Depicting Human Form

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Abstract
This paper involves constructive exegesis. I consider the contrast between morality and art as sketched in Philippa Foot's 1972 paper of the same name, 'Morality and Art'. I then consider how her views might have shifted against the background of the conceptual landscape afforded by *Natural Goodness* (2001), though the topic of the relation of art and morality is not explicitly explored in that work. The method is to set out some textual fragments from *Natural Goodness* that can be arranged for a tentative Footian 'aesthetics'. I bring them into conversation with some ideas from Iris Murdoch to elucidate what I think the import may be, for Foot, of depicting human form.

1. Preamble

The subject of this paper is art and morality in Philippa's Foot's monograph *Natural Goodness*, a surprising topic perhaps since Foot seems not to mention this area in that mature work. Instead, we find a 1972 paper, included in the 2002 collection *Moral Dilemmas*, entitled 'Morality and Art', which, in the preface, Foot tells the reader she has included only 'hesitantly', the reason being that she was less able to speak, in her words, 'more robustly' of the objectivity of moral judgments there than she was in later work. It seems that such was her dissatisfaction with the paper that she didn't include it in an earlier volume of essays where chronologically speaking it belongs – *Virtues and Vices*, published in 1978.

It is true that as Foot's life progressed she came to speak more and more 'robustly' of the objectivity of moral judgment, arriving at her most robust formulation with the conception of *natural goodness* that the title of her monograph refers to. The Foot Archives at Somerville College contain an earlier draft called *The Grammar of Goodness*, a title which would have remained apt. Foot is concerned with forms of evaluative judgment and in particular with the peculiar grammar of forms of evaluation of *living things*. A good deer is one that can run swiftly; a good owl is one that can see in the dark. A deer or owl that cannot do such things is defective insofar as they cannot do what creatures of their kind do.

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The word 'good' applied this way is used *attributively*, not *predicatively*. Foot jokes in a footnote of the 1972 work that she used to explain this contrast by holding up a torn scrap of paper for her interlocutors to see. Like the adjectives 'large' and 'small', the use of 'good' in most contexts isn't intelligible independently of consideration of what the noun to which it is attributed picks out. A small elephant is only small *as elephants go* – we cannot say that it simply is small. Likewise, a scrap of paper is not simply good or bad. Foot recalls that an offer to pass the paper around to check whether or not it *is* good would rouse a laugh, a recognition of the grammatical – and logical – absurdity.

With this invitation to check, Foot means to target a *predicative* use of 'good' that G.E. Moore draws attention to in his 1903 *Principia Ethica*. Moore thinks that goodness is a property which is 'out there' and which is intuitable – we can recognise and contemplate it, hence Foot's invitation to check. But goodness, for Moore, is non-natural. It cannot be identified with or reduced to natural properties. Instead he lists the pleasures of human interaction and the enjoyment of beautiful objects as 'good' in this predicative sense, saying that 'it is only for the sake of these things – in order that as much of them as possible may at some time exist – that anyone can be justified in performing any public or private duty. They are the *raison d'etre* of virtue.'[1]

By 2001, Foot had her own way of making sense of the most important reason for virtue's being. Just as a good deer needs to be swift, the good human needs the virtues – for instance, in order to do what humans do, courage is often needed, as is kindness, honesty and, as Foot emphasises and which many theorists leave off their list, a willingness to receive good things. The virtues, though important, are not my topic in this paper; instead see the contribution of John Hacker-Wright to this volume. For now, we need only note that by *Natural Goodness* Foot had found her way to speaking *robustly* of the objectivity of moral judgment because she had discovered a normativity that is *natural* insofar as it is necessitated *by the kind of animal we are*, and so is grounded neither in subjective attitudes, nor in social conventions or in rules or principles of the sort that are created by our linguistic practices. But when she was writing 'Morality and Art' in the early Seventies, she was still on her journey towards robustness. The task of that 1972 paper was to compare moral and aesthetic judgements. My task is in this paper is to attempt a bit of exegetical extrapolation – or construction.

[1] G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1903/1922), 189.

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By *Natural Goodness*, Foot's views on moral judgment have changed. My question is: How might she have treated the comparison between moral and aesthetic judgment from that later perspective, or indeed the broad topic of art and morality at all? There are glimmers on the topic of art in the text of *Natural Goodness* that invite this strategy. I'm going to lift them from the text so as to set out one way in which theorising on Foot's naturalism could go. And in particular, I want to show that looking at things in the way I suggest can help to deflect a criticism that can be laid against Foot of a certain kind of conservatism.

So, here's the plan for the paper. First, I'm going to set out the 1972 contrast. Then I'm going to offer a closer synopsis of Foot's later view before moving on to my constructive project in the second half of the paper. There I will set out some textual fragments from *Natural Goodness* that I think can be arranged for a tentative Footian 'aesthetics'. I bring them into conversation with some ideas from Iris Murdoch to elucidate what I think the import may be, for Foot, of depicting human form. I demonstrate this in the last part of the paper by drawing attention to two passages from the final pages of *Natural Goodness*.

2. Getting started: Strain or fiction?

Foot starts her 1972 paper by delimiting her terrain. She says she will not ask whether moral considerations are relevant when judging art. She says she will not argue, with G.E. Moore that aesthetic experience is an intrinsic good that ought to be pursued for its own sake.

Like Foot, I have started by mentioning Moore, but not quite to leave him aside. It's well-enough known that some of Moore's views on ethics and aesthetics influenced the Bloomsbury group. In a 1908 letter we find Virginia Woolf writing to Clive Bell, author of the formalist manifesto *Art* and husband of her sister, painter Vanessa Bell:

> 'I am splitting [my] head over Moore every night, feeling ideas travelling to the remotest parts of my brain, and setting up a feeble disturbance hardly to be called thought. It is almost a physical feeling, as though some little coil of brain unvisited by any blood so far, and pale as wax, had got a little life into it at last.'[2]

[2] Virginia Woolf, 1908, quoted in S. P. Rosenbaum, 'The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf', in S.P. Rosenbaum ed. *English Literature and British Philosophy*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971), 319.

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Literary critic Patricia Waugh comments: 'Rarely has reading analytic philosophy appeared so erotic, so close to the body'.[3] Here we have a picture of ideas being *in-corporated*. But if Moore's aesthetics proved animating or vivifying in this way – some little coil of brain has got life into it at last – the content of his aesthetics Waugh finds more 'eviscerated'. Though Moore thinks we should admire the corporeal expression of the mental qualities of those we have affection for – something Bloomsbury also went in for – his conception of aesthetic experience or consciousness is neither bodily, nor situated or historical. A diagnostic introduced in the last chapter of the *Principia*, 'The Ideal', helps us see this.

Moore instructs: we are to consider things as if they existed by themselves *in absolute isolation* and to ask whether their mere existence is good – 'good' being used here in a predicative sense. Those things that survive absolute isolation include, he thinks, the states of consciousness involved in aesthetic experience and in the appreciation of what is beautiful in Art or Nature.

Such isolationalism might be thought the pinnacle of art-for-art's sake, a movement that Iris Murdoch discards in her 1959 paper 'The Sublime and the Good' as 'flimsy' and 'frivilous', and with which she associates with Bloomsbury. 'Art is for life's sake….' – she writes – 'or else it is worthless'.[4] I show a little later to what extent Foot would agree.

After leaving aside Moore, Foot shares a hunch, something that tallies with her broadly Wittgensteinean method – we often find her drawing attention to feelings of malaise, a sense of queerness that is the mark of something philosophically suspect (recall the laugh that the scrap of paper roused). Her hunch is this: 'there is some element of fiction and strain in what we say about right and wrong, while our appraisal of aesthetic objects is relatively free from pretence'. This is a contrast that she thinks has, to borrow her way of speaking, *something behind it*. She sorts three dimensions of difference which I'll call *Contingency*, *Relativity*, and *Inescapability*. Let us go through each of these briefly.

Start with *Contingency*. In the two papers from the late Fifties which made her name – 'Moral Arguments' and 'Moral Beliefs' –

[3] Partricia Waugh, 'Beauty rewrites literary history : revisiting the myth of Bloomsbury.', in *The recovery of beauty : Arts, Culture, Medicine*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 108–128.

[4] Iris Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', in P. Conradi ed. *Existentialists and Mystics: Writing on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Penguin), 218.

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Foot urges that moral judgments are not simply subjective. They can't be likened to cries like 'ow' or 'alas' or even declarative expressions like 'How nice!', which can be sincere or insincere but not true or false. But we want to be able to say that certain moral judgments are true or false.

Admitting this much, however, still leaves open what makes a given moral judgment true. Perhaps I can conjure up moral principles by myself, *for* myself, self-prescribe how I am to act. Foot demonstrates that such a view would allow for bizarre prohibitions against, for instance, *'walking up to an English door, slowly'* (I mustn't do that) or '*looking at hedgehogs by the light of the moon*'. Instead, morality must have some connection with securing benefit and removing harm. And to the extent that it does it must be objective. Still, for the 1972 Foot, an uncomfortable degree of subjectivity remains, best explained by example. A conception of morality as connected with benefit and harm fixes it that the killing of human beings is objectionable. Nonetheless – and here I quote from a footnote in the 1972 paper – 'there is a genuine choice as to whether or not to count as a human being, with the rights of a human being, what would become a human being but is not yet capable of independent life'.[5]

This is an example of *Contingency*. Though there may be fixed starting points in moral disagreement – even a *definition* of good and bad, as connected say with benefit and harm – there may be 'play' in the system, as she calls it. But where there is such play, we may wind up tracing back to and leaning on the strength of mere conviction; we may wind up wanting to say that something 'just is' right or wrong, thereby giving the impression of some kind of authority standing behind our conviction. But here is the fiction, Foot thinks. The strain or uneasiness we may feel is the sense that there *is* nothing behind our 'just is' proclamations. Aesthetic judgment is different; the notion of contingency doesn't get a foot-hold. It's not obvious what it could be for two people to agree on all the *aesthetic* facts relevant to appreciation – the starting points – and then disagree in their appreciation to the extent that discussion backtracks to bare 'just is' statements, with the spectre of some kind of authority behind them.

Relativity. It follows from the assumption of contingency that there may be *some* moral judgments for which a relativistic account will be right for where there is 'play', mere conviction – or attitudes

[5] Philippa Foot, 'Morality and Art', in Moral Dilemma (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 7.

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or feeling – may stand behind certain assertions. Foot gives some examples of relativity from outside ethics. *Clothes are said to be elegant; someone is good-looking; letting yak's butter go rancid before floating it on tea, gives a delicious flavour*.

No one will deny the relativity of such statements, says Foot. 'It would quite obviously be ridiculous for us to say that our opinions about the Tibetan's tea is correct and theirs mistaken'. It involves, in her words, '*no compromise of our own*' to grant that a Tibetan uttering a sentence meaning 'Rancid yak's butter gives a good flavour to tea' is saying something true. But a compromise of our own is involved if we grant that 'it is right to do X' is *true* when said by some person even though, were *we* to say it, it would be false.

In the case of the flavour of tea on at least one reading, to refuse to acknowledge that a Tibetan uttering the sentence meaning 'Rancid yak's butter gives a good flavour to tea' is saying something true belies, thinks Foot, a fictional belief that one's own taste is superior. The same is true in morals. In morals, we don't tend to allow a modest relativism – or compromise. But where there is contingency, and where compromise is ruled out, the fiction of superiority lurks nearby, something about which we may feel uneasy. In contrast, when it comes to art, if we have something to say in criticism of the art of, for example, a different age – perhaps that it is 'melodramatic' or 'florid' – we offer reasons in support of our claims but we don't insist that we must somehow be right. To grant that the Eighteenth century reader might have been saying something true in describing Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* as 'riveting' involves no compromise of our own should we find the narrative voice 'dull' and 'overbearing'. And here Foot adds something that I find striking:

> 'Sometimes recognition or appreciation fails. But then we are increasingly likely to think of the matter like that, and not to condemn what we do not understand or like'.[6]

Inescapability is a theme that haunts Foot. We tend to think of moral judgments as committing, or inescapable – for some moral considerations are overriding. Moral judgments pertain to choice or action, something Foot thinks Hume gets right. But the amoralist is, we might say, an *escapist* – where we treat moral judgments as having a kind of inescapablity with respect to choice or action, he does not; though he may recognise the demands of morality, he does not act on them. This invites a distinction with the *immoralist* – the

[6] Op. cit. note 5, 15.

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immoralist does not recognise the constraints of the ethical at all. I return to the immoralist at the end of the paper.

The 1972 Foot is worried primarily about what we might say to the amoralist. We might try to convince him that he *should* act this way or that. What she feels, however, is the ineptitude, the complete inefficacy of *this* 'should'. For why should he? She has not yet found a form of natural necessity that grounds the real inescapability of certain moral judgments. At the moment, inescapability is felt but without any identifiable grounds.

By comparison, aesthetic judgments are escapable – we are free to retract, revisit, reframe prior leanings. Aesthetic evaluations don't pertain to action choice – and perhaps with practical rest comes a certain amount of evaluative abandon.

3. Bees and me

In this part of the paper, I move on to the late Foot. To recap my strategy: I'm attempting constructive exegesis. In *Natural Goodness,* Foot doesn't say anything much, or very explicit, about the contrast between aesthetic and moral judgments or on the topic of art and morality. But her views on morality have changed. How might she have treated the topic from her later viewpoint?

To begin, let's note in more detail what has changed by 2001 with respect to *morality*. Foot picks up work by Michael Thompson, itself a development of some Anscombian strands of thought, and which offers Foot a way of articulating a conception of the human life-form to which she will attach her *attributive* 'good'. For Thompson, the form of life of a kind of living thing is captured by a series of what he calls *natural historical judgments,* where these are judgments expressed by statements of the sort that might be narrated on a natural history TV program. They have forms like 'The S have/does F'; 'S's do F'; 'This is how things go with an S: they do F'.

For instance: swordbills have a beak longer than their body – as each long flower blooms, it gives the swordbill a fresh supply of food all to itself; Saiga antelope give birth to twins so their numbers grow rapidly just when grass is plentiful; the glass frog[7] leaves its eggs on stones close to waterfalls. Such statements are unquantified and non-empirical. There is no particular swordbill that has, all to itself, the deepest draft of nectar from the longest

[7] I have adapted some natural historical judgments from those narrated in David Attenborough's Planet Earth II.

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flowers. Often the lifeform term in the grammatical subject appears with the definite article – *the* glass frog. Such judgments are also *atemporal* – though saiga antelope are born when grass is plentiful there is no *particular* past, present or future time *at* which *the* saiga is born.

Foot assumes, like Thompson, that a cache of such natural historical judgments characterises the human life form and that it is in light of *that form* that judgments of natural goodness or defect can be made. A 'good' human can do what creatures of their kind do, where, as I noted at the outset, this requires the possession of the virtues - humans need virtues like bees need stings, Foot would say. And since practical rationality involves acting well – as Foot puts it in a 2003 interview, it involves taking the right things as reasons[8] - morality becomes part of practical rationality. What we have reason to do is grounded in our human nature.

With this new model of moral evaluation, gone, it might be thought, are the feelings of uneasiness and strain that the earlier Foot detects; they are replaced instead, with relief and maybe even the joy of the naturalist. Humans are returned to the natural world of bees and plants. But not for long. Our reflective capacities transmogrify, and are essential to, human ways of going on. By the end of *Natural Goodness*, the feeling is different, darker. Foot considers Nietzsche's immoralism; she describes it as 'poisonous', a description I will return to.[9] Before that, we can ask how *Relativity*, *Contingency*, and *Inescapability* now look against the backdrop of this new conceptual scene.

First, note that *Relativism* with respect to moral judgment no longer involves compromise. All it involves is an innocuous kind of cultural relativism which allows that the human form of life is exemplified at different times and places, habitats even, in different ways.

Contingency too is transformed. The starting point for ethics is now a life-form concept, *human*, a concept that makes relevant natural historical judgments that say how things are and ought to be with an individual of that kind. To hesitatingly revisit my earlier example, it does not strike me that Foot would say now, as she did in 1972, that 'there is a genuine choice as to whether or not to count as a human being, with the rights of a human being, what would become a human being but is not yet capable of independent life'.

[8] Philippa Foot, 'The Grammar of Goodness: An Interview with Philippa Foot', *The Harvard Review* of Philosophy XI (2003), 32–44.

[9] Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 113.

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The later Foot might rather say: in conceiving of some bit of matter as something that can 'become a human being' one brings it under the concept human, and lets it be the grammatical subject of natural historical judgments that together make up the natural history of the life form human. *The human begins as a cluster of cells*. Of course, this leaves open whether the same rights extend – at the same time – to every individual organism that shares in the human form of life, but it seems that it does not leave open whether *this individual* falls under the concept human. Critically, though, the idiom of 'play' survives in *Natural Goodness*. She writes: 'I have very little idea of how much 'play' there will in the end turn out to be, how many grey areas'.[10] I will return to *Contingency* later and with it *Inescapability*.

So, how does aesthetic judgment fare from the explanatory perspective of natural goodness?

I want to say first off that there is no reason to think that Foot would have changed her mind about *their grammar* – aesthetic judgment involves attitudes and feelings. At the same time, however, were Foot to have revisited the themes of the 1972 'Morality and Art' explicitly in *Natural Goodness*, I can imagine that the *strategy* according to which she would have charted the comparison would have changed – this is what I'm going to demonstrate next.

4. Art, secondary goodness, still-life

In making her 'Fresh Start' – the name of the chapter at the beginning of *Natural Goodness* – Foot says that the goods that 'hang on human cooperation' also hang on such things as respect for art. It might be wondered why and how goods that hang on human cooperation also hang on art. Foot does not say what this connection could be. I have a go – and here I am beginning the constructive part of the paper.

Elizabeth Anscombe says we have ways of getting each other do things that do not depend on force. Promising is an example of such co-operation. While force is indexed broadly to the present, *now*; promising brings about its effects in the future. Anscombe calls the kind of necessity that promising brings about Aristotelian necessity. Foot mentions self-interest as an Aristotelian necessity; self-interest is necessary for humans since, once grown, *we* are better placed than anyone else to look out for ourselves and for our futures. Though the word 'time' does not appear in the index of

[10] Op. cit. note 8, 23.

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Natural Goodness, *care* for the future is, I think, a kind of virtue for Foot; sensitivity to time and a suitable kind of temporal orientation, for oneself, one's children or dependents, is part of natural goodness, as is, we might imagine, care for the form of life itself and the variety of ways in which it can be instanced at places. She often mentions hope.

Further, although atemporal, natural historical judgments often contain time references to temporal phases of various sorts – circadian, seasonal, developmental (at night, the moongoose forges; in spring the black bear lazes by its den; the human infant puts objects into its mouth), these temporal phrases and words are, we might say, part of the *superficial* grammar that articulates a life-cycle. But this is distinct from having a kind orientation in time that is part of the life form itself and which the natural historical judgments that characterise the life-form collectively express or *show*.

So, with this notion of an Aristotelian necessity in sight, we might ask: Does art involve a way of getting people to do things that does not depend on force, where this may involve respect for the normative status of art? I'm going to draw on Iris Murdoch's aesthetics to defend this possibility though the idea I want to explore is slightly distinct, if compatible – it is the idea not that we have ways of getting people to *do* things that depends on art, but that we have ways of getting each other to *see* things that depends on art, where seeing for Murdoch is a precursor to doing. Murdoch writes that we can only act in the world that we can see.[11]

In Murdoch' aesthetics we find at least two ways of homing in on the idea that we have ways of getting each other to see things which hangs on art. First, let us return to Gordon Square – where this paper was first read – though at an earlier time. In her essay 'Old Bloomsbury' in *Moments of Being* (1976), Woolf depicts a way of going on that was characteristic of the members of the Bloomsbury group, but which is mundane and familiar:

> 'We sat and looked at the ground. Then at last, Vanessa, having said….that she had been to some picture show, incautiously used the word 'beauty'. At that, one of the young men would lift his head slowly and say, 'It depends what you mean by beauty'. At once all our ears were pricked. It was as if the bull had at last been turned into the ring. The bull might be

[11] Iris Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', in P. Conradi ed. *Existentialists and Mystics: Writing on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Penguin), 329.

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> 'beauty', might be 'good', might be 'reality'. Whatever it was, it was some abstract question that now drew all our forces …. Often we would still be sitting in a circle at two or three in the morning.'[12]

Murdoch sees the kind of triangulation that exists between at least two individuals, here a group, and an artwork, here a picture show, as having epistemic significance. Words are used in contexts. I can learn something about your scheme of concepts in the context of a shared object of attention. For instance, with reference to the picture-show I can learn something about what *you* think is 'mediocre', or 'ingenious' or 'derivative' since you will help me see where and why, for you, such words apply and we can thereby get the measure of where we diverge and overlap.[13]

Second, Murdoch gives a certain explanatory role to the *form* of the artwork. For instance, the novel, a narrative artwork, yokes together elements from our shared form of life in a coherent way. And if it is *great* art, for Murdoch, it will be realistic. Realism in art, like realism more generally is, for her, a *moral* achievement. But in this respect, the great artwork is, for Murdoch, a bit like a lens. In depicting patterns of human life in a realistic way, those patterns are made more salient to us when we turn away from fiction to reality; they come to 'stand out', they are lifted out of the maelstrom of existence otherwise full of contingency and seeming to lack point. And if it is great, it will foreground, now using *Foot's* idiom, what is serious not trivial in human life, though this is not to say that what is serious cannot be found in the most humdrum realities. What is serious for Foot is what matters in a human life; its goods. Yet if great art is like a lens for Murdoch – and, to be clear, this is my way of framing things – it is also like a mirror. The artwork, she says, is a 'cracked object'. In writing about the novel in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* she tells us that:

> 'The novel is a discursive art…The novel, in the great nineteenth-century sense, attempts to envisage if not the whole of life, at any rate a piece of it large and varied enough to seem to illuminate the whole, and has most obviously an open texture, a porous or cracked quality… . The object is as it were full of holes through which it communicates with life, and life flows

[12] Virginia Woolf, 1976, 'Old Bloomsbury', in S.P. Rosenbaum ed. *A Bloomsbury Group Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 362–63.

[13] For detailed discussion, see Anil Gomes 'Iris Murdoch on Art, Ethics, and Attention', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 53/(2013), 321–337.

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> in and out of it. This openness is compatible with elaborate form. The thing is open in the sense that it looks toward life and life looks back.'[14]

I cannot explore this passage adequately here, but suggest only that it chimes with perhaps the most quoted of lines in Murdoch's entire philosophical corpus: 'Man is a creature who makes pictures and then comes to resemble those pictures' – this is from her 'Metaphysics and Ethics', published the same year as Anscombe's *Intention*. It is also statement that at once recalls the form of the *natural historical judgment*. *Man is a creature who makes pictures*; 'The S does F'. Making pictures is something we, humans do, where 'picture' may be read on a cultural and historical scale to involve myth – the epic pictures we need but can be held captive by, a theme Mary Midgley's meta-philosophy constantly and brilliantly returns to.[15] *And then comes to resemble those pictures*. 'This is how things go with an S: they do F'.

Of course, we might wonder what it is to *resemble* a picture and again there is much to say. But for now, and for the purposes of this paper, I only note that resembling cannot mean copying which would involve interpretation and the possibility of mistake. In her long essay – or short book – *The Fire and the Sun,* Murdoch, writing on the *Timeaus*, comments 'a good man does not copy another good man, playing him as an actor plays a role….'[16] Her own philosophy agrees. The only sense in which one can copy a villain is by performing instances of actions that *are villainous*. But, if so, resembling a picture is not a matter of copying: it is a matter of *being* what is depicted. Here we might be reminded of the closeness that Woolf's thought comes to Moore's on reading him – his thoughts are incorporated.

Returning to Foot then I think we can so far light on a negative claim, though not before adding a further detail to the picture I am assembling.

In 1972, Foot says that in cases of good conduct, benefit does not usually accrue to oneself, or at least self-benefit is irrelevant – and it is precisely this fracturing of benefit from which the amoralist

[14] Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992) 96.

[15] For instance, see Mary Midgley 'Philosophical Plumbing' *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 33 (1992), 139–151.

[16] Iris Murdoch, 'The Fire and the Sun', in P. Conradi ed. *Existentialists and Mystics: Writing on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Penguin), 436.

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wants to escape. In contrast, the fruits of good art *are* garnered by the one to whom the good – the interest and enjoyment of the artwork – will come. But from the perspective of *Natural Goodness*, elaborated in this Murdochian frame, this no longer seems the case; the goods of art range wider. This might at once be thought to point to a crude *functional* account of art - the propensity of formal artworks to hone our attentive capacities, to allow for the co-ordination of divergent evaluative perspectives and so on. This might suggest too that art is at best only of *instrumental* value, but Foot, I think, offers us a distinctive way of conceiving this relation – and this is the second glimmer I want to shore up from *Natural Goodness*.

It is easy to overlook natural goodness, Foot thinks, because we make so many evaluations of *non-living things* in the natural word – she mentions the soil and weather, but also artefacts made by animals - the nests of birds and beaver's dams, and, in the human case, houses and bridges. But the goodness of these things she thinks is only *secondary* – their goodness is only intelligible in the context of the life form in which they play a part. Specifically: '*they contribute to the way things can go in the life of the species*.' It is tempting to see art, if not quite having the artefactual status of at least many houses and bridges, then as expressions of our creative capacity that are at least akin to these things. But, if so, we can think of art too as possessing a kind of secondary goodness.

Some clarifications. Importantly, evaluations of secondary goodness when applied to art or representation are not quite aesthetic evaluations though evaluation of aesthetic quality may be a component feature of the assessment of secondary goodness. Nor is such evaluation straightforwardly suggestive of an ethicism or aestheticism about art. Ethicism is broadly the idea that the moral outlook endorsed by an artwork is relevant to its *aesthetic evaluation*. In aestheticism there is no such link. Whether Foot would hold either of these I cannot say but at any rate the evaluation of secondary goodness is evaluation of a different kind. Things that have a secondary goodness *contribute to how things go in the life of the species*. I think we can leave it highly indeterminate how art contributes to how things go in the life of the human animal. That things do go some way or other however brings into view the third comment I want to consider.

In evaluating how things contribute to how things go in the life of the species, we are concerned with the life-form *as it is now* – not with how it could be. For one, the idea that the human life-form itself could be 'better' or 'worse' assumes the predicative use of 'good' that Foot wants to head off. Besides, she also tells us, using the

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language of art, 'it is only insofar as 'stills' can be made from the 'moving picture' of the evolution of the species that we can have a natural history of the life of a particular kind of living thing' at all.[17] And here she comments on what she sees as a gap in Michael Thompson's account.

The gap she sees is this. Not just any proposition that has the *natural historical form* let's say – the superficial grammar of such judgments - should figure in the set of natural historical judgments that tell us how a good *X* should be. Here's her example: 'The blue tit has a round blue patch on its head', but supposing blue-tits being so coloured plays no part in the life of the blue tit, the grey-headed blue tit in my garden need not be defective. On this understanding, what plays a part is just what is needed *to live* the life of a particular kind of thing. And here Foot shows us that there can, in fact, returning to our earlier discussion, be a little 'play' in the system – a creature that can live the life of a blue tit need not have a blue-coloured head. Likewise, there may be many different ways in which *what is needed* to live the life of a particular kind of thing can be met. These two points I think help waylay the charge of a certain kind of conservatism that can be laid against Foot. For instance, in a recent and illuminating paper Tom Whyman writes that Foot articulates a notion of the human good as 'univocal' and 'ultimately unchanging – something that every human being, who has ever existed, is subject to in ethical reflection in exactly the same way'.[18] But Foot, I think, allows for change – there is the still and there is the moving picture – *and* she allows for variation – the natural historical judgments that go to make up the 'still' must have teleological import but what is needed to live the life of a particular kind of living thing can be met in different ways.

It seems then that we can finally circle back to *Inescapability* and *Contingency*. We now have an explanation for the *inescapability* we may feel with respect to moral judgment. To act well, even if we don't on occasion, issues from our human nature, and this explains too in what sense *Contingency* is transformed. At the same time, once we admit the Murdochian natural historical judgment into the 'still' that constitutes our natural history, this picture becomes complicated. For just as a characteristic kind of orientation in time is expressed, or shown, by our natural history, so does it contain a latent dynamism which hangs on the pictures we make of ourselves and

[17] Op. cit. note 9, 29.

[18] Tom Whyman, 'Radical ethical naturalism', *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 44/2 (2018) 159–178.

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on their secondary goodness. In the last part of the paper, I draw these ideas together by glossing some of Foot's closing remarks in *Natural Goodness*.

5. Depicting human form

Earlier I said that Foot describes Nietzsche's doctrines as 'poisonous'. In what ways are they poisonous? According to Nietzsche's view, as cast by Foot, there are no right or wrong actions *considered in themselves*. But, here, and I let Foot's voice take over:

> 'human life, unlike the life of animals is lived according to norms that are known and taken as patterns by those whose norms they are. So, we have to teach children what they may and may not do…the norms to be followed must be largely formulated in terms of the prohibition of actions such as murder or theft….[U]nlike the members of other species, humans, having the power of abstract thought can consider they own ways of going on. We humans have ourselves developed and can criticise our own practices. We can ask whether human life might be better conducted if Nietzsche's doctrines were taught. But then we must think about how human life could be carried on'[19]

The norms to be followed that involve prohibition are what Anscombe calls 'stopping modals' – they are of the form 'you mustn't do *X*', 'you can't do *X*', where *X* may be filled in by something that it *is* in the power of a human animal to do; thieve or lie or murder even. That adults teach children such norms is part of our natural history and again a certain kind of orientation in time is expressed by our instructing our children in this way. But since living according to such norms is what we humans do, a human that flouts these norms is defective.

A Nietzchean immoralist is *more* than defective however. Since it is part of human life that norms expressed using stopping modals are taught to children, a view that doesn't treat the actions that can take the place of *X* as prohibited *in themselves*, would be, *were that view taken up*, inimical to the human form of life going on. It is in this sense, then, that Nietzsche's doctrines are poisonous – they fail to have secondary goodness. I have so far cast the Wittgensteinean frame of Foot's thinking on these matters in terms of epistemic feelings – hunches, feelings of malaise. But in this final page of *Natural*

[19] Op. cit. note 9, 114.

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Goodness, there are echoes of the rule-following argument – the possibility of human life going is internal to the human life form itself.

So, does this mean, finally, that we should not countenance poisonous doctrines – or, as Hume would cast, it morally vicious artworks, a question Foot explicitly does not broach in her 1972 paper? I'm not sure Foot would say so, but in a postscript, she gives an example which might suggest that the taking of certain kinds of objects as objects of aesthetic appreciation is defective:

> 'Goethe told his secretary Eckermann of a certain Englishman who, owning an aviary, was so struck one day by the beautiful appearance of a dead bird that he straightaway had the rest killed and stuffed. Hardly a crime! And yet there was *something wrong* with that man'[20]

For a Moorean isolationist, the mere existence of states of aesthetic appreciation is good and the more such states exist - as 'killing the rest' might engender – the better. The problem with absolute isolationism however is that it demands the de-historicisation of the work. But – more critically – it also assumes that the act of contemplation of such isolated objects is itself de-historicised, floating free from any background. And perhaps the evaluative escapability of aesthetic judgment tempts this picture. This, I think, is what Foot would find dangerous.

Works of art and philosophical doctrines appear against a background – they are Murdochian 'cracked objects', full of holes, '[they] look toward life and life looks back'. Foot is writing against a background where the aesthetic pull of Nietszche's depictions of human form were mirrored in the historical events that she took as the background for all of her philosophy from 1946 on, and she too recognises too their allure. But she also recognises her task as philosopher. Again, feelings creep in. When criticising Nietszche, she feels herself a surveyor reducing a glorious countryside to its contours – 'or like someone telling the Sirens they are singing out of tune'.[21] But like Midgley, Anscombe and Murdoch, she sees that this is work that needs to be done. If art is for life's sake, then so is

[20] Op. cit. note 8, Postscript.

[21] Philippa Foot, 'Nietzche's Immoralism', in *Moral Dilemmas* (Oxford: Oxfrod University Press, 2002), 158.

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philosophy. Or to paraphrase Foot: We were seduced once. Who's to say we will not be again?[22]

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