https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

THE PERFECTIONIST TURN*

By Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen

> To emulate a worthy man is not to re-live his individual life, but to utilize the principle of worthy living, exemplified by him, toward the qualitative improvement of our individual life.
>
> —David L. Norton[1]

I. Introduction

Imagine a scenario much like Plato describes at the end of the *Phaedo* where Socrates, in his jail cell surrounded by friends, having been condemned to death by the court of Athens, is about to receive the hemlock. Suppose further that Socrates, as in Plato's dialogue, drinks the hemlock, but does not die; instead, a courier rushes in to announce to those present that Socrates was pardoned from his sentence and that the courier has an antidote, which he then administers, that will restore Socrates back to his former state of health. The only catch is that Socrates is no longer allowed to practice philosophy in any way and in any form. Being a man both obedient to law and opposed to suicide and self-exile, Socrates continues his life without philosophy. He can make love to his wife, play with his children, chat with people about the weather and politics, but he can do no philosophy—either publicly or in private. We might suppose that Socrates has an immense capacity for philosophy and a compelling disposition toward doing it. But he is equally strong willed, and each time he is tempted toward philosophy, his *daimon* says no, that he must obey the law. It would be common to say of this Socrates that he cannot live up to his potential, that he is no longer able to perfect himself. But would we necessarily say he has lost the ability to achieve well-being or human flourishing? Could Socrates not obtain well-being or human flourishing by taking up some other activity with pleasurable and satisfying dimensions, even if they are not philosophical activities? To what degree can one's perfectability be separated from one's well-being or human flour-

* We would like to thank the other contributors to this volume for their helpful comments and questions as well as the editors of this journal for their assistance. Special thanks go to an anonymous reviewer and especially to Daniel C. Russell for his careful and constructive commentary on our work. Of course, the usual caveats apply.

[1] David L. Norton, *Personal Destinies: A Philosophy of Ethical Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 13.

doi:10.1017/S0265052513000046
© 2013 Social Philosophy & Policy Foundation. Printed in the USA.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ishing, and how might the latter be dependent upon the former, if it is at all? Is someone's good necessarily good for that person?

Consider another scenario regarding Socrates and the hemlock. In this case, Athens not only pardons Socrates, but completely regrets its decision to keep him from philosophizing. Not only that, Athens wants Socrates, given his great gifts in this area, to actively pursue philosophy as often and wherever possible. The only problem is that either because of something in the antidote or the ordeal Socrates had to endure, Socrates no longer has any interest in doing philosophy. He would rather take up gardening, but since he is a law-abiding citizen he continues to philosophize. In this case, the same questions we raised above with the first case can be raised again here. Socrates' well-being seems now to lie outside of doing philosophy, but it might still seem that we should say that his perfection consists in his continuing to philosophize. The issue we are raising with these examples is whether one can plausibly have a "perfectionist" theory of well-being or human flourishing. Or, to put the issue in terms that seem to capture the contemporary debate[2] on these matters: Do the notions of well-being and human flourishing determine how we are to understand self-perfection or must that which defines self-perfection be the basis for understanding well-being and human flourishing? This question arises, as we shall see because of a certain sort of naturalism that has traditionally been associated with perfectionism.

Perfectionism has a long history in Western philosophy.[3] "Perfect" comes from the Latin *perfectus* and its Greek counterpart *teleios*. *Perfectus* implies that a thing is completed or finished and thus involves the idea of a thing having a nature which is its end (*telos)* or function (*ergon*). To "perfect," to "realize," or to "actualize" oneself is thus not to become Godlike, immune to degeneration, or incapable of harm; it is rather to fulfill those potentialities and capacities that make one human. Accordingly, a good human being has perfected him- or herself—that is to say, being a good human involves actualizing one's basic human potentialities. It involves being completed, fulfilled, or actualized as compared to being incomplete, unfulfilled, or unactualized and thus remaining in a state of potentiality with regard to exercising basic human capacities. Perfectionism is thus the

[2] See these excellent works: Daniel M. Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Ethical Naturalism" in *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory,* ed. Rosalind Hurshouse, Gavin Lawrence, and Warren Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1995), 149–79; Mark LeBar, "Aristotelian Constructivism," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 25, no. 1 (2008): 182–214; and Daniel C. Russell, *Happiness For Humans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Despite their differences, they all seem to want in various ways to have the *notions* of well-being or human flourishing wear the trousers when it comes to understanding self-perfection and not the other way round, as we will argue.

[3] See Douglas B. Rasmussen, "Perfectionism," in *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics,* ed. Ruth Chadwick (San Diego: Academic Press, 2012) 2d ed., vol. 3: 395–403. DOI: 10.1016/B978-0-12-373932-2.00213-1. Some sentences in this paragraph are taken from this entry.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

view that one's fulfillment as a human being is a function generally of living according to one's nature, usually understood as the perfection of one's capacities. What is good for an individual is somehow linked to *being a good human being*, understood as a statement about the person's exercising the capacities of his or her nature.

If, however, a person's well being or flourishing could be understood apart from, or without reference to, her capacities or nature, then perhaps we need not understand human good and thus flourishing or well-being in terms of perfecting our nature. Rather, if perfecting our nature is relevant at all to flourishing or well-being, it is so because perfecting our nature is no longer linked to fulfilling our capacities but has some other meaning. Indeed, the traditional understanding of perfectionism, according to which well-being and flourishing *are* a function of perfecting our nature defined in terms of fulfilling our capacities, has been challenged by Daniel M. Haybron, and Daniel C. Russell and Mark LeBar. As we shall see soon, Haybron argues that perfectionism is irrelevant for understanding human flourishing. Russell and LeBar argue that Haybron is wrong to think that a neo-Aristotelian account of human flourishing must be perfectionistic (at least in the sense that Haybron understands perfectionism), but they nonetheless hold that it is possible to understand human flourishing or well-being by simply appealing to our "deepest convictions" with no particular need for an ontological, naturalistic, grounding for these convictions.[4]

Our goal here is to make a start in meeting this challenge. In doing so, we will be taking the side of the classical tradition according to which well-being and flourishing are a function of perfecting our nature. However, at the same time we will also suggest that this traditional naturalistic understanding of perfectionism can only meet the challenges to it by adopting a significantly more individualist understanding of human nature than is typical. We can make such a defense, we believe, because human nature has both generic and individuative characteristics; so when the concept of human nature is deployed, neither of these types of characteristic can be utilized to the exclusion of the other and both must be employed jointly. We call the type of perfectionism we advocate "individualistic perfectionism."

Individualistic perfectionism holds that human good is in its very nature individualized and relative to the agent,[5] but is nonetheless not simply reducible to whatever desires one may have or to the merely conventional

[4] See Daniel C. Russell, *Happiness for Humans*, 36–64; and Daniel C. Russell and Mark LeBar, "Well-Being and Eudaimonia: A Reply to Haybron" in *Aristotelian Ethics in Contemporary Perspective*, ed. Julia Peters (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 52–68.

[5] Human good is always and necessarily good for some individual or other. See discussion of the individualized and "agent-relative" character of human flourishing in Douglas B. Rasmussen and Douglas J. Den Uyl, *Norms of Liberty: A Perfectionist Basis for Non-Perfectionist Politics* [hereafter *NOL*] (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 132–38.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

or otherwise simply subjectively determined. Rather, our desires and subjective preferences must be measured against standards that are a function of our human nature or human life-form that consists in a determinate set of potentialities which, when actualized, appropriately amount to what we call human flourishing or the self-perfecting life. This way of life is attained through the exercise of practical wisdom and moral virtue—the aim of which is to determine for an individual the appropriate form (or balance), along with the particular manifestation, of basic human goods[6] as they can be both realized and defined by that individual person. The appropriate form that is expressed in achieving, maintaining, and enjoying these goods will not issue, then, in either a one-size-fits-all way of life or in a set of rules that are to be universally legislated to all agents equally. Rather, what lies at the heart of ethics is the issue of what is worthy of valuing, which for us is ultimately an individual human being's own self-perfection, and this requires that ethics be primarily concerned with persons determining for themselves in what their individual human good concretely consists. Human good is thus grounded in the individuative and generic features of individual human beings, and it is fully immanent in their self-perfecting choices, actions, and lives. It is this model of individualistic perfectionism that we will use to meet the challenges to perfectionism traditionally understood. It is a position that seeks to retain the nonreductive naturalism of the traditional view while incorporating the need for individualism implied by contemporary criticisms of that view. We believe that other approaches that focus upon flourishing and well-being either get the naturalism wrong or oversell the individualism, or both. Perfectionism for us must include an appropriate understanding of both dimensions.

We begin, of course, with the general idea that a good human being is one who has actualized his or her human potential; but this idea alone is inadequate to account for human good. We also need to know why one should say that it is worthwhile or valuable to actualize one's own potentialities, for a perfectionist account depends upon making the link between fulfilling potentialities and it being valuable to do so. That link has been challenged. This concern was first raised by P. Glassen, and later by L. W.

[6] We are thinking here of such basic (sometimes called "generic") goods as, for example, knowledge, health, friendship, pleasure and such virtues as integrity, temperance, courage, and justice. We take these examples from Aristotle's *Rhetoric,* bk. 1, chap. 6, 1362b10-28 (trans. W. Rhys Roberts) in *The Basic Works of Aristotle,* ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1968), 1344. But there have been other similar lists from Aquinas to John Rawls to John Finnis. We do not assume that such a list is exhaustive or immune to revision. Further, these goods are best understood as activities that are constituents or expressions of the overall human good or ways of living known as human flourishing. See Douglas B. Rasmussen and Douglas J. Den Uyl, *NOL,* 129–32; Douglas J. Den Uyl, "Prudence and the Individual," in *The Virtue of Prudence* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), chap. 8, pp. 187–223; and Douglas B. Rasmussen, "Human Flourishing and the Appeal to Human Nature," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 16, no. 1 (1999): 1–43.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Sumner and Valerie Hardcastle, and more recently, by Haybron.[7] They posit what is claimed to be a fundamental and insoluble difficulty for perfectionist accounts of human good. This difficulty may be stated in different ways. Here are three. Glassen expresses it as follows:

> From the statement that the function of a good lyre-player is to play the lyre well, or in accordance with excellence, what follows is, not that the good of a lyre-player is playing the lyre in accordance with excellence, but rather that the goodness of a lyre-player consists in playing the lyre in accordance with excellence.[8]

Haybron states the difficulty this way.

> I would suggest that the naturalistic perspective, while arguably one source of the Aristotelian view's allures, is not the perspective that gives perfectionism its primary appeal. . . . There is indeed something appealing about the idea that goodness in a lion consists in perfecting its nature *qua* lion. But is it so obvious that lion well-being consists in the exercise of lion excellence? . . . [I]t is unfortunate when an animal's life is devoid of some major feature of its species—for instance if a lion is never able to hunt. The problem, intuitively, is not lack of perfection—not being a good lion or exercising the virtues proper to lions—but "missing out," failing to enjoy one or more elements of a full life for a lion. Similarly when a person is born blind, retarded, etc. . . . What I do deny is that well-being fundamentally concerns perfection.[9]

Finally, as Russell succinctly frames the matter, "Well-being must be a good *for the agent* in question, and being a good specimen (say) just is not that kind of good."[10]

We can summarize these concerns as follows: Even if performing one's natural function makes someone a good human being, it does not seem to follow from this alone that such a performance is good for one. It does not

[7] See P. Glassen, "A Fallacy in Aristotle's Function Argument about the Good," *Philosophical Quarterly* 7, no. 29 (1957): 319–22; L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 78–79; Valerie Gray Hardcastle, "On the Normativity of Functions" in *Functions: New Essays in the Philosophy of Psychology and Biology,* ed. André Ariew, Robert Cummins, and Mark Perlman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 143–56; and Daniel M. Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness,* 155–75. This problem also may go as far back as Sidgwick, see Talbot Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 194ff.

[8] Glassen, "A Fallacy in Aristotle's Function Argument," 320.

[9] Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness,* 174–75.

[10] Daniel C. Russell, *Happiness for Humans,* 47. Russell is summarizing Haybron here in this statement of the problem. But he too sees this problem as real or legitimate *when perfectionism is understood as Haybron describes it*. Russell calls Haybron's account of perfectionism: "'Perfectionism' (with a capital P)." (Ibid., 46; see below.)

even seem to follow that it is valuable to be actualized or that an individual human being has any necessary stake in being actualized. There thus seems to be a difference between the human good understood in terms of perfecting our nature and a view that sees human good in terms of what might contribute to one's flourishing or well-being. In other words, one might say that a wedge has been driven between what is human good *simpliciter* and what might be said to be good for a particular human being in terms of what might contribute to that person's own well-being or flourishing.[11] Accordingly, these challenges for any perfectionist view of human good can be framed in terms of a fundamental question (call it the "G" question): What is the connection between being a good human being and such a state of affairs being good for a human being?

We regard this question as important not only because failing to resolve it threatens the viability of a *perfectionist* account of the human good having any connection to value, but also because resolving it offers the chance of seeing perfectionism in a new light—that is, in a way that is different from most traditional accounts. If individualistic perfectionism can serve as a model for helping to resolve the issue here, then we believe it offers a chance to see perfectionism without transcendence—whether such transcendence is expressed in terms of some deity, a Platonic Form, or in terms of society, culture, biology, gender, or history—by making the nature of the individual human being the ultimate standard for perfection. Indeed, endeavoring to meet this challenge affords us the opportunity to suggest that the solution lies in following up on Philippa Foot's claim that "*life* will be at the centre," [12] because life is both the link between being good and being good for and the basis for showing why it is worthwhile to be actualized. Life as it is actually lived by human beings is a process expressive of both individuative and generic characteristics of human nature. With the life-based approach, the problems the "G" question presents can become mostly "dissolved," rather than solved.

[11] For other discussions of this distinction, or more generally the distinction between "good" and "good for," see Talbot Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), "Against Modern Dualism about the Good," chap. 6, pp. 192–235; and Toni Ronow-Rasmussen, "Mo(o)re Objections," in *Personal Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chap. 7, pp. 95–108.

[12] Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 5. She also states: "'Natural' goodness, as I define it, which is attributable only to living things themselves and to their parts, characteristics, and operations, is intrinsic or "autonomous" goodness in that it depends directly on the relation of an individual to the "life-form" of its species" (ibid., 26–27). However, Foot is not concerned with "the good of a species, as if a species were itself a gradually developing, one-off organism, whose life might stretch for millions of years," but rather she is concerned with the goodness that can be attributed to individual living things (as well as to their parts, characteristics, and operations) "that belong to a species at a certain time" (ibid., 32 n. 10). Also, Ayn Rand notes that "it is only an ultimate goal, an *end in itself,* that makes the existence of values possible. Metaphysically, life is the only phenomenon that is an end in itself: a value gained and kept by a constant process of action." "The Objectivist Ethics," in *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 17.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

II. Distinct But Not Separable

One factor that seems to be behind the problems the "G" question presents is the claim that if one holds that human good is always and necessarily good *for* some individual human being, then one is disallowed from speaking of generic human goods or human good itself—that is, of human good *simpliciter*—because such expressions seem to require human good to be universal in nature and independent of the agent (agent-neutral). This apparent incompatibility is based on an error, however.[13] It assumes that an abstract consideration of human good requires denying both its individuality and its essential relatedness. But this does not follow. To think of human good without thinking of whose good it is or what concrete form it takes is not the same as denying that human good is individualized or essentially related in its very nature. The mode and manner of thinking something thus-and-so need not determine its manner of *being* thus-and-so.[14] To think that it does is to confuse the mode of our cognition with the manner of existence of what is cognized.[15] Abstraction[16] need not entail separating what is unified in reality. Accordingly, it is possible (and we shall argue correct) to speak of the activities that are the generic goods and virtues that constitute human good and note that everyone needs to engage in these activities without making the human good a universal independent of the individual agent. Appreciating this point is a necessary step in appreciating what we regard to be the correct understanding of "human nature" and thus human good

When we say that Socrates and Aristotle are perfecting themselves, what are predicated of Socrates and Aristotle are not generic goods and virtues understood as universals, *but these goods and virtues as requiring some specific determination and unique manner of existence.* To illustrate this point, we can consider the generic good of friendship. Friendship may be applicable to any understanding of human good, and yet not only are the friends different from one case to the next, but the relevant balance and modes of connectivity of friendship to any other characteristics of human good are so as well. There is thus no reason to *assume* that a perfectionist understanding of human good requires it to be a universal reality. We can predicate human good of different individuals, but that only makes human good universalizable. It does not make it universal. As Henry B. Veatch noted:

[13] Some of what is presented in this section is adapted from Rasmussen and Den Uyl, *NOL*, 153–58.

[14] See in this connection Anthony Kenny, *The Metaphysics of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 134.

[15] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Book Two: Creation, trans. James F. Anderson (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), chap. 75, p. 234.

[16] See Aquinas, *On Being and Essence,* 2d ed. rev., trans. Armand Mauer (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968), 42–43 and 47. See also translator's note 15, p. 39.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> If the good of X is indeed but the actuality of X's potentialities, then this is a fact that not just X needs to recognize, but anyone and everyone else as well. And yet given the mere fact that a certain good needs to be recognized, and recognized universally, to be the good of X, it by no means follows that X's good must be taken to be Y's good as well, any more than the actuality or perfection or fulfillment of X needs to be recognized as being the actuality or perfection of Y as well.[17]

Though our perfectionist understanding of human good is not about universals, our understanding of that good as individualized is universali*zable.* What is universalized here is the knowledge that being some value, reason, or ranking for some person is what provides a basis for a person's conduct. Yet there is nothing about this universalization that requires what is a value, reason, or ranking for one person to be so for another.[18] Universalizability does not mean or require either universality or agent-neutrality of human good—that is, it does not require that the value of human good have standing in its own right apart from individuals whose good it actually is.

There is of course the question of just what it is that makes value V desirable or choiceworthy for someone, but that is a question that for us as neo-Aristotelians is answered by appealing to the nature of individual human beings. Ultimately, our values, reasons, and rankings are grounded in both what and who we are, and this is an involved and complex story for each of us—for which we will have something more to say later. Nonetheless, what should be clear already is that for us what lies at the heart of ethics is not the universalizable but the goods that can be realized for individuals themselves.

In short, then, distinguishing (a) what is a good human being from (b) what is good for a human being does not require one to hold that there are correspondingly two types of human good: a universal human good and an individualized human good. That we can speak sensibly of human good without referring to individuals and can speak sensibly of good for particular individuals without noticing what the person might have in common with others does not signify that we have thereby identified two different forms of good. This is so because a reality is not determined by

[17] Henry B. Veatch, "Ethical Egoism New Style: Should Its Trademark Be Aristotelian or Libertarian?" in *Swimming Against the Current in Contemporary Philosophy* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 194.

[18] Let us say that values, reasons, and rankings, V_1, for a person, P_1, are individualized, and further let us say the same holds true, respectively, for values, reasons, and rankings V_2-V_n for persons P_2-P_n. Conduct based on such individualized values, reasons, and rankings can be universalized as follows: if V_1 provides a basis for P_1 to act, so does V_2 provide a basis for P_2 to act as well as V_n for P_n. One cannot claim that V_1 provides P_1 with a legitimate reason to act without acknowledging that V_2 provides P_2 with a legitimate reason to act, and so on. See note 5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a conceptual distinction itself but, if anything, the reverse holds—such distinctions are tools used in grasping what a reality is, not in determining it. But the point that distinctions do not determine reality is, of course, only a logical point when applied to an ethical context like this one, so we need to consider these matters more deeply. Particularly, we need to consider our suggestion that it may not even make sense to attempt to understand either (a) or (b) without the other. To that problem we now turn.

III. Problems with Separating "Good" from "Good For"

Haybron argues that "perfectionism . . . bears no necessary connection to anything that can plausibly be viewed as an organism's goals: for one can achieve perfection, at least to some degree, merely by fulfilling a capacity . . ."[19] Accordingly, he believes that perfectionism cannot adequately answer what we call the "G" question, because perfectionism only provides the type of value that is concerned with doing things excellently and not with the type of value that is concerned with "succeeding in one's goals."[20] Perfectionism offers *performance* value; where what is needed to explain human flourishing or well-being is *success* value. "The perfectionist's fundamental mistake lies in not recognizing that well-being is what we might call a *success* value: it concerns the success of an organism in achieving its goals."[21] Thus, he claims the following:

> To conceive of well-being or flourishing in terms of perfection, then, is to engage in an inescapably Procrustean enterprise: we will invariably be able to imagine cases in which excellence meets nothing that could be considered among the individual's goals, or where the degree of excellence attained outstrips the degree of goal-attainment.[22]

Perfectionism for Haybron is clearly a non-starter when it comes to understanding human flourishing or well-being.

Haybron's complaint against perfectionism pertains to two levels. The first level is concerned with what performance value or excellent activity has concretely to do with an individual's own goals and life. That is, how

[19] Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness,* 169.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid. It might be suggested that Haybron's point could be made another way: the type of well-being that one finds in performance value is not the type of well-being that one finds in success value. This point is fine so far as it goes, but we choose not to frame the issue in these terms, because we are dubious of how far one can really get with some intuitive understanding of well-being or human flourishing. Our concern is more basic—namely, we are interested in what shapes our understanding of well-being or human flourishing in the first place.

[22] Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

does being excellent at something help one determine what choices to make here and now? How does it help one determine in what one's own well-being or human flourishing concretely consists? The second level is concerned with what performance value or excellent activity, understood as the fulfillment of basic human capacities, has to do generally with the goal of human flourishing or well-being. Why think that fulfilling human capacities has anything at all to do with the goal of human flourishing? We will consider the second level of complaint first.

Performance value or excellent activity considered apart from success value, or more generally speaking, fulfilling basic human capacities considered apart from the goal of human flourishing, is *to say the least* very difficult to understand. Haybron rightly asks why one should care about such activities *if* they are separated from standards of success or human flourishing, but he does not recognize that this very separation is what makes his attack on, and understanding of, perfectionism so wrong-headed. The separation of performance from success value leaves open the questions: "What is the context that gives rise to performance value or excellent activity?" and "Why would people engage in fulfilling basic human capacities if there were not something to be achieved?" The issue here is not what the best account of human good is, but simply whether it makes sense to conceive of performance value or excellent activity or fulfilling basic human capacities, apart from a context that gives rise to the need to do so—keeping in mind, all the while, that to ignore a context is not to eliminate it. Without there being something these activities are for—namely well-being or flourishing itself—without a reason for choosing to engage in such activities, why would they be an object of concern or value? Regardless of how one cashes out "being a good human being," there needs to be something achieved, accomplished, done, or fulfilled to make sense of these activities. The question of "Why care?" still matters, for to talk of performance value apart from a context that explains these activities—that is, to think of capacities as abstracted from context—is to render them valueless.

Similarly, what would it mean to flourish as a human being or attain *well*-being if the standard or measure for determining human flourishing or wellness of being is not based on what a human being is—meaning, of course, based upon the central dispositions and capacities that exemplify human living? What is the point of the adjective "human"? It is important to consider briefly how Haybron frames his answer to this question. Haybron explicitly rejects subjectivist approaches to human well-being[23] and states that "'authentic happiness' . . . has intrinsic prudential value as an aspect of self-fulfillment."[24] However, this self-fulfillment is "non-perfectionist and internalist, grounding nature-fulfillment in the arbi-

[23] Ibid, 177–79.
[24] Ibid, 178.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

trarily idiosyncratic make-up of the individual."[25] Putting aside the question of why the idiosyncratic makeup of individuals might be called "arbitrary," or indeed doubts about the adequacy of his account of the so-called self, it is nonetheless clear that Haybron not only wants to emphasize the *individualized* character of human flourishing against merely fulfilling generic human capacities, but also to make it exhaustive. But there is no justification for taking such an extreme position, especially if one has doubts about Haybron's account of perfectionism in the first place. Our point here is, of course, not to deny the importance of individualized flourishing, but only to note that none of this requires denying that individualized flourishing has a general shape or contour in virtue of which it is nonetheless a version of *human* flourishing. Indeed, there would not be much sense in telling someone who pursues no friendships, or cares nothing for knowledge, or disdains any concern for how to use and control his emotions that he is living an unfulfilled or undeveloped life and is therefore not "authentically happy" *if* there were not something about his being human that supported this admonition.[26] Colloquially, we would say that such a person is a "miserable human being," and the point of this expression would be just to note this person's failure to pursue the goods that he needs in order to be a good *human* being.

It seems that Haybron assumes that letting the generic character of human beings play a role in an account of human flourishing is incompatible with its individualized and thus pluralistic character. But this is by no means necessary. As Isaiah Berlin has noted, our ends and values might be many, but not infinitely so. "They must come within the human horizon," because "the nature of men, however various and subject to change, must possess some generic character if it is to be called human at all."[27] At this general level, then, we can simply note that we hold that there is nothing about emphasizing individuality that requires rejecting that one is a human being as well and that this fact plays an important role in determining in what individualized human flourishing consists. What remains to consider, however, is Haybron's first level of complaint—that is, what do performance value or excellent activity (that is, being a good human being) concretely have to do with an individual's own goals and life (that is, being good for a human being).

Haybron complains that it is during the making of concrete decisions on how to conduct one's life that we can see the basic weakness of tying human flourishing to perfectionism. He offers concrete examples. We find most interesting and revealing his example of Angela who faces a choice

[25] Ibid. 193.

[26] We take this to be the basic point of Russell's excellent argument in his use of the "Crumb" example in chapter two of *Happiness for Humans*, op cit.

[27] Isaiah Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal" and "Alleged Relativism in Eighteenth-Century European Thought," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in History of Ideas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 11 and 80 respectively.

between retiring and continuing as a career diplomat. Haybron offers a highly detailed description of Angela and her situation,[28] and he nicely shows that for Angela neither of the alternatives is obviously better than the other, that there are pros and cons to both, and that the choice depends on many personal factors as well as time and context. Haybron has Angela choose the path of the career diplomat over retirement because it exercises more of her capacities as a human being, but he also indicates from the example that her well-being would more likely consist in her choosing retirement. The example is used to show that to speak of a good human being is not to speak of what is good for a human being.

Thus, Angela's decision to accept the new assignment and continue as a diplomat gives Haybron the opportunity to claim that a perfectionist (specifically an Aristotelian) would hold that the diplomatic assignment involves greater perfection. "She more fully exercises her capacities, functioning more fully *qua* human being than she would as a retiree."[29] The life of a diplomat is more excellent than the life of a retiree because it involves a greater use of what is uniquely human, that is, a greater use of human intelligence. But Haybron thinks as well that "she would clearly have been better off taking the early retirement."[30]

> In taking the job, Angela chose the path of greater excellence and virtue, a life that more fully exercised her capacities as a human being. But she was not securing or promoting her happiness or well-being. She was *sacrificing* it.[31]

We think otherwise: (A) We do not think that continuing on as a diplomat would necessarily involve greater excellence or perfection than retirement, and (B) we do not think that in making that choice she was sacrificing her well-being or human flourishing. Our ability to make both of these points is what gives shape to our theory of individualized perfectionism.

Regarding (A): Haybron construes "qua human being" far too narrowly. We hold that perfection is not confined to simply the formal character of our nature—that is, to our humanity—but must be found in our nature as a whole.[32] Hence when one speaks of functioning *qua* human being, one must consider not just what is uniquely human but all that is involved in being the sort of living thing a human is. So just as "it is towards intelligent living that all our powers and capacities are ultimately directed, including our powers of knowledge, and . . . it is man

[28] Haybron, The Pursuit of Unhappiness, 161–62.
[29] Ibid., 162–63.
[30] Ibid., 162.
[31] Ibid., 163.
[32] See note 16.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

himself that counts more than all his knowledge . . . ,"[33] so too it is the application of intelligence to the activities of human living that matters most and not just the exercise of intelligence. Such is the role of practical wisdom mentioned earlier in our model of individualistic perfectionism. Consequently, regardless of what Aristotle may have thought (and this is by no means clear or settled), much of Haybron's worry about perfectionism would be alleviated if one holds that *human* virtue or excellence (that is, human perfection) is found first and foremost in the life of practical wisdom, not in the life of *theoria* or any other single capacity. The excellence of any capacity must be understood within a larger context of excellence for individual human living as mediated by practical wisdom. One's talents and dispositions and circumstances must be jointly considered as they pertain to the particular individual through the use of that individual's practical wisdom.

In this regard, as Kathryn V. Wilkes noted nearly thirty-five years ago, "the *ergon* of man is indeed 'activity of *psuche* in accordance with rational principle,' the rational principle in question is, broadly, intelligence in general: intelligence that may be applied to art, craft, science, politics, philosophy, or any other domain."[34] The central task is to find the balance or "mean," but this is no mere average. It is finding the appropriate balance of basic goods at a given time that is appropriate for the individual—that is to say, it must be determined in light of "a consideration of the set of circumstances, talents, endowments, interests, and beliefs that descriptively characterize the individual."[35] We call this balance his or her "nexus." The excellent use of practical reason applies as much to the choice of friends and leisure as it does to choices of career and work. One can function as much *qua* human in fashioning a life in retirement as in making decisions as a diplomat. Not only is human excellence or perfection not confined to one particular form of life (for example, the philosophical life), but it is also not confined to those forms of human life that require more theoretical or abstract reasoning than those that do not. Practical wisdom is an individualized affair. It is expressed in the choices and conduct of an individual engaged in the task of human living.[36]

The difficulty for some, but the virtue for us, with our position here is that it would not likely issue, except in rather extreme cases, in definitive lawlike pronouncements about how one is to conduct one's life. For some, perhaps, the goal of ethics is to arrive at decisive claims about what should concretely be done in a given set of circumstances. On this view, the chief object of any reflections on what to do must

[33] Henry B. Veatch, *Rational Man: A Modern Interpretation of Aristotelian Ethics* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003), 40.
[34] Kathryn V. Wilkes, "The Good Man and the Good For Man," *Mind* 87 (1978): 568.
[35] Rasmussen and Den Uyl, *NOL,* 144.
[36] See Rasmussen and Den Uyl, *NOL,* 143–52 and *The Virtue of Prudence,* 187–223.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

culminate in some kind of normative commandment. By contrast, we hold that normative reflection has the purpose of refining our capacity for judgment, all the while knowing that judgments are often open-ended and may differ for different individuals in the same circumstances. Angela's generic capacities, though not to be ignored, are not the only things to be considered; no particular one of them excludes or eliminates the importance of considering her other generic capacities and her particular propensities and circumstances. To say that remaining a diplomat will, on balance, exercise more of Angela's intellectual excellences might be correct, and might be considered in isolation the single most powerful argument for her continuing as a diplomat. But that single most powerful argument may be outweighed by the confluence of other factors that, if taken by themselves are less compelling, but if taken jointly result in flourishing through retirement. On the other hand, perhaps that same intellectual thrust is, after all, sufficient to override other considerations, or perhaps to induce innovative ways to integrate with other factors with which that disposition is now in tension. Such is the role and nature of judgment. It cannot be exhausted from the philosopher's armchair nor rendered formulaic.

Hence, regarding (B) where we do not think Angela was necessarily sacrificing her well-being: because of the individualized nature of human excellence or perfection, the weight of any basic (or "generic") good[37] of human flourishing such as intellectual activity can vary in prominence for different persons. Thus, Angela's decision at that time to take the assignment and to continue on in her diplomatic career could certainly be understood in terms that reflect her deepest interests, talents, endowments, and concerns. The more we know about Angela, or Angela about herself, the more plausible our conjectures become about the most suitable path for her to follow. We have no difficulty seeing, given the information we have, that the choice she made to continue her diplomatic career represented her understanding of herself, of who she is, of her very individuality. "In doing what she does best" (as Haybron describes it) she would find the pleasure, the joy, the satisfaction of the central form of excellence for her life. This is her form of self-perfection, her form of human flourishing, and it is by no means clear or obvious that she would have been better off if she had chosen instead to retire. Indeed, from everything we know about Angela from Haybron's description the opposite *seems* to be the case. However, if she did make the choice to continue as a diplomat for reasons that did not employ her intelligence towards the appropriate mix of her talents and circumstances, then we would indeed expect a lack of well-being and flourishing.

Russell agrees with Haybron that we can and should avoid perfectionism in the way Haybron understands it and which Russell calls

[37] See note 6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

perfectionism with a capital "P."[38] Two of the problems of capital "P" Perfectionism are the "under-specification problem" and the "agent-neutrality problem."[39] The first problem concerns the issue of saying that happiness consists in achieving some kind of "perfection" and then being unable to specify clearly the sorts of perfection that lead to happiness, because there are so many candidates for happy lives and so many paths to achieve them. This particular issue arises precisely because individuals can be so different and are in different circumstances, so the tendency is to remain on too general a prescriptive plane to be useful. The problem of agent-neutrality is virtually the opposite problem and involves holding that by fulfilling certain generic human capacities one is thereby *eudaimonic* as an individual. In our discussion of Haybron and his two levels concerning excellence and success, we dealt with both of these issues. But for now, we see them here as the same issue, namely one of failing to consider an alternative view according to which human nature is understood as having both individuative and generic capacities, and that talking of one without tying it back to the other is, of course, going to pose problems.

The issue of the generic and its relationship to the individuative is, however, carried over, to some degree, in Russell's and Haybron's discussion of "welfare internalism" versus "welfare externalism," and what follows here is meant to underscore our earlier comments regarding Haybron's separation of individuative from generic considerations (and vice-versa). Welfare internalism is the view that happiness is solely a function of the individual's makeup as an individual. Welfare externalism is the view that the happiness of an individual is not wholly dependent on the individual's makeup, but also upon other factors outside of the individual. In this connection Russell wants to introduce the notion of a person's humanity to help avoid having to consider solely an individual's particular existing goals and values. There are some things about just being a human being that can help contribute to happiness even if one individually fails to see their relevance and thus fails to act for them. Russell gives the example of a person without love in his life who also fails to see how his humanity indicates that love really would make a contribution to his happiness, even if there is nothing in him now pointing in that direction. Of course, if our human nature includes both individuative and generic human capacities, this argument is more than plausible, because both would be factors in any final assessment of well-being and both would be applicable to a full understanding of one's humanity. To argue otherwise would be to suppose that generic and individuative characteristics of human nature are separated in the individual such that human nature refers to a kind of holding receptacle of shared capacities;

[38] See note 10.
[39] Russell, *Happiness for Humans*, 46–47

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

if a given agent is somehow not now exhibiting one of the shared capacities (for example, love), we need to draw that one from "human nature" and add it to the agent's personal profile. But either a disposition like loving is connected to human nature or it is not. If not, how would speaking of humanity get us any closer to the importance of loving for this agent?

It is conceivable that any given characteristic could be provided by another more general source, such as an "ethical context" or our moral convictions, that we then use to infuse the desired characteristics into human nature; we find that to be mysterious, however, since presumably the point of all the human nature talk is to help conceptualize the nature of an ethical context in the first place. But more on this issue shortly. For now, we just want to note that "human nature" in our scheme of things may end up doing quite similar work to Russell's "humanity," though we prefer the former concept because (as noted in our discussion of Angela) it is more integrative in that it refers to human nature as a whole, not just an abstract part of it. Moreover, the term more directly links our view to naturalism than would a term like "humanity."

Welfare internalism, like welfare externalism, is then, at best, a tool for helping one to figure out the nature of happiness. By narrowing the focus one can reflect more deeply on the individual's dispositions, but that must always be done with an eye toward returning to the broader perspective, and vice versa. Indeed, we go even further and are willing to consider social and cultural circumstances when reflecting upon "external" contributions to happiness; we extend consideration to these circumstances on the grounds that "man is a social animal," making one's well-being in some degree a function of how we are regarded by others. Russell's conclusion, consequently, is one which we would endorse because he wants to include consideration of humanity in order to help broaden the narrowness of welfare internalism and, thus, to argue that humanity should be a part of any consideration of happiness or, in our case, perfection.

Like Haybron, Russell mentions certain characteristics such as autonomy and emotional fulfillment as factors in happiness, well-being, or human flourishing. Our dispute then does not seem to come down to substantive differences about goods to consider when thinking about these matters. The dispute seems to be about how to frame the context in which consideration of how happiness, well-being, or human flourishing should be understood takes place. What determines our deepest convictions about the character of well-being or human flourishing? What makes, for example, exercising the capacities to love or to know worthwhile? Surely, nearly no one would think a human life worthwhile without love or knowledge, but why is this? What grounds these convictions? It seems that there is a reluctance to face these sorts of questions. Indeed, it is our view that this is due to a desire to avoid precisely what we want to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

embrace—namely, teleology—and to thus bring the evaluative dimension in from somewhere else. To wit:

> One way of thinking about human nature aims at deriving ethical facts from ethically neutral facts about our nature (call this our "first nature"). . . . By contrast, one might hold instead that ethical facts can be ascertained only within an ethical outlook as a whole, and that such an outlook must include certain normative views about what it means to be human (call this "second nature").[40]

Russell seems to accept the distinction made above, which was originally posited by McDowell,[41] and adds: "My own view is that we need a conception of human happiness in terms of *second* nature as opposed to first nature (even if some eudaimonists have thought in terms of first nature)."[42] Russell thinks it is a mistake to see ethics as a function of "first nature" where norms are adopted because they make possible the realization of some natural capacity we might have. Instead, ethics must concern itself only with second natures that occur within the context of "an ethical outlook as a whole." Presumably this means we do not derive norms directly from "bald" facts about human nature, but rather recognize a context for normative reflection itself and then derive the particular norms within that context. The problem with perfectionism as a "first nature" idea is that it supposes that by providing norms connected to fulfilling a capacity of some sort, we have thereby given a reason to fulfill that capacity as a way of contributing to the agent's well-being or flourishing. But that seems a separate, not necessarily related, step entirely.

However, the effort to shove perfectionism into the category of "first nature" and to talk about ethics only with respect to "second nature" would suggest that those capacities have nothing to do with understanding the context in which ethical norms are considered. Indeed, our point would be that there is a unity between first and second natures; capacities are *meant* to be exercised and can only be understood as the sorts of capacities they are through their exercise, such that the very context of ethical reasoning is a function of both together and neither alone.[43] Now

[40] Ibid., 42.

[41] John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Ethical Naturalism," 149–79.

[42] Russell, *Happiness for Humans*, 43.

[43] It might be objected that this move is too quick. One may have the capacity to ride a unicycle, for instance: if one tried, one could learn to do it. Yet, does one have a reason to exercise that capacity? Maybe—but if one does, it is not in virtue of the sheer logical structure of that capacity. That is to say, it is true that one can understand one's capacity only in terms of a certain kind of exercise of it, but one can still ask whether focusing on developing that capacity is a very good way of working toward one's well-being. But this objection misses the point and ignores the teleological context of this discussion. We are talking about certain kinds of capacities here—namely, generic human dispositions. Riding a unicycle is not one of them. Generic human dispositions are capacities that define the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Russell believes we can make the separation because, for example, a Nietzschean conception of fulfilling capacities for greatness is to be pursued irrespective of whether such pursuit promotes the agent's happiness; on the other hand, the Aristotelian wants capacities fulfilled in order to realize the happiness of the agent. Deciding between these two positions is a matter of normative judgment that Russell claims stands outside, and is brought to, any factual description of human nature.[44]

One problem with this argument is that according to Aristotle, and in our view as well, a correct description of the nature of a human being is *inherently* value laden. Thus there cannot be any neutral or "bald" facts about human nature that are devoid of value implications; this means that one cannot consider capacity fulfillment without considering the role of such fulfillment generally and in the person's life in particular. Because capacities are things to be realized, they come packed with value-laden elements such as when, where, and why the capacity is to be exercised. We are thus not deriving ethical norms from "first nature" facts so much as we are discovering the normative dimensions within those "facts." Moreover, the point of considering human nature in the first place just is to give us a standard for measuring normative claims such that any appeal to a normative context to decide between the Nietzschean and the Aristotelian would either be using that very human nature or appealing to some other standard. If the latter, we are always confronted with having to justify that other standard. In the former case, we might simply say that there is something wrong with Nietzsche's conception of human nature, as indeed there is, precisely because that very human nature tells us something about how to judge the Nietzschean conception of it.

The general mistake, of course, is to suppose that capacities are things bearing no relation to the agent's well-being. Because they are inherently normative, pointing to standards of success and fulfillment, the key is to figure out how they are so related. Discovering that mistake allows us to speak of the misuse of the concept of capacities by the likes of Nietzsche and others. Doing all this properly requires using the actual capacity the individual possesses in conjunction with other capacities the agent may possess—not to mention the agent's circumstances and social connections—in order to determine the ways in which that capacity can contribute to the agent's living well. The living well of the agent is the normative context for making judgments between different normative postures.[45] The fact that someone can fulfill one capacity

life-form of the being in question. As such they are inherently reason giving because they are part of what defines valuable for that kind of thing. Pleasure and maintaining one's balance might be such generic human capacities; riding a unicycle is not, though it may be a function of these other two.

[44] Russell, *Happiness for Humans,* 43.

[45] It should be noted that we take normative judgments to be more "open-ended" than might suit some moral theories. That is, for us the training in reflecting upon choices, the

without paying attention to other capacities does not constitute an argument for the claim that a person is properly conceiving the capacity by conceiving of it in isolation. We can say that this way of looking at a capacity is mistaken precisely because we deny that there is such a thing as a "first nature" capacity that fails to carry with it normative dimensions which contribute to some sort of fulfillment through its exercise with other such capacities. That is the whole nature and value that teleology brings to this discussion and perhaps why the distinction between first and second natures only makes sense if teleology is ignored.

We might say, then, that the absence of teleology makes possible the entire discussion of "bald facts" or "first nature." Russell, following McDowell, wants to argue that we cannot derive norms from bald facts because any given bald fact requires reflection, which moves it to a "second nature" status.[46] In other words, if one has the capacity to eat meat because of the presence of incisors in one's mouth, it is only upon reflection about whether one has a reason to eat meat or not that the capacity can be exercised in any relevant way. But that very reflection moves the "first nature" to a "second nature," and thus supports the claim that we cannot derive values directly from facts about human nature. The only problem with this argument is that reflection is itself a capacity, so either one has not moved off of the "first nature" position after all, or one is bringing to bear an "ethical context" that will help in deciding how to use the capacity. The latter option seems to be where Russell and McDowell want to go, but doing so would give "ethics" a categorizing property completely independent of human nature, though capable of being applied to it. In other words, "ethics" or "ethical context" is what is being used to understand human nature rather than human nature informing and determining the content of ethics. Perhaps this remnant of Kantianism is plausible, but it really does not explain why human nature matters at all. We might try to solve the problem by employing a concept such as "humanity" which is somehow inherently ethical, because of certain other features it possesses such as choice and dignity. But such a move in the end reduces to "this is what 'ethics' means," and since we have another paradigm to offer, we are not convinced at all that this is what ethics has to mean.

In making our point here we have also gone some distance toward understanding how the "G" question with which we began must be handled. A "natural" reading of the question presents us with an ambiguity and even a propensity to move in the wrong direction. The question asks: "What is the connection between being a good human being and such a state of affairs being good for a human being?" Stated in this form

development of virtues, and the assessment of circumstances disinclines us to suppose that there must always be a "right answer" or particularized rule that should define the solution to any given ethical situation and that it is the philosopher's job to find such "answers."

[46] Russell, *Happiness for Humans,* 44.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

there is a tendency to read the first clause—"being a good human being"—in a general and generic way only. Thus, the ambiguity is whether we are to read "being a good human being" in this strictly generic sense or in the full sense of including both individuative and generic characteristics. Read in the strictly generic sense, the question would be of the sort that asks how those generic characteristics help in thinking about what is necessary for flourishing or perfection. Since those are not the only considerations, in the end, there would be some distance between those sorts of reflections and any remaining issues of what is good for human beings, since the individuative dimensions have yet to be considered. In a sense, Haybron, Russell and others rely upon this "natural" reading to make their points.[47] If, by contrast, we read "being a good human being" in the full sense of including both dimensions, then the "being good" and the "good for" become interpenetrating notions. Consequently, the ostensible divide between "being good" and the "good for" is another example of a distinction without a separation. The result is that the "G" question ultimately dissolves as a question about the *nature* of the human good under perfectionism. It is at most a question about the relationship between two aspects of a distinction.

IV. Natural Teleology and the Self-Perfecting Life

What, then, is required in order for there to be in "first nature" no separation of "being good" from "good for" so that perfectionism can get off the ground? What is required is a type of entity whose very existence as the kind[48] of thing it is calls for actualizing certain potentialities. The need for this process of actualization gives rise to the very notion of what will or will not benefit the thing in question, because its very existence, qua the kind of thing it is, *is* its ultimate[49] end. It is here, as we noted in the introduction of this essay, that Philippa Foot's claim that "*life* will be at the centre" is most instructive. By noting the centrality of life to any form of natural goodness, Foot introduces to the general idea of goodness as the actualization of X's potentialities the notion of X needing (or benefiting from) their actualization. Life is

[47] As our discussion of Angela revealed, our view of perfectionism rejects the idea that developing talents is *ipso facto* the same thing as self-perfection and that such perfection can develop apart from the life of practical wisdom.

[48] For a defense of the claim that individual beings have a nature and can be classified in terms of natural kinds, see David S. Oderberg, *Real Essentialism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), especially chap. 9, "Species, Biological and Metaphysical," 201–40. See also, Douglas B. Rasmussen, "Quine and Aristotelian Essentialism" *The New Scholasticism* 58 (1984): 316–35.

[49] "Ultimate" refers to that end which gives rise to and explains the need for the actualization of certain potentialities by a thing. Such an end is only ultimate in relation to the thing in question—its ultimacy is not based on some alleged hierarchy (or structure) of existence or some chronological ordering.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a process for which the question of benefit or lack thereof is primary and ever present, because the forms of existence of living things are the very aim of their activities. All the various senses of benefit (or harm) arise from and develop within this life-form context. Let's examine this claim a bit further.

The actualization of the potentialities that make a living thing what it is must involve the actualization of potentialities that constitute its life. But by the very same token it also requires that life not be defined as simply not being dead. As Foot has observed, "the teleological story goes beyond survival itself."[50] There is no such thing as life that is not this or that *form* of life. Being alive must involve living in a certain manner. Living as a certain kind or sort of thing provides, then, the basis for determining what potentialities are the relevant ones for actualization and why their actualization is valuable.[51] The centrality of *life-form* is the crucial insight here. The form of a living thing determines what potentialities are to be actualized if it is to be a good instance of its kind, and its life provides the need for their actualization. The life-form provides direction to the process of actualizing potentialities; in a word, it provides the *telos*—the end, or goal of the process. Regardless of what their life-forms may be, the actions of living things ultimately make a difference to their forms of existence—specifically, to their living as the kinds of things they are. A living thing's actions can succeed or fail in this regard, and accordingly can be judged on that basis as beneficial or harmful, good or bad.

To appreciate this insight, it is crucial not to treat what can be *conceptually* distinguished—namely, an entity's life and its form—as *ontologically* separable features that can be fully analyzed and understood apart from one another. For beings such as ourselves, whose life-form is essentially characterized by the ability to reflect on the features that make up our life-form and who can consider explicitly, not only what we are, but also our very individuality, the issue of actualizing our nature as living things is a complicated matter. But there is nonetheless a common conceptual structure involved in how human good is determined and how good is determined for any other living thing. This common conceptual structure is what Julia Annas describes as "continuities between our ways of evaluating ourselves and the evaluative patterns to be found in the lives of animals and plants."[52] And as Philippa Foot has noted:

[50] Foot, *Natural Goodness,* 43.

[51] However, it would be wrong to assume from this that one could determine the good of any kind of living thing or the good of any individual living thing of a certain kind merely from understanding that the processes by which living things actualize themselves must involve activities that are good for them. There is a difference between explaining the basis in "first nature" for why it is valuable for living things to actualize their basic potentialities and giving an account of what such actualization involves for a living thing.

[52] Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?" in *Virtue Ethics Old and New,* ed. Stephen M. Gardiner (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 2005), 17.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> There is a "natural-history story" about how human beings achieve this good as there is about how plants and animals achieve theirs. There are truths such as "Humans make clothes and build houses" that are compared with "Birds grow feathers and build nests"; but also propositions such as "Humans establish rules of conduct and recognize rights." To determine what is goodness and what defect of character, disposition, and choice, we must consider what human good is and how human beings live: in other words: *what kind of living thing a human being is.*[53]

Though there is more to this story than can be discussed here, we can summarize our basic point: Regardless of differences in particular life-forms, *it is the life-form of the being in question that will provide the basis of our understanding its good, not its mere existence.* It is the life-form exemplified in and by each individual that unifies the good and the good for, because that life-form ensures that there are no goods that can be understood apart from being goods for some agent. This way of putting the matter is another way of stating the essence of teleology.

Natural teleology not only does not suppose that there is some divine craftsman whose intentions determine the functions of living things,[54] but also that even if there were such intentions, they would be irrelevant to a natural-teleological account of living things. Such accounts are, as Michael Thompson notes,

> as far as can be possibly imagined from the category of intention or psychical teleology . . . [n]atural-teleological judgments . . . organize the elements of a natural history: they articulate the relations of dependence among the various elements and aspects and phases of a given kind of life . . . . Even if the Divine Mind *were* to bring a certain life-form into being "with a view to" securing an abundance of pink fur along the shores of the Monongahela, this "purpose" would have no effect on the inner natural-teleological description of that form of life. . . .[55]

Just as life-form is crucial to understanding the unity of good and good for in living things, so too is it crucial to understanding natural teleology.

Despite Thompson's well-founded point, natural teleology is still often associated with dubious metaphysical views—namely, that there is some

[53] Foot, *Natural Goodness,* 51, (emphasis added).

[54] See André Ariew, "Platonic and Aristotelian Roots of Teleological Arguments," in *Functions, op. cit.,* 7–32; and James G. Lennox, "Teleology," in *Keywords in Evolutionary Biology,* ed. Evelyn Fox Keller's and Elisabeth A. Lloyd's (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 324–33.

[55] Michael Thompson, *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2008), 78–79.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

grand *telos* for the cosmos or that there is a *scala naturae* ascending from simple elements to an unmoved mover. Moreover, natural teleology is thought to entail such suspect positions as vitalism and a providential conception of nature and to involve its advocates in the fallacy of anthropomorphism. Finally, it is often thought that natural teleology holds that species are fixed and do not evolve. It is not necessary, however, for advocates of natural teleology to hold any of these questionable metaphysical views, adopt such controversial positions, or commit such an elementary fallacy.[56] Rather, all that it is necessary for the natural teleologist to hold is that when it comes to living organisms there is an internal directive principle that is an irreducible feature of their developmental processes. The process is irreducible in the sense that the movement from potentiality to actuality is inherent in the structure of the organism in such a way that other forms of explanation (for instance, mechanical or chemical) are insufficient to account for the phenomenon. In other words, the capacity that living things have for the development to maturity cannot be accounted for by merely appealing to the potentialities of the material elements that compose their structures. Thus, natural teleology holds that living things have causal powers that are the result of properties that are not reductively identifiable with the properties of the material elements that compose them. These nonreductive properties augment the ontology of the world and provide a mode of causation that is rooted in the very natures of living things.[57] What living things are and how they operate cannot be adequately understood except insofar as they are understood as functioning for the sake of their mature state. These teleological considerations reveal, then, part of the ontological basis that would support an individualistic, life-centered perfectionist account of human good.

Though it has been argued that the theoretical core of natural teleology is vindicated by modern biology,[58] it is not necessary here to take up a discussion of its role in genetics or in an evolutionary account of the species. It is only necessary to hold that individual living things have natural ends. Nonetheless it must be admitted that to many it appears that if, as teleology seems to suppose, we have ends by nature then we have very little choice about how we should live our lives, and that in turn seems to run contrary to pluralism. Choices, then, would concern means only, giving no scope to the ideas of multiple legitimate modes of living or of a person improving himself or herself by becoming someone different.

[56] See Allan Gotthelf, "Aristotle's Conception of Final Causality" and "Postscript 1986," *Teleology, First Principles, and Scientific Method in Aristotle's Biology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3–44. Also see Fred D. Miller, Jr., *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's* Politics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 336–46. See also note 55.

[57] Richard Cameron, "How To Be a Realist About *Sui Generis* Teleology Yet Feel At Home In The 21st Century," *The Monist* 87, no. 1 (2004): 72–95.

[58] See Max Delbrück, "Aristotle-totle-totle," in *Of Microbes and Life,* ed. Jacques Monad and Ernest Borek (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 54–55.

This conclusion neither follows nor is true, however. First of all—and as suggested by our earlier account of individualistic perfectionism—our neo-Aristotelian perspective does not embrace a dominant-end view of human good. Rather, we have adopted a so-called "inclusive end" view of human good according to which there are multiple constitutive, final ends (also called, basic or "generic" goods) that must be managed in a complex, and individually differentiated, interrelationship in light of what we have called the individual's "nexus." Simply put, human good is not a single universal maximand.

Secondly, there is no contradiction between teleology and the choice to become someone different from the way one is now by way of improvement.[59] Obviously teleology allows for change in the sense that one can move toward or away from one's *telos.* But the worry here is that teleology would prevent one from aspiring to remake oneself in different ways, since there would only be "one path" available within a teleological context of self-improvement. But does teleology lay down for us rails upon which we must either proceed or be derailed with nothing in between? Perhaps that is true for some life-forms. For us the perfected state for humans, by contrast, is an actuality that is an *active,* not a passive, state and thus exhibits itself through action of some type. Since human rationality (as expressed in both speculative and practical wisdom) is the mode in which human potentialities are actualized, it is the exercise of this form of rationality that constitutes the perfection, not some final resting place or quantity of good achieved.[60] Thus, we cannot for living things understand the good *for* something as being finally different from the good *of* something. In this regard, the first example of Socrates with which we opened this essay is applicable here. The prevention of philosophizing cripples and deforms Socrates in a way contrary to his life-form and thus to his well-being. And similarly, the second case of Socrates we noted in our introduction might likewise be regarded as a situation of a life-form in transition or altered, requiring new standards for measuring success.

[59] For a fuller discussion of this matter in connection with certain forms of optimization, see Douglas J. Den Uyl, "Homo Moralis," *Review of Austrian Economics* 22 (2009): 379–85.

[60] Our view is no doubt within the camp of what Julia Annas calls the "stronger relation between our rationality and our human nature" (op cit. pp. 22ff) where human nature is the "material" with which rationality works. It is not clear from her own discussion of this stronger relation, however, whether human nature puts any constraints upon our rationality, whether rationality is limited to working only on human nature or also on what human nature confronts, and whether rationality is treated like a "second nature" that is bringing norms to the "first nature materials." In this regard, we would tend not to speak of virtues as ways of achieving or providing flourishing as Annas seems willing to do, but rather of virtues as generalized descriptions of flourishing activities themselves, thus indicating more directly the unity between flourishing and virtue and avoiding the temptation to speak of first and second natures. Finally, it is likely that our understanding of the life-form is more individualistic than Annas's account of the stronger relation. Nevertheless, Annas certainly provides one of the more useful analyses of what needs to be considered when tying ethical value to human nature.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The short point of all this is that achieving final ends does not mean the closing off of options, choices, or possibilities of diverse modes of living or selves. Even a thoroughgoing flourisher *becomes* in important ways. It is true that not everything can count as a flourishing life, but the field is sufficiently wide to not run afoul of worries about pluralism.[61] People do define themselves as they choose, because their achievement is expressed through choosing and not exclusively or necessarily through the consumption of what is chosen. It is, in this regard, quite common when thinking of final ethical ends to confuse achievement with completion. The ethical ends that go into composing a self-perfecting life may be achieved but never completed so long as one lives, because they express the very modes of appropriate living itself. It is only when the maximands are conceived in terms of "how much" rather than "how well" that one faces the problem of reconciling pluralism and choice with teleology.

VI. Conclusion

"What is the basic standard of value?" is a question that has occupied ethicists for millennia, and the answers have been fundamentally: custom, authority, reason, or nature. The Aristotelian tradition, to which we attach ourselves, primarily answers the question with "nature." The other categories are not thereby excluded, but this ethical tradition ultimately measures what is reasonable and what is valuable in custom and authority by looking to what we are by nature. That naturalistic standard, as we have tried to show above, not only does not exclude, but actually presupposes choice, purposefulness, or self-direction. Thus reason, custom, and authority are the modes or tools through which our nature is realized, but these modes would not themselves be the ultimate grounding for value in the neo-Aristotelian framework we adopt. That is to say, what counts as reasonable, authoritative, or appropriate socially would have to be measured in the end against a naturalistic standard of value. Have we shown above how to make such measurements or evaluations?

The answer to this last question is obviously "no." The title of this paper expresses our purpose here, namely, to clear the way for us to make "the perfectionist turn." We have devoted the bulk of our attention toward rebutting arguments that would otherwise keep us from making this turn. We have not shown the superiority of the perfectionist framework nor put it into action in making normative judgments. Perhaps because perfectionist naturalism (which, as our discussion of teleology indicates,

[61] There are eighty-eight keys on a piano, which also "limit" what one can do, but one's musical options are hardly thereby restricted. Aristotelianism is associated with some type of essentialism which, in the broadest terms, means that things have natures. Hence there are certainly conceptual limits to what qualifies as a good human life built right into the structure of an ontology that says there is a human nature. But exactly how "limiting" those ontological commitments are seems to us a very open question.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is nonreductive in character) is so out of keeping with the usual forms of ethical theorizing, just launching such a project requires one to spend time defending its very viability. In endeavoring to make the project viable, we have nonetheless given some indications of how an individualistic perfectionist ethics might operate. The rather open-ended character of the normative landscape of individualist perfectionism would thus stand in contrast to theories which view ethics as primarily a tool for managing and defining social interaction.

Our project here, therefore, has been a narrow one. Yet like many small beginnings, there may be a larger research project contained within this seed. If nothing else, would the sort of perfectionist approach advocated here really issue in ethical norms of a rather different character from those resulting from other approaches? And if that were the case, would that itself challenge what seems to be the contemporary presumption that we all measure our theories against a common baseline of what qualifies as ethical or moral? We suspect that, in the end, that is really the question we are debating, and if there is any truth to that conclusion, perhaps nothing highlights it more than individualistic perfectionist naturalism.

Educational Programs, Liberty Fund
Philosophy, St. John's University

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052513000046 Published online by Cambridge University Press