics as a whole presents the beliefs of many different societies it investigates not as unrelated local norms, but as competing answers to the questions of justice and courage (and so on) with which all societies are (being human) concerned, and in response to which they are all trying to find what is good. Aristotle's analysis of the virtues gives him an appropriate framework for these comparisons, which seem perfectly appropriate inquiries into the ways in which different societies have solved common human problems.[111]

---

[111] Nussbaum M (1993), p249

The above paragraph seems to cast the enquiry in a slightly different light than I have been presenting it. Not as aimed at coming to conclusions with which everyone can agree, but coming to solutions for human problems that can be recognised from some independent standpoint as the best solutions to those problems.

That is, it seems to present the discussion about the virtues as being aimed at coming to understand facts about proper human functioning, which were previously hidden from view, but which the discussion makes evident. That is, Nussbaum here seems to assume that there is a determinate course the discussion must take, and the course it must take, is decided by human problems and efficient solutions to them.

This would put the structure of the theory in line with the Aristotelian thought that the virtues are necessary to getting what one needs. That is, Nussbaum's thought would have to be that, what emerges from cross cultural discussion, is answers to the question of ,"how is it that human beings get what they need?" If that is the structure of the inquiry into ethical experiences, then it looks like it is supposed to produce conclusions that stretch to the entire human race, even those whose testimony has not even been accepted. Once the appropriate facts about proper human functioning have been uncovered, they can be applied, without those to whom they apply needing to accept them at all.

The thought would be something like this: understanding human experience of one's finitude and needs provides one with a greater understanding of what it is to deal well with human need. The progression of ethical thought is not reflection upon what people can and cannot accept, but is better thought of as a process of developing more and more effective remedies to human need. Indeed it does look as though Nussbaum *does* imagine herself to have shown something like this to be true, which is stronger than I have already attributed to her. However, I believe that her move from the position to which I have attributed her, to a stronger one, cannot be sustained.

Nussbaum's theory works, in as far as it does, because it is a theory that works from the "inside" out. It does not begin by questioning the credibility of one's own ethical viewpoint, indeed it relies upon it to deliver a specific kind of empirical evidence, ethically informed empirical evidence.

However, from an ethical viewpoint, it is clear that it is not only needs that matter, but how one goes about satisfying them, one cannot conscience taking drinking water from the frail hands of a child dying of thirst—even if one does need it.

The need, for example, water, is linked into a system of thick ethical concepts, desert, self-control and reasonableness, to name but a few. These undoubtedly figure in the estimation of the appropriateness of any given response to need, and, thus, they must figure in our estimation of what constitutes virtue or not. So, when one renders an ethical judgement on when one should or should not drink, an important part of the judgement one renders can only be explained by understanding the concepts that lie behind the judgement. Everyone has complicated networks of ethical beliefs that are, on first glance, completely inexplicable to those who do not share those networks—we British, for instance, believe that the state owes the citizen free medical care. To understand why, one needs to understand quite a lot of the history of British political thought on, and policy surrounding health issues.

In light of what was said in the previous subsection, when one, as a reflective subject of one's own ethical consideration, comes to consider the relationship of one's own conception of humanity to the problem of the human need for healthcare in illness, it must be a part of one's own reflection to understand that there are many ways of solving that problem. It must be so, because when one reflects on one's own humanity, a part of that reflection is, pace Williams, an understanding that human evolution gives no prescriptions for the way in which healthcare must be handled, other than that if one is going to survive, it must be handled.

It would be a misunderstanding of one's own reason for me to say that the standards of appropriateness that apply to one's own conception of healthcare are universal. All this is to make again the point, that needs are not yet values, and to say that human beings must have their needs fulfilled, is to say no more than that they must have some values that go towards getting their needs fulfilled, but it need not say anything about the nature of those values.

Proper human functioning consists in getting what one needs, in part by possessing values that allow for getting what one needs—but one need not specify a particular set of values here, only the possession of some values or other which get the job done. It would be a mistake to assume that a

conversation in which the participants came to agree on strictures of appropriateness on the satisfaction of needs, need delimit the strictures of appropriateness that apply to the satisfaction of all human need.

For example, human beings need to eat or they will die, but one group might translate that need into valuing the glory of the hunt, while another group might get what they need by valuing the hard work of the field. For each of these groups there are different ways to appropriately get one's needs fulfilled, and the other group represents an inappropriate way of going about getting that need fulfilled.

These strictures of appropriateness can be understood as different elaborations of "basic problems", as mentioned in "St Just's Illusion". That is to say, as elaborations of basic problems, they are culturally thick, and they are linked into a system of claim and justification, in which certain claims come to be seen as justifications for certain kinds of action in the light of an intellectual tradition. These elaborations alter, to some degree, the specification of the problem. In our own society the problems presented by food and poverty are not the same problems that are suffered in societies which lack our relative wealth. That is, the problems faced by the poor in Britain are not the problems faced by the poor in Libya. One can identify the basic problem which links these notions of poverty together, and one can even suggest that charity might be a solution to these problems—but what charity *is* in those different contexts is completely different. Charity in these contexts will involve different social structures and justifications.

This is not simply a question, again, of creating a disjunctive conception of value in which different conceptions of virtue such as the hunter's and farmer's can both be recognised as virtuous ways of going about getting what one needs. Both values can take the functional role of facilitating the fulfilment of need, but that does not make them equivalent—in this case the conception of the need is different, so, while the conceptions relate to the same problems, they can only accept some answers as being answers to the question of need. They share ends to some degree, but those ends come apart in others, the hunter and the farmer do not want the same things—and it would be to ignore what was actually going on in their different societies to pretend that they were both operating under the same virtues.

The farmer wants peace and quiet, the hunter wants the thrill of the chase. There is no sense in which we can rely on need to provide us with a specification of a determinate set of values necessary to the satisfaction of those needs, such that we could judge our current ethical outlook against them, and Nussbaum's theory must be incorrect in as much as she supposes we can.

Nussbaum's theory is correct, while it sticks to the abstract specification of the virtues, i.e in so much as it sticks to the 'weak thesis' from "St Just's Illusion". So far as it does, it offers an interesting ethical theory predicated on discussion between ethical viewpoints.

That theory cannot, however, show us that virtue is natural to human beings in the sense that virtue represents proper human functioning The fact that we can see in human beings a common set of needs, and discuss with other groups of human beings what we think should be done about those needs, does not mean that we must assume that the solutions, at which we arrive, thereby present us an ethical theory against which all human lives may be judged.

 Nussbaum, therefore, fails to establish the legitimacy of her method as one for showing the truth of Aristotelian naturalism. Williams can accept what she says about ethics operating from an internal viewpoint, but reject the idea that we must consider the virtues to define proper human functioning. In both *ELP* and in "St Just's Illusion", the reason for this is that we can see the possibilities of many kinds of human life, many of which do not include what we call virtue, and the lack of which, for those who live those lives, cannot be said to be a failure to function.

(v) Summary:
.

Nussbaum attempts to establish the thought that the life of virtue is proper human functioning by enjoining us that we can recognise and discuss virtue across cultures. However, if she wants to suppose this, she must also suppose that shared human needs come along with shared criteria of how to appropriately fulfil those needs—a shared way of human valuing.

Against this, Williams sounds a note of scepticism when he identifies human beings as a "bricolage of powers and instincts". The thought that emerges is that, in the process describing virtue as the proper functioning of the human being, the Aristotelian, by their method, will have to make some claims about the structure of the human being. Claims which, by virtue of the fact that we are aware of our evolutionary heritage, when reflected upon, cannot bear the weight of their application across the whole human race.

What is at stake is the idea that we can look at our own ethical judgements as being the products of a legitimate pattern of reflection on human nature; that is, the idea that there is some importance in holding such judgements to be true. I have responded in Williams's fashion, that although there is something to a Nussbaum conception of ethics, as requiring cross-cultural coherence, that reflection on human function need not leave a privileged place for judgements of what virtues are 'natural' to us.

4. FOOT, HURSTHOUSE AND MCDOWELL:

At the beginning of section 3, I presented Williams's challenge to the Aristotelian, that they find a way of vindicating the claim that, to live the life of virtue, is the only way to lead the life the life of a properly functioning human being—the only non-defective human life to lead. Furthermore, they must do this without appeal to a notion of human nature that is external to the sphere of ethics.

Nussbaum's approach to establishing this claim was to claim that virtue was best understood as cross culturally identifiable responses to human needs. The ethical reasoner could thereby establish the required confidence in the Aristotelian method by building these responses into a coherent whole that would form a picture of the best responses to human needs being always and everywhere the life of virtue—the best expression of human reason in response to human need.

I presented an argument that William's objections can undermine our confidence in this approach by pointing out that need vitally underdetermines what counts as a good response to those needs, even when that need is considered from the perspective of the virtuous. That our knowledge of the many and various powers and abilities of human kind, the bricolage that is a human being, should undermine our confidence that only one among those many responses to human need could be considered proper human functioning.

Nussbaum's approach however, is not the only one available to the Aristotelian. The Aristotelian might instead try to understand that claim as being one that is recommended by *our* reason. That is, the Aristotelian may suppose we need only demonstrate to ourselves—as opposed to other groups who do not share our ethical thought— that the life of virtue is the life of the properly functioning human being, in order to show that it is so. With this conviction in hand, there would be simply nothing else for us to think other than that the life of virtue is in the best interests of human beings.

Ethical reasoning in this picture is analogous to Neurath's boat. Otto Neurath once likened science to a boat which cannot be put into port and must be repaired at sea[112]. The metaphor is

---

[112]Neurath O (1932)

intended to convey that there is no theory-independent standpoint from which one can critically reflect on one's theory. Instead, we must rely on how well one's theory coheres with everything else one already knows. To place that metaphor in the ethical context is simply to say that ethical thought can similarly have no independent standpoint from which we may view its correctness or incorrectness, and similarly, that ethical beliefs must be assessed on the basis of how well they cohere with all our other beliefs. To say then, in this picture, that virtue represents the proper functioning of human beings, is to say that from the perspective of an agent involved in ethical reasoning, virtue just is proper human functioning.

Nussbaum's conception of ethics is one way of understanding this claim. However, the criteria upon which it operated were still fundamentally concerned with human nature, as conceived from the "outside"—human needs. Her project sought cross-cultural assent to claims of virtue, on the basis of those shared needs, in order to vindicate them as proper human functioning. However, the Aristotelian might do away with the notion of cross-cultural assent, and take the only criteria necessary to virtue being understood as proper human function, to be the role of virtue within one's own ethical outlook.

Ethical reasoning starts from the position of some assumptions or other about what is right and what is wrong—and it must employ those criteria to guide self-criticism. McDowell captures this thought when he says:

> Moving beyond the that to the because is moving from unreflective satisfaction with piecemeal applications of the outlook to a concern with how they hang together so that intelligibility accrues from the parts from their linkage to the whole.[113]

His thought is that first, in an ethical education, we are given a capacity to make certain judgements—such that "stealing is wrong" or "charity is a virtue"—and we can reassure ourselves that we are justified in those judgements by uniting them into a coherent whole which can explain the individual judgements.

---

[113] McDowell J (1996), p56

That is to say, according to this picture, the rational credentials of our specification of virtue are provided by ethical thought itself. For this reason I shall call this kind of coherentism 'rationally autonomous', its aspirations are to stay within the rationally autonomous domain of ethics—not to make ethics a mere "branch of biology /ethnology"[114]. Ethical beliefs are to be assessed by their relation to and coherence with other ethical beliefs and facts about human life, rather than against a standard provided external to the system.

An Aristotelian approach which accepts this coherentism, even though it stresses the autonomy of ethics, may remain naturalist—in as much as it retains an ethically informed conception of human nature as a structuring consideration in ethical reasoning. This is the approach taken by Foot and Hursthouse, the latter or whom, is heavily influenced by McDowell[115].

Foot and Hursthouse suppose that evaluations of human beings, in terms of good or bad, share a logical structure with evaluations of plants or animals in the same terms—rendering ethical assessments a species of normative natural assessment, dependant on the special kind of "flourishing" given over to any species. In section (i), I will attempt to explain the approach, while in section (ii), I shall explain how it might be supposed to escape the arguments I have put in Williams's name so far by the coherentist method employed by Foot and Hursthouse, which allows them to suppose that there is simply nothing else for us to think, other than that the life of virtue is the best expression of human reason. In section (iii,) I will suggest that this method faces a dilemma between relativism and implying strong interpretation of the kind ruled out in chapter 2. I will return to *ELP* to suggest, that if the Aristotelian starts from the position that virtues are essentially dispositions, including dispositions to reason in certain ways, then it will be impossible for them to put forth the Wittgensteinian argument without falling into a kind of relativism.

---

[114] Hursthouse R (1999), p257

[115] "To a greater or lesser degree" in virtue of the fact that the assumption that these three views fall together is essentially based on an understanding of those views taken in the main from Hursthouse interpretation of the other two. The most controversial figure to include with Foot and Hursthouse must be McDowell, because while his ethical philosophy is avowedly Aristotelian, he employs in its construction a great deal of Kantian material (see his discussion of Hume and Kant in "Two Sorts of Naturalism" (McDowell J (1995), in Hursthouse R, Lawrence G and Quinn W eds. (1995) Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory, Clarendon, Oxford) for a good example of this). To explore the extent to which the addition of Kantian material makes McDowell immune from the arguments directed at the Aristotelian here is outside of the remit of this piece, and so will be for now, left to rest.

(i) Rationally Autonomous Coherence and A Response to Williams

 I gave a brief outline of Foot's Aristotelian naturalism while explaining the concept of an "Aristotelian categorical" in chapter 1. I should now like to return to Foot and Hursthouse and give a slightly wider account of their Aristotelian approach.

In section 1(i), I mentioned that, for Foot, the language of human function relates to Aristotelian categoricals. Aristotelian categoricals include a certain normativity, defining, as they do, the pattern of life of the species to which they are correctly predicated. For both Foot and Hursthouse, to be a good living thing is to be flourishing in the characteristic manner of the species, and that means, getting what one needs.

I mentioned also in section 1 (i), that the way in which a human being flourishes cannot be considered to be exactly analogous to the way in which a plant or an animal flourishes—there is more to human life than reproduction and survival, and we must judge human flourishing against more than simply those traits which the human possess which allow us to do those things.

Flourishing is an end, and that end is getting what one needs—but what one needs, in Foot and Hursthouse's picture, is not only bodily health, but also to do with one's social relations and one's reason[116]. In short, one needs happiness, and what it is to flourish, is to lead a happy life[117]. Happiness here is not to be taken as mere fleeting satisfaction. Foot states that we should be suspicious of the idea that happiness could be "a state of mind which seems as detachable from beliefs about special objects as is, for example, having a headache, or a tune running though one's head"[118]. I do not wish to argue with Foot's conception of happiness for now, instead, I should like to return to the topic of virtue.

One must understand Foot and Hursthouse as proposing that the virtues are part of proper human functioning in their regard to happiness—the virtues are what characteristically make a human

---

[116] Foot P (2001), p44
[117] Foot P (2001), p92
[118] Foot P (2001), p90

life a happy life. In *On Virtue Ethics*, Hursthouse summarises this Aristotelian claim about the virtues thus;

> the claim is not that possession of the virtues guarantees that one will flourish. The claim is that they are the only reliable bet—even though, it is agreed, I might be unlucky and, precisely because of my virtue, wind up dying early or with my life marred or ruined.[119]

and

> To claim that the virtues, for the most part, benefit their possessor, enabling her to flourish, is not to claim that virtue is necessary for happiness. It is to claim that no 'regimen' will serve one better—no other candidate 'regimen' is remotely plausible.[120]

At first glance this looks like a rather cruder interpretation of the virtues than Nussbaum gives us. The first quote suggests that, to cultivate the virtues, is to "place a bet", that is to say, to follow a policy on getting the good life.

However, to say that that the virtues are the "only reliable bet" at the good life, seems to render them non-essential to proper human functioning in a way which any Aristotelian presumably wants to say that they are not. Hursthouse seems to be transforming the virtues from an expression of the proper functioning of human beings, to one among many kinds of bet, or policy—the payout being a good life which can be recognised, as such, from an independent perspective. That is, this seems to allow that there could be other bets that have nothing to do with virtue which have a chance at winning that jackpot, and that is something which one does not expect the Aristotelian to say.

The second quote, however, gives us reason to believe that this is not what Hursthouse is getting at, and that she is hinting at something rather deeper. The quote starts off, rather unpromisingly, by denying that the virtues are necessary for happiness, or the good life, but that they

---

[119] Hursthouse R (1999), p172
[120] Hursthouse R (1999), p173

are a good regimen for getting it. This paints the virtues as being analogous to a healthy diet or a regimen of exercise. One may end up healthy without either, but the only reliable way of getting at health is by those means.

Hursthouse, explicitly and repeatedly in *On Virtue,* draws an analogy between health and the good life, with virtue playing the role of medicine or exercise in the analogy. This allows one to make sense of the claim that the virtues are a "reliable bet"—it is a claim to the effect that the good life is more readily available to the virtuous.

However, even with this in hand, the quote can still be somewhat frustrating, because it is hard to see how she can justify the bold assumption that the virtues have any claim to be the "only reliable" regime for happiness. Might one not think that, even if virtue was a reliable, or indeed the only reliable route to happiness, that there might be individuals whose skills and interests made more vicious regimes more likely to succeed *for them*? "Yes", one wants to cry, "being virtuous might prove a reliable way of getting at the good life for other people, but what if I am *very good* at stealing valuable things from locked places, and very bad at respecting people's property? What could she say to me?".

Hursthouse does not regard such considerations as problematic, and the reason for that is evident in the second half of the second quote above, the notion that no other "regime" for life is remotely plausible. To say that the virtues are the only reliable bet for a life, is to say that they are the only kind of life which one would actually choose to go for, with hope in hand, of living a good life. That is, Hursthouse admits that the "wicked may flourish like the green bay tree"[121], however, the life of virtue, as Hursthouse puts it, is the only life which one would advise one's children to go for:

> This is something that we should find striking. Never mind, for the moment, about irresponsible parents who do not bother about their children's upbringing; never mind about the fact that some parents may have very corrupt ideas about what is involved in the exercise of some or even all virtues. If we just concentrate on the fairly virtuous parents who are fairly conscientious about their

---

[121] Hursthouse R (1999), p174

children's upbringing, is it not a striking fact, in this context, that (a) they try to inculcate virtue in their children despite (b) having their children's interests at heart and wanting to prepare them for life?[122]

The thought is this, if we are trying to offer someone advice on how to structure their life so as to be happy, does one not offer them the advice that they should lead the life of virtue? It may be that there are other ways in which one could get happiness, but they are not the advised ways. From the perspective of virtue, the other bets are not bets, they are desperate gambles—it may be that there are some who end up happy without the virtues, but what this represents is sheer luck, and is not the normal course of human life.

This returns us to Aristotelian categoricals, which Hursthouse classifies as: "For want of anything better, I suppose we could classify them as 'ethical but non-evaluative beliefs about human nature and how human life goes'."[123]. From the perspective of virtue, statements like "liars do not prosper", express ethical, but non-evaluative truths. They capture facts about what it is to live a human life-- accessible to those who possess the perspective of virtue. From the perspective of the virtuous, a good life cannot be dishonest life, because the habitual liar's life is a desperate gamble at the good life. These classifications aim to capture objective truths about the world, from the perspective of the virtuous. They do not aim to express evaluations of states of affairs, but rather generally applicable ethical truths about the course of human life.

Hursthouse's arguments, in support of virtue, are being put from the viewpoint of one, and to an audience of those, who already accept the claims of virtue. Generally speaking, Hursthouse assumes her readers, even if they are not avowed virtue ethicists, to be in possession of at least some of the virtues —and in being so, understand the kinds of reasons for which the virtuous person acts. They have learned a means of presenting possibilities of action in terms of good or bad actions, and if they are deliberating rationally, will pick the good, rather than the bad actions. By understanding virtue, those in possession of the virtues, therefore, only see certain kinds of life as possibilities for them—because they can only see certain kinds of life as being reasonable. Even though Hursthouse's

---

[122] Hursthouse R (1999), p175
[123] Hursthouse R (1999), p189

audience may suggest vaudevillian, moustache twiddling villains as counterexamples to her arguments, the readers themselves already accept to a large extent her conclusion, that one should act for such and such reasons if one wants a good life; that no other regime of reasons is remotely plausible for them.

This tendency can also be seen in Foot's *Natural Goodness*, when Foot discusses the limits of the good human life. For her, happiness is "conceptually inseparable from virtue"[124]:

> ...humanity's good can be thought of as happiness, and yet in such a way that combining it with wickedness is a priori ruled out. Wittgenstein in speaking of his life as a wonderful life certainly did not mean that it had been a life of virtue; but I am sure that he would not have counted as a source of happiness anything he saw as evil in it.[125]

From the perspective of virtue, happiness cannot stem from vice, because the virtuous cannot consider what is good or happy in their lives to have its source in vice. Foot here is not concerned with giving us a foundational account of happiness towards which the virtues aim. She is rather working already within the ethical sphere, trying to show us (that is the same us that Hursthouse is appealing to, the putatively minimally virtuous readers) that which she believes that we already accept, even though we might not know that we already accept it. If our conception of the properly functioning human being is a conception of a human being properly oriented such that their dispositions aim at happiness or flourishing, we must, according to Foot's understanding of happiness, include in that conception of proper functioning dispositions that we see as vicious. Further, we shall have to suppose that a human being oriented towards happiness aims at the virtues which are conceptually connected with our conception of happiness.

This is a project of uncovering and examining the standards by which we already live and seeing whether or not we (again the possessors of virtue), can justify them to ourselves as rational:

---

[124] Foot P (2001), p95
[125] Foot P (2001), p96

> The pretensions of an Aristotelian naturalism are not, in any ordinary understanding of the terms, either 'scientific' or 'foundational'. It does not seek to establish its conclusions from 'a neutral point of view'. Hence it does not expect what it says to convince anyone whose ethical outlook or perspective is largely different from the ethical outlook from within which the naturalistic conclusions are argued for. (So the Mafioso drug baron, or whatever other wicked character we imagine being unconvinced, is largely irrelevant.) But, for all that, it may serve to provide rational credentials for our beliefs about which character traits are the virtues, not merely re-express them.[126]

It is for these reasons that Hursthouse and Foot are unmoved by the same sort of relativist critiques that I put to Nussbaum in Williams's name—they do not seem to care to recognise any other ethical viewpoint as an ethical viewpoint, because from the point of view of one who is in possession of the right ethical outlook, other outlooks seem confused or mistaken.

This is tellingly present in Hursthouse's recurring character of the Mafioso, the kind of immoralist who might be invoked in a relativist critique of Aristotelian naturalism. Generally speaking, when one considers a Mafioso in a philosophical light, one is given to attribute to them a different set of ethical commitments than one possesses oneself, perhaps a concern with a certain conception of honour and family, which is needless to say somewhat different from our own. We might not consider these conceptions as fully rational, but one wants to say that one can at least imagine taking up the viewpoint of the Mafioso and seeing it to be both rational and ethical—that we could come to see them as not simply confused.

We might put this in terms of the Mafioso's beliefs, justifications and actions having some kind of internal coherency. However, when Hursthouse speaks of the Mafioso, she does not have this kind of character in mind. She speaks of someone who has what one might call an "antiethical" viewpoint, one who possesses nothing which we can understand as an ethical viewpoint at all[127]. This character is essentially an egoist of a rather pernicious kind. They do not act according to stable ethical commitments, they do as according to their desires and, if they were to give a justification of their action, that justification would be post-facto rationalisation. We cannot, if we are virtuous,

---

[126] Hursthouse R (1999), p193

[127] Hursthouse has expressed this to Simon Hope in conversation, and I relate it via this route.

according to Hursthouse, see, in the behaviour of the Mafioso, any reason beyond sheer selfishness, which is to say that all they can offer us is the pretence of reason. This raises a general question about whether or not we, the virtuously educated, can see that which we cannot see any reason for, as forming a part of a genuinely ethical viewpoint at all.

Williams thinks that we can see other viewpoints as ethical viewpoints, and that we can do so because all it is to have an ethical viewpoint for him, is to have a set of commitments that go deeper than mere egotistical wants and desires:

> I am, at the time of mature reflection, what I have become, and my reflection, even if it is about my dispositions, must at the same time be expressive of them. I think about ethical and other goods *from* an ethical point of view that I have already acquired and that is part of what I am. In thinking about ethical and other goods, the agent thinks from a point of view that already places those goods, in general terms, in relation to one another and gives a special significance to ethical goods. Looked at from the outside, this point of view belongs to someone in whom the ethical dispositions he has acquired lie deeper than other wants and preferences.[128]

On the basis of this characterisation, we might consider a different character, that of the Samurai[129]. Both the Mafioso and the Samurai display a disregard for human life that we, the partially virtuous readers of Hursthouse, regard as deplorable.

However, the Samurai justified their behaviour in light of a set of thick ethical concepts surrounding honour and what it was to be a warrior. They acted for reasons and modified their behaviour on the basis of reasons that did not relate to their desires or preferences. Williams would therefore say that they possessed an ethical outlook. This would still allow Williams to acknowledge that Hursthouse's Mafioso lacked an ethical outlook, the difference between the Mafioso and the Samurai is that the Mafioso does whatever they like and justifies it by post-hoc reasoning whereas the Samurai does what they see good reason to do, stemming from deeply ingrained dispositions to reason in an ethical way (they not only understand themselves to be bound by an ethical code, but they as a

---

[128] Williams B (1985), p51
[129] Williams B (1975), p140

81

matter of fact characteristically act in accord with that ethical code). The Samurai is therefore constrained in ways in which the Mafioso is not, and it looks plausible to call those constraints ethical constraints.

The possibility of Samurai like characters can make it look like Hursthouse is simply being insensitive to the possibility of ethical viewpoints, other than the view from the position of virtue. If we believe in the possibility of other ethical viewpoints, this looks like a pure and simple prejudice. Williams's objections to the Aristotelian are predicated on the possibility of recognising other ethical viewpoints as viewpoints. It is essential to his project that we can make sense of the idea of viewpoints which are not like those of the viewpoint of virtue.

The possibility of such viewpoints allows us to make sense of the idea that there are other perspectives available on human nature, other than the perspective the virtuous, which might lead us to doubt that the Aristotelian account of the ethical nature of the human being as the authoritative view. The Aristotelian project of proceeding from the "inside" seems, from Williams's perspective, to be making sweeping assumptions about the structure of human nature, as seen from the "outside". In "St Just's Illusion", Williams makes much of the fact that values are socially constructed, and that societies need not construct the same values. Accepting that different ethical viewpoints might be constructed from the same basic human problems made it possible to say that the question of the extent to which some creature must share human values, in order to be interpretable as a human being, was an empirical one.

Nussbaum's reply was to attempt to show that virtue was a concept used to characterise what we recognise as response to human need, an essential part of all societies without which human beings would perish. That I responded to, on Williams's behalf, by saying that it is possible to take up different perspectives on human needs, so that, what is seen as a solution from one viewpoint might look like neglect from another—and, in seeing that, we should come to doubt the authority of *our* perspective on that need. However, both the argument from "St Just's Illusion" and the reply I give to Nussbaum, would not fare so well if we could not make sense of the possibility of there being multiple *ethical* viewpoints.

When Williams speaks of an ethical viewpoint, he is speaking of an object dealt with by anthropology—a system of belief or a way of life. Hursthouse need not deny that there are systems of belief, or ways of living that differ from our own, however, she might deny that those systems of belief represent genuine reason giving considerations.

For Hursthouse, from our ethical perspective, we cannot understand the Samurai's viewpoint as presenting genuinely reason giving considerations, and the Aristotelian is therefore under no obligation to provide reasons to the Samurai[130] or to tailor their account of proper human functioning to include their lives. Virtue includes, by the Aristotelian definition, dispositions to think and value in certain ways—to see certain concepts as reason giving. To say that there is only one ethical viewpoint available, and that it is the viewpoint of virtue is to say that, ethically speaking, the only *genuinely* reason giving concepts are the reason giving concepts involved in the viewpoint of virtue.

In the case of the argument from "St Just's Illusion", it would make sense only to speak of values—things to be valued— in another's culture when one saw virtue in that other culture's output—and that would mean that we could not even make the claim, if we are, as Hursthouse assumes, at least minimally virtuous, that there were different values on offer. What one would see, when casting one's eye over another's culture, would be another attempt by other human beings to make sense of the same values that oneself has, the only values that one can recognise *as* values.

The reply to Nussbaum would similarly not get off the ground if it were impossible to coherently imagine a plurality of genuinely reason giving, ethical viewpoints. Were that the case, then there would be no sense to the claim that the satisfaction of needs might be taken differently. There is, in that case, a right way and a wrong way of going about getting what one needs, and the right way is the way demanded by virtue. It is in this manner that I take Foot and Hursthouse to be speaking, taking it as impossible to have a genuinely ethical viewpoint that does not involve virtue. The central plank of the position is that, from the perspective of virtue, one can only be expected to accept as rational considerations in favour of some ethical belief or other which one can see reason for. Since the virtuous can only see reason in what they see as virtuous, thus they must see the life of virtue as

---

[130] Hursthouse R (1995), p33

the life of the properly functioning human being—it is the only life which they can see as leading, barring cases of wild luck, to flourishing.

(ii) Second Nature

What, if anything, licences this way of going about things? Is it not merely a kind of dogmatism? That is, why does Hursthouse think that the viewpoint of the virtuous is the only genuinely reason giving viewpoint? Hursthouse sees the danger this theory might simply be taken as dogmatism. However she believes that McDowell gives us a way of understanding the Nurathian process which allows her not to have to consider aberrant ethical viewpoints (like the Samurai's) as being genuine ethical viewpoints without being dogmatic:

> ...I assume that he [McDowell] has shown that there is a space within which the rational validation of beliefs about which character traits are the virtues could proceed, unhampered by either the excessive demands of ethical foundationalism or the bogy of being nothing better than mere rationalizations of one's personal or culturally inculcated values. The particular judgements that emerged, bit by bit, from reflective scrutiny, within one's ethical outlook, might well represent a change in that outlook rather than expressing it. And those that were part of the outlook and survived the reflective scrutiny would not merely re-express it; they would now express, so to speak, that they had survived the scrutiny.[131]

The space, of which Hursthouse speaks, is McDowell's notion of "second nature". In "Two Sorts of Naturalism", McDowell outlines what he means by "second nature" in as much as it relates to ethical concerns[132]. McDowell considers our ethical thought to be culturally conditioned, but does not see that cultural conditioning as something that prejudices our thought, but rather that acquisition is what allows ethical thought to occur at all:

---

[131]Hursthouse R (1999), p166
[132] McDowell also gives an outline of what he means by second nature in *Mind and World* however, it is at that point directed towards other concerns and is therefore less useful for us in attempting to understand Hursthouse's Aristotelianism.

> Moral education does not merely rechannel one's natural motivational impulses, with the acquisition of reason making no difference except that one becomes self-consciously aware of the operations of those impulses... moral education allows one to step back from any motivational impulse one finds oneself subject to, and question its rational credentials. Thus it effects a distancing of the agent from the practical tendencies that are part of what we might call 'his first nature'[133]

McDowell calls the aspects of our thought that we acquire in this way "Second Nature" in order to express the fact that they are natural to us, although not merely given by "First Nature", that is to say the human being categorised as according to the biology.

The thought here is that it makes no sense to think of ethical education as merely an imposition on dispositions already possessed by the human being, from some outside force—like pressing wax with a seal—allowing the human being to give reasons and justifications for actions that they would want to take even without that rational structure in place. Instead, one comes to see one's introduction to second nature, as bringing into existence, rational capacities which may in turn be used to critique those judgements, which one was induced to see as natural by that education. Earlier in section 1, I quoted McDowell in order to show that Aristotle did not have to regard ethical education as setting one's dispositions in concrete:

> It is open to us to suppose that reflection towards the because, aimed at an accrual of intelligibility from seeing how elements of the that hang together, might issue in a reasoned modification of an inherited outlook. Elements of what has hitherto passed for that might not hang together satisfactorily, on reflective consideration in which one tries to integrate them so as to equip them with a because.[134]

In light of McDowell's notion of second nature, we can now read this quote as also proposing the possibility of reflecting upon the second nature that one acquires in ethical education.

---

[133] McDowell J (1995), p170
[134] McDowell J (1996), p56

That is to say, second nature is not merely a reshaping of the "practical tendencies" of first nature in line with some or other culture. Ethical education, for McDowell, brings into existence capacities for examining the reasons one has for acting—including those reasons one has learned to see via one's acquisition of second nature.

Before one is educated into second nature one is, as an animal, blind to reasons. After one has acquired second nature one can see reason in favour and against action. This might also be characterised as coming to understand the value of certain ends, coming to possess practical reason by having one's eyes opened to the worthwhileness of or otherwise of actions:

> In acquiring one's second nature...one learned to take a distinctive pleasure in acting in certain ways, and one acquired conceptual equipment suited to characterize a distinctive worthwhileness one learned to see in such actions, that is, a distinctive range of reasons one learned to see for acting in those ways. If the second nature one has acquired is virtue, the rationality of virtue is simply not in suspense, although always open to reflective questioning.[135]

What is especially important here, however, is the fact that as a part of coming to have a virtuous second nature, if one is lucky enough to get it, one comes to appreciate the virtues *as* rational considerations. That is to say, if one is properly brought up so as to gain an understanding of virtue, it becomes axiomatic in one's reasoning that the virtues are worthwhile. This is not however dogmatic, because it is open to one who possesses a virtuous second nature to examine what they take as virtue, in light of the rest of their ethical thought.

The thought is similar to the thoughts I attributed to Nussbaum earlier in section 2i, that ethics works from the inside. However, McDowell's thought has somewhat wider implications. For Nussbaum, the thought was simply that ethical thinking was in a sense irreducibly personal. That is the fact that ethics has to be viewed through the prism of our desires, ambitions and particular

---

[135] McDowell J (1995), p170

conceptions of human beings and the world, showed that Aristotelian approaches to ethics did not need to rest on a scientific accounting of human nature.

For Nussbaum, interaction with other systems of thought would, if we could engage them in conversation, help produce a consensus on the structure of virtue. This was so in virtue of the fact that we could evaluate their responses to human need and critique them as responses to human need. For McDowell, an encounter with someone, who had a different second nature from oneself, could only induce one to alter one's own conception of virtue if there was something in the other's thought that one could come to see as a rational consideration in one's own second nature.

McDowell's notion of "Second Nature", if a correct characterisation of our reason, shows that one cannot understand as rational considerations, considerations which do not hang together with one's own ethical thought. What another's second nature represents to them as rational considerations, if there is nothing in their outlook which speaks to our own, must look to us nothing like an ethical way of living—their second nature does not present to them considerations *we* can recognise as rational. As Hursthouse illustrates, from the perspective of virtue, we need not see other forms of second nature (say the kinds that licence lying and cheating) as presenting real possibilities for living:

> Contemplating the lives of, say, those who are wealthy and powerful, and, apparently at least, perfectly happy, but who lie and cheat and ruthlessly sacrifice some others when it suits them, we may find that we do not regard them as enviable or desirable at all. The wealth and influence might be nice to have, but not at the cost of living like that. And contemplating our own lives, we may find many sources of dissatisfaction, but quite possibly none that we attribute to our possession of such virtues as we have. On the contrary, we may find ourselves inclined to attribute some of them to the imperfection of such possession. 'If only I could be less selfish and self-centred, more thankful for what I have, more concerned with the good of others and the good in them, how much happier I would be,' is not an uncommon thought.[136]

---

[136] Hursthouse R (1999), p177

The Aristotelian, who accepts the notion of second nature, is preserved from the charge of prejudice here by the fact that second nature is rational nature, and therefore, shapes the possibilities of what will count as justification for living a certain way, to the possessor of a virtuous second nature.

It is not dogmatism to exercise one's rational capacities, even if in that operation one comes to see no reason for living as another lives. One can reflect upon the structure of one's ethical thought in ways that meet our criteria of objectivity and impartiality set forth by that ethical thinking itself. One can also, in this picture, hold oneself open to putatively rational considerations that are not native to one's own second nature, however, in order to enter into one's own reason they must pass muster under the rational criteria set forth by one's own second nature.

To put it more simply, the Aristotelian recognises that we do not all share the same viewpoint, however, they need not concede, therefore, that there can be other *ethical* viewpoints if those viewpoints do not look, from the viewpoint of someone who possesses the viewpoint of a virtuous upbringing, as though they have some rational considerations which recommend them as such.

This might seem like a kind of second order prejudice. A prejudice, not on the level of assuming the correctness of one's own viewpoint, but rather on the level of assuming that one's viewpoint contains the right tools for assessing correctness in these matters; assuming that one's own criteria of objectivity and impartiality are in fact objective and impartial in themselves.

However, we can see why McDowell thinks that such worries are incoherent in his phrase from "Two Sorts of Naturalism", that "Reason has only its own lights to go by"—one cannot get outside of the standards that one uses to reason, in order to test them by some other external standard. To insist otherwise, would be to insist on foundationalism in ethics, that is, that there was some available external standard by which one could judge one's ethical beliefs, to suppose that such a thing was a necessary component of anything which could honourably call itself an ethical theory.

With McDowell's notion of second nature in hand, Foot and Hursthouse are free to paint a picture of the life of virtue as being the life of the properly functioning human being. To explain, it is a thesis shared by all parties in this debate, that when one comes to possess virtue, one does so by coming to possess certain dispositions of thought and action.

Among these dispositions are dispositions to judge that things are a certain way in light of certain facts—one who possesses virtue can tell that kicking small, harmless, furry animals is cruel, because they are helpless and harmless. The facts then, for the virtuous, are not neutral—in the sense that it is not possible to get a grip on the facts about how things are, for the virtuous, without exercising all the concepts that virtue has given them.

In understanding a concept, one gains the ability to correctly apply it[137] and recognise the circumstances in which it applies. Furthermore, the Aristotelian presses that the perspective of virtue is the perspective that we (the understanding readers of Hursthouse) hold, and so, if we have been well brought up, we cannot make sense of the idea that anyone could think differently about human beings if they were thinking rationally. There are two upshots of second nature, and those are, if one believes McDowell to be correct, then one will a) see that ethics produces its own criteria for correctness and incorrectness, and b) see that to doubt the possibility of other genuinely ethical viewpoints is not simply to engage in a kind of prejudice. Thus, the argument that I have been putting forth on Williams's behalf would seem to fail. Reflecting on human nature from the perspective of virtue, what the virtuous see is indeed a bricolage, but they see in it the possibility of virtue and know that this possibility is the best of the possibilities available.

This Aristotelian counterargument hinges on a particular conception of understanding, a conception which is drawn from Wittgenstein's later philosophy. The thought is, on the face of it, simple. Speaking a language or conducting a piece of reasoning is like playing a game. In a game of chess pieces have proscribed movements, if one is engaged in playing chess one cannot simply decide that one's pawn is going to move backwards, move it so, and still be playing chess.

Chess is a practice, and understanding it means that one understands the space of possible moves. One can consider a language in this way. There are words in English which are set aside for insult, and it would either be a misunderstanding of English, or the result of some kind of previous agreement to use those words as a friendly greeting in English. Similarly, one can consider rationality

---

[137] Within reason. It does not count against one understanding the term "chair", that one might be baffled about what to call something that looked very much like a chair, but popped in and out of existence. Similarly, it need not count against one's understanding of virtue, that one might not be immediately come to see the right thing to do when faced with a difficult dilemma; say, being faced with a situation in which one must choose between killing a man and destroying a city.

this way, there are certain forms of argument that one cannot use if one is committed to the rules of rationality—the barefaced p&¬p for instance—to use such an argument is either to lobby for a changing of the rules of what goes as rationality, or to misunderstand them. Foot and Hursthouse's thought is that ethical terms carry with them rules of application like this, as Hursthouse says of Foot (and by extension of herself):

> ...what she takes herself to be doing is most certainly not putting forward a foundation for ethics. She is a Wittgensteinian through and through... and she is doing what Wittgenstein says is the work of the philosopher namely assembling reminders for a particular purpose. The general Wittgensteinian purpose is always to 'command a clear view of our use of words'; the particular purpose in Foot's case has always been to get clearer about our use of words when we are expressing or talking about our moral beliefs. When we evaluate someone as a good person, their action as right or wrong, their character as good or bad, what are we doing, what other uses of these words are these moral uses like?[138]

The thought that there could be other genuinely ethical outlooks, from Hursthouse's perspective, looks like a particularly philosophical mistake. We have become unmoored from our language, and we forget that we can make sense of it. The notion of second nature figures here as a way of making sense of the fact that the use of these concepts is undergirded by dispositions which are culturally conditioned, and that others may lack those dispositions—but that should not make us lose faith in the possibility of applying ethical concepts, because they are a part of our second nature.

(iii) A Problem for the Aristotelian.

It might be wondered, at this point, what more the argument I have given on William's behalf has to say to the notion that we cannot make sense of other ethical viewpoints at all? It is, I think, possible to give a response on Williams's behalf against the coherentist considerations put forward in the

---

[138] Hursthouse R (2012), p176

previous section. If those considerations can be undermined in their application to ethics, then it will be possible to show that we must regard other ways of living as embodying ethical commitments. If that can be shown, then it must be conceded that it would be to get human nature wrong to identify proper human functioning with one set of those commitments.

Lear's criticism of such coherentist approaches will be of great use in explaining the argument I want to make on Williams behalf. The key point in the method is that one cannot step out of one's form of life and examine it as a whole, as it were from side on (or top down, or whichever metaphor one prefers):

> Within the moral outlook, we see that certain acts-e.g. the killing of innocent humans-really are wrong, and that anyone who thinks otherwise is mistaken. This does not mean that we can convince anyone outside our moral outlook to adopt it: for we've already admitted that outside our moral outlook there is nothing to which we can appeal to commend it. We can only make various appeals to get him to see a situation as we do; if he is not so disposed there is nothing more that can be done. However, this doesn't threaten the objectivity of ethics, it only reveals him to be insensitive. The objectivity of mathematics does not totter every time a child cannot be taught to add.[139]

Foot and Hursthouse's thought is that a certain set of ethical judgements are part of the perspective of the properly functioning human being. The thought here seems to be that we cannot even begin the process of getting around the side of ethical judgements, critiquing them from the "outside", any more than we can with mathematical judgements.

This is a distinctly Wittgensteinian thought. In the collection of notes that makes up *On Certainty,* Wittgenstein suggests that there can be nothing that we can say to a tribe of people who, say, believed that they went to the moon in their dreams[140]. We could explain to these strange people

---

[139] Lear J (1983), p42

[140] Wittgenstein L (1979), paragraphs 106 and 108. The argument presented in the main body relies on the felt "distance" from 108 and the tribe from 106. I think that it is natural to take the two remarks together, taking the recalcitrant from 108 to be a member of the tribe from 106, however I concede that one might argue that this characterisation was a stretch. The presence of a child in 106 makes a difference, suggesting naiveté and possible conversion on behalf of the one we are being asked to imagine conversing with. While in 108 all that is suggested is "distance" between the one who accepts our conceptual scheme and the one who doubts it, which

that there are many reasons that they could never have been on the moon, for instance, generally speaking, one has to be awake to pilot a vessel capable of lunar travel.

All Wittgenstein says about these people is that one would feel a great "intellectual distance" from them, which might mean many things, but I would like to consider for now that it means that one should not regard such people as a genuine possibility[141]. Wittgenstein imagines putting all the available evidence to a recalcitrant tribe member, and despite this, holding onto the thought that they have, in fact, visited the moon. There is no suggestion that the tribe member has not understood, or at least that he has a hold of the evidence presented against him, but he still does not believe. At this point, one should surely have to say that such a person was not making sense.

One is free of course to imagine people or tribes who spoke nonsense like this as Wittgenstein does. However, when one asks "who is this tribesperson?", the answer must be that he is no one. Wittgenstein's example is meant to serve, as Jonathan Lear explains, as a heuristic device which demonstrates the limits of our "mindedness"—our characteristically human way of thinking. "Our", as it applies to "mindedness" needs to be understood in the correct way.

If one thinks of 'us' as a subset of human thinkers—"we modern liberals" perhaps—then one has misunderstood the point. The example is not simply meant to be an example of a way of thinking that "we modern liberals" cannot understand, but that no human being could make sense of. Lear sums the point up well with the example "7+5 would equal 12 if everyone had been other-minded" [142]. Lear writes:

> We cannot make any sense of this counterfactual, for the notion of people being other minded is not something on which we can get any grasp. Our problem is that being minded as we are is not one possibility we can explore among others.[143]

seems to present an un-bridgeable gulf between the two parties (what more could be said to convince the recalcitrant in 108 than Wittgenstein presents?).
[141] Lear (1986)
[142] Lear J (1983), p45
[143] Lear J (1983), p46

The credibility of the Aristotelian method, outlined in the previous subsection, is founded upon the lack of the possibility of seeing things any other way. The notion of "being minded" in such and such a way is a notion of sharing kinds of perception, understandings and "feelings of naturalness" (that is to say instinctive or heuristic kinds of reasoning)[144]. This notion is very similar to that of "Second Nature" in that one's mindedness determines what considerations one can recognise as rational..

There is, I think, much to be sceptical of, when this argument is applied in the ethical case. What is one to say about the real people, who quite clearly are human beings, but disavow one's own ethics despite all one's urging? I have already said that, in order to understand other groups of human beings anthropologically, we must hold something like the "weak" interpretation thesis. This involves something like a principle of charity. Just as we might come to understand a language we have never heard before as a language by understanding the majority of what is said in it as being true, so we must come to understand another way of life by assuming that most people who lead it are at least functioning as human beings.

In the realm of ethics, the possibility of thinking otherwise— holding an ethical outlook with which we do not— is unavoidably salient. Unlike in the mathematical case, where the Wittgensteinian method can show such worries about mathematics to be senseless—because there are not a variety of different ways of being mathematically "minded"—and thus reflection on the groundless nature of mathematics to be fruitless, the ethical case might show that there was indeed something to be gained from reflection on the groundless nature of ethics. In the ethical case there are a variety of different second natures on offer. That would be an understanding that one cannot coherently hold that human beings need virtue to function properly. To illustrate the point one might try and give some or other generally accepted ethical propositions the same counterfactual treatment that Lear gives 7 + 5. Take for example charity:

a) To help to those less fortunate than oneself is a virtue.

---

[144] Lear J (1983), p40

b) It is only within the context of our being so minded that to help to those less fortunate than oneself is a virtue.

As with Lear's example a) is certainly true, however difficulties arise with b).

It is, admittedly, very difficult to get a grasp of what a group of people who lived entirely without charity would look like. How could they bring up children, or pass on learning, or even go about making more children, if they did not possess at least some trait which disposed them towards helping those less fortunate than themselves?

When one thinks on the counterfactual 'it is only within the context of our being so minded that charity is a virtue', one is tempted to think of a race of beings like us, but mired in utter chaos. A free for all, where being disadvantaged at all means death. That kind of society is certainly not one that we can understand as a human society (although we might understand it as a particularly human disaster). However, that is not the only possibility for thinking of a society without our virtue of charity.

We might instead think of a world without the need for that notion of charity at all. The basic human problem need not be ignored in order not to be answered by the virtue of charity. A world like this would be the kind of world that Kant imagines when he writes:

> ...the human race could very well subsist, and no doubt better still than when everyone chatters about benevolence and compassion, even develops the zeal to perform such actions occasionally, but also cheats whenever he can.[145]

This would be a society where giving to the needy involved no genuine commitment to self-sacrifice or selflessness. Perhaps giving to the needy, in this society, would take the form of a kind of social one-upmanship or a way of getting some tax breaks. From our perspective, this represents a vapid and false way of living, but it is an intelligible way of a human society continuing on without charity.

---

[145] Kant I (2012), p36 G4:423

Given our thick ethical concepts and the ethical commitments they hold us to, we could not endorse a society in which there was no charity at all. We already possess the notion, and we cannot divorce ourselves from our intellectual heritage, as McDowell says:

> ...it is a deep truth that all thinking, just as such, is anchored in traditions. Reflection has nothing to go on, anywhere, but a putative grasp of the that, which (at least to begin with) is merely inherited.[146]

Our intellectual heritage allows us to see certain acts as charity and certain dispositions as charitable. Those will factor into our conception of what lives we can see as worthwhile[147]. However, as Williams says in "St Just's Illusion", it is possible to imagine a society which lacked this intellectual heritage, or possessed a different one. That possibility is not unintelligible, it is as a matter of fact what we encounter when we look at the historical record. The lives of the Romans or the Ancient Greeks were lives lived by human beings, but at least with regards to concepts like charity, they were certainly not minded as we are.

The understanding that we must use our intellectual heritage in ethical thinking does not imply that we must see every other possible society as possessing that same intellectual heritage—as acting on the thick ethical concepts that we possess.

What is regarded as charity differs across time and circumstance, and has a great number of different instantiations in different societies—where it is instantiated at all. Of course, there is a common theme in these different instantiations and societies, a basic value which lies at the heart of charity—that one should help out the needy. This, however, needs an elaboration into a society in order to be properly understood, we must answer the questions of "who are the needy?" and "what counts as helping them?". Charity is an example of a thick ethical concept, as, in order to understand the answers that are given to those questions in different times and different places, one must be understand the society that gives them and the times in which that society exists.

---

[146] McDowell J (1996), p57 foot note17
[147] By this I don't mean to imply that our intellectual heritage does not allow us to question this notion of charity, but merely to acknowledge that our ethical viewpoint determines the starting point of ethical reasoning.

In understanding that there even are such different instantiations of the practice of charity which bear resemblance to one another, one must concede that it is possible to identify a practice which is similar to one's own, but different in character, in other groups . Given this, it seems natural to say that it is only our, rather than human, practice which commits one to the truth of a).

The Aristotelian must deny this, and say that one really cannot imagine an intelligible society without virtue of charity as one sees it. That, whenever one inspect another society, one must find some analogue to it, and that one comes to understand that analogue as being, in essential nature, the same thing as one's own virtue.

If the Aristotelian does this, however, they face some problems which will be familiar from "St Just's Illusion". The problem is that, in order to imagine that we cannot conceive of a society that lacked thick ethical concepts that our second nature possess, the Aristotelian has to make two assumptions. They must first, to a large degree, ignore the intellectual history of any thick ethical concept, say the concept of charity has its roots in a Christian worldview, and the translation of that concept into a secularised worldview. This presupposes that all human beings start from the same intellectual position when it comes to ethical issues, and that all human beings are concerned with essentially the same problems in essentially the same way. I hope that I have already said enough about this thought in section 2 to make a deeply unpalatable assumption.

The assumption that the Aristotelian, who wants use the coherentist method, must make, is that the essential nature of human beings is such that their reason is best expressed in the kind of social institutions and traditions that we possess and work within. They must make this assumption because thick ethical concepts depend upon a way of life, and where one has the concept, so must one have the way of life.

In making this assumption, the Aristotelian must erode the boundary between the viewpoint from the "inside" and the view from the "outside". That is, in identifying the life of virtue as the life of the properly functioning human being, the Aristotelian comes to attribute material found on the "inside" to an "outside" picture of human nature. This is because, as Williams spends a good deal of "St Just's illusion" establishing, we cannot easily separate such thick ethical concepts from their roots in an actual historical process that only some societies have historically been participants in.

Of course we can understand the common root of thick ethical concepts that deal with the same areas of life, but that common root does not determine the course of the evolution of a thick ethical concept, the social, rational and historical context does this:

> ... every conception of freedom as a social or political value is an elaboration in political or social terms of that primitive idea of freedom as power; it involves, for instance, an interpretation at the level of social experience and argument of the frustrations and resentments involved in the obstruction of power.[148]

This much is available to the ethical agent who partakes in reflection upon their own ethical viewpoint. With this knowledge, that agent cannot thereby come to see their own ethical practice as distinctively human in any more substantial sense than its being a response to a primitive value, of which there are many available. To do so, would be to write human nature in their own image, to confuse their own second nature with the nature of human beings in general

This presents a problem for the Aristotelian, not because of the humdrum relativist point that other cultures should make us reflect on our own, but rather because the possibility of our recognising the existence of thick ethical concepts that are not our own undermines the Aristotelian argument that such possibilities are unintelligible.

That is, we must recognise that those people who live in societies which do not share our thick ethical concepts are not simply irrational or mistaken—we can see in their histories how they have come to the positions to which they have come. We can, as it were, see ethical second nature from the outside in a way in which we cannot see mathematical mindedness from the outside. There are no human beings that do not share our mathematical mindedness, but there are plenty who do not, or at least might not, share our ethical second nature, and this fact is necessary in order to understand human history anthropology and politics.

If other human beings, who do not share our values, are intelligible to us, then the possibility that virtue represents the life of the properly functioning human being becomes unintelligible to us—

---

[148] Williams B (1991), p138

and in seeing that, and remembering that human beings are a "bricolage of powers and instincts", we should lose confidence in the possibility of naturalist Aristotelian ethics.

The worry might be done away with if we could believe in something like Aristotle's teleological cosmology; that the view of the human being we possess "from the inside" was essentially the same as the view on the human being "from the outside". In that case then, we might be able to come to understand virtue as proper human functioning without the worry that other possibilities were intelligible. With a somewhat Aristotelian cosmology we might come to see ethics like mathematics, as being held up by a shared human mindedness.

We know however, that Aristotle's teleological cosmology is false. We are a "bricolage" which contains the potential for a number of different, intelligible, ways of living.

(v) Summary:

Aristotelian naturalism, in the form that Foot and Hursthouse propose, is not committed to an attempt to utilise the "outside" viewpoint in order to capture ethical truths. It is possible to have a coherent idea of human nature from the perspective of virtue, an understanding of ourselves drawn from ethical reflection.

The thought is that we simply cannot recognise as ethical behaviour that which we cannot see ethical reason for, from our point of view, our second nature. Second nature is a rational nature. It includes all the instruments of reason by which we judge our ethical thought. When we come to examine another viewpoint, we may then only say that it is an ethical viewpoint, to the extent that we can recognise its concerns as embodying the ethical concerns presented to us by our second nature.

I have not disagreed with McDowell's notion of second nature. However, I have presented here the response I believe Williams would give to one who imagined that this project had to be predicated upon a normative conception of human nature which identified the life of virtue as the life of the properly functioning human being.

Williams rules out the attribution to human nature of thick ethical concepts like the virtues, which are products of an elaboration of basic human problems into values and justifications. The recognition of those basic human problems as shared should also allow us to recognise that our responses to them need not be shared—human beings are a bricolage of powers and abilities, and there is no reason to think that there is only one way of putting those into operation which should count as proper human functioning.

CONCLUSION:

In this thesis, I have attempted to understand and evaluate two of Williams's arguments against Aristotelian naturalism.

The first is the argument that Williams makes against Aristotle in *ELP*. That argument I took to hinge on the possibility of there being a viewpoint which renders an "outside" perspective on our ethical dispositions, such that we can come to see our own ethical dispositions as non-essential to human nature. Williams contends that this position was unavailable to Aristotle, it is a position that has been made possible by the advance of natural science. For Williams, Aristotle was engaged in a project of trying to identify the biological features of the human being with virtue. In seeing the "inside" and the "outside" perspectives on human nature as the same thing, Aristotle thereby makes the mistake of attributing, to proper human functioning, features of his ethical way of life. Williams, on the other hand, suggests, that since we can make the distinction between the "inside" and the "outside", we must come to understand human biology in such a way that we cannot attribute to it substantial ethical claims.

I have attempted to show that this argument cannot, as it stands, do away with Aristotelian naturalism. Williams himself concedes that his discussion on *ELP* does not appropriately address the way in which ethics may be approached "from the inside". Instead of trying to attribute the virtues to proper human functioning via a picture of human nature from the "outside", the Aristotelian may, instead, attempt to do so via a conception of what lives we can imagine ourselves identifying with. The lives with which we cannot identify, are not the lives of the properly functioning human being.

In response to this, I gave Williams's second argument. That argument was to the effect that, in the identification of a life as "human", need only be minimally concerned with the values that others possess. That is, in order to understand a human being as being human, one only need to see in them a set of basic, shared, human values. These values however underdetermine the way in which human beings might act towards them. These basic values are facts of human nature, problems presented by human need and the human way of life, but they do not give us a picture of proper human functioning.

Against this I gave replies from the positions held by Nussbaum, Foot and Hursthouse. Nussbaum's reply was to suggest that cross-cultural coherence over solutions to need could provide us with an account of proper human function. I conceded to Nussbaum that there could be cross-cultural coherence in specifications of need, and discussion towards shared thick ethical concepts. However, I disagreed that the result of this discussion must be a conception of proper human functioning.

Foot and Hursthouse suggested that the Aristotelian could come to have a conception of proper human functioning held up by the thought that we simply could not imagine human functioning any other way. That is, a proper understanding of ethics will render the conclusion that there is simply no other way to function as a human being than virtuously. Against this essentially Wittgensteinian argument, I urged that, to think this would be to mis-represent humanity as a whole. The Wittgensteinian method may be applicable in some contexts, but it is not applicable when the possibility of other viewpoints is as salient as it is in the ethical context.

I have attempted to show that Williams's arguments against Aristotelian naturalism can be seen as stemming from the same thought, that we should not confuse the "inside" viewpoint with the "outside" viewpoint. This seems to me still a strong argument against the Aristotelian naturalist, when it is expressed in terms of the argument from interpretation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anscombe G.E.M (1958) "Modern Moral Philosophy", *Philosophy*, Vol 33, No 124, pp1-19

Anscombe G.E.M (1969) "On Promising and its Justice", *Crítica: Revista Hispanoamericana de Filosofía*, Vol 3, No 7/8, p61-83

Aristotle (2009) *Nicomachean Ethics* Ross D Trans, Brown L ed, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Broom J (2013) *Rationality Through Reasoning*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford

Davidson D (1973) "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 47, pp. 5-20

Foot P (2001) *Natural Goodness*, Clarendon, Oxford.

Foot P (1979) "Moral Relativism" in her (2002) *Moral Dilemmas and Other Topics in Moral Philosophy*, Clarendon, Oxford.

Foot P (1958) "Moral Arguments" in her (2002)*Virtues and Vices: and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, Clarendon, Oxford.

Foot P (1959) "Moral Beliefs" in her (2002)*Virtues and Vices: and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, Clarendon, Oxford.

Foot P (1972) "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives" in her (2002)*Virtues and Vices: and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, Clarendon, Oxford.

Hope S (2013) "Aristotelian Social Justice: An Unanswered Question" *Res Publica*, Vol 19, Issue 2, pp157-172

Hursthouse R (1995) "The Virtuous Agent's Reasons: A reply to Bernard Williams" in Heinemann R ed. (1995) *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, UCL Press, London

Hursthouse R (1999) *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Hursthouse R (2002) "Virtue Ethics vs. Rule Consequentialism: A Reply to Brad Hooker", *Utilitas*, Vol 14, Issue 1, pp41-53

Hursthouse R (2012) "Human Nature and Aristotelian Virtue Ethics", *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, vol 70, pp169-188

Hurley S (1989) *Natural Reasons*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Kant I (2012) *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* Gregor M and Timmerman J trans/ed, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Lear J (1983) "Ethics, Mathematics and Relativism", *Mind*, New Series, Vol 92, No 365, pp38-60

MacIntyre A (1981) *After Virtue*, Duckworth, London.

McDowell J (1986) "Critical Notice of Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy", *Mind*, New Series, Vol 95, No 379, pp377-386

McDowell J (1995) "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics" in Heinemann R ed. (1995) *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, UCL Press, London

McDowell J (1995) "Two Sorts of Naturalism" in Hursthouse R, Lawrence G and Quinn W eds. (1995) *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, Clarendon, Oxford.

McDowell J (1996) "Deliberation and Moral Development in Aristotle's Ethics" in his (2013) *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical Essays*, Harvard University Press, London

McDowell J (1996) *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, London

Neurath O (1932) "Protocol Statements" in Cohen S and Neurath M ed (1983*) Otto Neurath, Philosophical Papers 1913-1946*, Reidel, Dordrecht

Nussbaum M (1993) "Non-Relative Virtues: an Aristotelian Approach" in Nussbaum M and Sen A eds. (1993) *The Quality of Life*, Clarendon Press, Clarendon.

Nussbaum M (1995) "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics" in Altham J.E.J and Harrison R eds. (1995) *Mind, World, and Ethics: Essays on the Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Nussbaum M (1999) "Virtue Ethics, a Misleading Category?", *The Journal of Ethics*, Vol 3, No 3, pp163-201.

Tompson M (2004) "Apprehending Human Form", *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, Volume 54, pp 47-74

Williams B (1975) "The Truth in Relativism" in his (1985) *Moral Luck*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Williams B (1976) "Persons, Character and Morality" in his (1985) *Moral Luck*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Williams B (1983) "Evolution, Ethics and the Representation Problem" in his (1995) *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Williams B (1985) *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, Routledge, Abingdon

Williams B (1987) "Making Sense of Humanity" in his (1995) *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Williams B (1987) "The Primacy of Dispositions" in Moore A.W ed. (2006) *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*, Princedon University Press, Oxford

Williams B (1991) "St Just's Illusion" In his (1995) *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Williams B (1992) "Who Needs Ethical Knowledge?" in his (1995) *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Williams B (1995) "Acting as the Virtuous Person Acts" in Heinemann R ed. (1995) *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, UCL Press, London

Williams B (1995) "Replies" in Altham J.E.J and Harrison R eds. (1995) *Mind, World, and Ethics: Essays on the Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Williams B (1996) "Values, Reasons and the Theory of Persuasion" in Moore A.W ed. (2006) *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*, Princedon University Press, Oxford

Williams B (1999) "In the Beginning was the Deed" in Hawthorn G ed. (2005) *In the Beginning was the Deed*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Williams B "Realism and Moralism in Political Theory" in Hawthorn G ed. (2005) *In the Beginning was the Deed*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Williams B (unpublished) "Modernity and the Substance of Ethical Life" in Hawthorn G ed. (2005) *In the Beginning was the Deed*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Wittgenstein L (1979) *On Certainty*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford

Woodcock S (2006) "Philippa Foot's Virtue Ethics Has an Achilles' Heel", *Dialogue*, Volume 45, Issue 3, pp 445-468