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Radical Ethical Naturalism

Abstract: *In this paper, I identify – and clear up – two problems for contemporary neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism. The first I call the problem of alienation; the second the problem of conservatism. I argue that these problems will persist, both for 'hard' and 'soft' forms of ethical naturalism, unless ethical naturalists adopt what I call 'Practical Realism' about essential human form. Such a Practical Realism leaves open the possibility of radical social and political criticism – I therefore suggest that contemporary ethical naturalists ought to be more interested in exploring the affinities their view shares with Marxist political thought.*

In this paper, I will be discussing what I call 'neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism' (NAEN). Thinkers of this school – the likes of Philippa Foot, Michael Thompson, and John McDowell – are linked by at least two things. Firstly, the insight – however this insight is understood *exactly* – that ethics must make reference to the sort of creatures human beings *are*: thus, the 'naturally-derived human good'. In this paper, I will refer to this as the idea that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists (NAENs) affirm some, ethically significant, notion of 'essential human form' (EHF).

The second trait these thinkers share is a lineage of influence traceable to G.E.M. Anscombe's seminal 1958 paper 'Modern Moral Philosophy': the paper in which the Aristotelian turn in Anglo-American ethical philosophy was first instigated. Indeed, the most prominent NAENs have typically been Anscombe's students, or the students of her students.

I am – or at least, I like to think I am – an ethical naturalist of this sort. In my view, NAEN offers us the most compelling prospect, from all the options laid out on philosophy's normative buffet, of formulating an ethics that is both plausible and robust. *Robust*, because such a naturalism can provide us with an objective basis on which we can answer questions as to what we ought – or ought not – to do. *Plausible*, because this objective basis – unlike its Kantian, utilitarian, or Humean

counterparts – is able to do justice to human life in all its manifest complexities and ambiguities, refusing to reduce away the real uncertainty that constantly confronts us as ethical agents into the gray emptiness of mechanical nature, or the idiot pedantry of some absolute moral principle.

Having said that, it's not like NAEN is entirely without its problems. In this paper, I will identify – and clear up – two related difficulties that the problem faces. I will trace these problems to their source, and I will explain how – by adopting a position which I call 'Practical Realism' – NAEN can overcome them. I should note however that my intention, in doing so, is not solely altruistic: helpfully and eager-eyedly clearing up a couple of obstacles that would otherwise stand in my favoured metaethical position's way. It is, rather, to demonstrate that these obstacles will persist unless the direction in which NAEN faces does not definitively *shift* – away from the polite, small-c conservatism of a Philippa Foot, or the quietism of a John McDowell – towards the social and political radicalism of the early Marx, or Theodor Adorno.

1. Alienation and Conservatism

As I've already briefly noted above: NAEN derives what positive normative content it contains from some notion of EHF. NAENs must, therefore, be in the business of making some fairly definite claims about how human life *ought* to be carried on: indeed, it is only by asserting such claims that NAENs are going to be able to formulate meaningful, action-guiding ethical propositions. A very broad, vague formulation of the relevant sort would be: human beings need to be healthy in order to count as living well; there are certain things human beings need to do in order to be healthy (consuming certain foods, avoiding others, exercising regularly, etc.); therefore human beings ought to do these health-giving things. Or: courage is a virtue; therefore human beings ought to be courageous; here is a list of criteria for what counts as courageous activity; it is good for human beings to pursue these activities.

This sort of essentialism, however, is *prima facie* problematic – indeed, it is from it that the two problems I will be discussing in this paper appear, at first glance, to emerge.¹ The first I will label the problem of 'alienation'. Essentialist ethical naturalism appears to proceed by inference from non-normative facts about human beings (how things simply 'are' with us, in terms of our species-life) to normative statements about what we, as human beings, *ought* to do. To sketch a crude example: in at least some societies, human beings need to hunt for food in order to survive. Adult male human beings are typically larger and stronger than adult female human beings, which – one might imagine – makes them better-suited to hunting large game. Therefore, one could claim, in such societies the role of adult male human beings ought to be to hunt for food, while the females stay at home. This sort of reasoning would be *alienating*, to the extent that it sets out to bind ethical deliberation in conformity to some object external to specifically ethical thought. In the example given, the problem – aside from how flattening it is about gender – is that consideration is only afforded to how humans might most effectively sustain themselves materially. This misses higher-order considerations of the sort we might consider relevant to being 'a good person' – eliminating the question of how these hunter-gatherers might best develop as moral individuals by reducing it away into the question of how they might optimise their chances of surviving to breed. If these higher-order considerations can't be robustly installed into the picture somehow, the risk is that our ethical reasoning will turn out to be little more than the slave of a hungry, dictatorial nature.

Secondly, this form of essentialism appears to imply what Michael Thompson describes as “an alarming and idiotic moral conservatism” (Thompson 2013, p. 2). This is the sort of conservatism that might be expressed in a phrase such as, 'it's just human nature'. Here, the idea would be that 'essential human nature' is something always already realised *just insofar* as there exist human beings who are bearers of this nature. Thus, that ethical knowledge ought to be a matter of simply looking back to what human beings 'have always done' – the wise will be the ones who elect to copy it. In the worst cases, this could lead to NAENs finding themselves obliged to endorse certain forms

of monstrosity – to continue in the vein of our previous example, it could for instance lead to ethical naturalism being invoked to reinforce male sexual domination over females.ⁱⁱ But even if they steered clear of this sort of bigotry, there could still be residual problems brought on by conservatism: for instance, an unduly conservative conception of human nature could lead to certain lines of social and political criticism being shut down as illegitimate, as involving suggestions that 'just wouldn't work' for human beings. At any rate – it's worth noting – the inference involved here is a totally bogus one: just because something is currently done, or has been done in the past, does not *entail* that we should continue to do it in the future: at best, we would need something *else* to support the claim. I call all this, the problem of 'conservatism'.

I have, of course, introduced these two problems in a rather stark way, such that they risk seeming like caricatures: can any sophisticated philosophical naturalist really mean for their account to imply *that*? To which I would reply: well no, almost certainly they don't *intend* it to. But that doesn't mean their logic isn't, amidst all the smoke and mirrors and any waterings-down they might attempt, inexorably drawn towards these problems. I will elaborate on this, in sections 2 and 3, by discussing two distinct forms of EHF, both of which have been attributed to Philippa Foot. The first, which might be associated with a 'hard' form of naturalism, is clearly subject to the problem of alienation – this, I hold, leads to conservatism becoming a problem as well. The second, associated with a 'softer', more liberal form of naturalism, initially seems well-set to avoid alienation, but is demonstrably subject to the problem of conservatism – this, I argue, lets alienation back in, as if via the back door.ⁱⁱⁱ

2. Biologistic Essentialism

Hans Fink (2008) suggests that Foot “comes close to exemplifying” a position whereby:

“All we need by way of ethics can be grounded in facts about the natural world 'as the

province of scientific understanding' including e.g. facts about 'what animals of a particular species need in order to do well in the sort of life they naturally live'" (Fink 2008, p. 53).

I will label this position, 'biologism'. The position consists in the claim that EHF is a specifically *biological* concept. Hence if our ethics proceeded by reference to human form as *thus* understood, all that matters for ethics could be described using the terminology of the natural sciences; ethics would simply be a matter of responding appropriately to what we can think of as *hard, natural facts*. Human biological nature, perhaps, gives us a set of criteria for what is going to count as human flourishing: it's all in our genes, say. Ethics ought to be consistently guided by these facts: were it to be, we would all be a lot better off.

Clearly, there will be some thinkers who are tempted by biologism. In particular, if you are the sort of eliminative naturalist who thinks that everything that can't be described in natural-scientific terms is an outmoded and over-elaborate fiction which simply must be done away with, then you are likely to find the view appealing: indeed, it could seem like this is *our only shot* at developing an objectively valid system of ethics. The New Atheist writer Sam Harris, for instance, defends a form of biologism about ethics, aiming as he does to ground moral philosophy in 'material facts' – in particular, facts about the make-up of the human brain (Harris 2010).

Foot was never going to claim anything quite this stark, but certainly there are points in her work where Fink's characterisation of her position looks to be right, and she affirms something identifiable as importantly *like* this view. For instance, at the outset of *Natural Goodness*, she writes:

“For I believe that evaluations of human will and action share a conceptual structure with evaluations of characteristics and operations of other living things, and can only be understood in these terms. I want to show moral evil as 'a kind of natural defect'... the fact that a human action or disposition is good of its kind will be taken to be simply a fact about a given feature of a certain kind of natural thing” (Foot 2001, p. 5).

So, on (what looks to be) Foot's view here, moral goodness or badness is grounded in facts about human nature, which are analogous in form to facts about animal or plant nature. We assess animal or plant nature with reference to biology: so too should we do this (it seems, she is suggesting) for human beings.

And yet for all this Foot would, I think, be the first to point out problems with this view. Later in the same work, she writes:

“... appearances are against my thesis. For how could there be a human life form that played the same logical role in the determination of goodness here as the equivalent in the case of plants and animals? There will surely be objection to the idea that a natural form of life characteristic of humankind could determine what you or I *ought* to do. What does it matter to me *what species* I belong to? Should we not protest on behalf of individuality and creativity against bringing in the human species when asking what I myself – this particular person – should do?” (p. 37).

Still later, Foot writes that there exists “an apparently unanswerable objection” to her view, namely that:

“... human beings as rational creatures can ask why what has so far been said should have any effect on their conduct. For let us suppose that the normative pattern that I called 'natural normativity' does govern our evaluations of human beings as human beings. Suppose that human beings are defective as human beings unless they do what is needed for human good, including such things as refraining from murder and keeping promises. The sceptic will surely ask 'But what if I do not care about being a good human being?'" (ibid., p. 52).

The problem here is, of course, nothing other than the problem of alienation as described in section 1: what is at issue is the mystery as to how biological facts might come to bear on us *normatively* – how exactly we (as human beings) are supposed to make the leap from how we merely, biologically 'are', to what, ethically speaking, we 'ought' to be. Biology might, as Foot says, give us a set of

criteria about how we are supposed to flourish *qua* human. But it can't get us to *accept* that criteria (at least, not on its own). Bringing about such an acceptance would require an additional sort of reflection – *specifically ethical reflection*. And indeed, engaging in this sort of reflection seems like it must be *just as natural* to human beings as, say, eating food to receive nutrition is, or reproducing through sexual intercourse; things that (I'm guessing) no-one would doubt were part of our 'animal' being.^{iv}

For the biologicistic essentialist, the human good exists in our genes, or in our brain states, or at any rate somehow *outside of* our practices of ethical reflection. For the biologicistic essentialist, there exists a certain set of criteria for ethical reflection, that much is clear, but it's not at all a set of criteria we are afforded any powers to *shape*, or which we can as it were *negotiate* with for ourselves. Whilst this thought might be appealing to certain sorts of authoritarian personality – for it doesn't seem as if the standard in question would be subject to the possibility of human errors in judgement – for the more independently-minded amongst us it seems likely to trigger an understandable recoil.

Suppose, for instance, that scientists discovered the existence of a 'happiness gene' – a gene which some people have, and others lack. Possessing this gene, it turns out, is necessary for one to be truly, deeply happy: happy in a lasting way. Those who lack the gene can *never* be deeply happy, and are likely to make others less so by expressing their congenital dissatisfaction both artistically – say, through their dingy poetry – and in conversation. Suppose we're interested in maximising human happiness; how should we respond to this new knowledge? By stopping people who lack the happiness gene from breeding? By euthanising them wholesale? Suddenly human flourishing seems like it could be maximised by inflicting something on a group of people that is deeply unjust at best, genocidal at worst. As far as I can tell we would have departed from good ethical conduct here. But in order to make sense of this, we need our reflection to be guided by *more* than just biological facts.

And besides which, it is far from clear to me how we ever *could* grasp such an alien standard. The idea of a purely biological standard seems like it presupposes the possibility of our obtaining some knowledge that is legitimate regardless of the particular standpoint occupied by the observer; the product of a 'view from nowhere'. But *I'm* not nowhere, and neither are you. And although I lack much detailed knowledge of how STEM subjects are practised, I don't suppose that *their* researchers are nowhere either. It seems that, far from being a standard which we cannot shape, the relevant 'biological' standard is at least in some sense the *product* of human endeavour. At any rate, it is something that we have arrived at through empirical observation and canonised in the context of a culturally specific type of institutional knowledge. But then there is automatically the danger of this standard functioning as a sort of 'reification' of the ingrained (perhaps, socially derived) prejudices of those who are responsible for articulating it. Hence it cannot act as a reliable guide as to how we ought to reflect on and (potentially) reshape our practices. A 'biological' standard for ethics that was articulated by researchers in a particularly monstrous society, who have themselves been shaped in their views by the monstrousness they've been raised within, is likely to ingrain still more of that monstrousness; worse indeed since this monstrousness can now be validated by dint of a standard posing as 'objective' and hence beyond mere human error. Thus there is a threat of conservatism associated with biologism, entering as if invited as the 'plus one' of the problem of alienation.

3. Non-biologistic essentialism

It is therefore understandable that NAENs should be keen to distance themselves from biologistic essentialism. This is, for instance, the stated purpose of John McDowell's essay 'Two Sorts of Naturalism': to demonstrate that the sort of naturalistic ethics associated with Foot can only be properly understood given a broader conception of the natural than the 'neo-Humean', 'bald

naturalist' (that is to say: biologicistic) view of nature prevalent in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy (McDowell 1998, pp. 174ff). The sort of view on which, as McDowell puts it, “reality is exhausted by the natural world, in the sense of the world as the natural sciences are capable of revealing it to us” (p. 175). In *Mind and World*, McDowell will refer to this view as one on which nature is identified with 'the realm of law' (McDowell 1996, p. 78).

This conception of nature as a realm of law-like, natural-scientific intelligibility – in short, the position I've referred to above as 'hard naturalism' – only captures the aspects of it which McDowell includes under the umbrella of what he calls 'first nature'. McDowell thinks that philosophers in general need to expand their conception of the natural to include what he calls 'second nature', under which fall “any propensities of animals that are not already possessed at birth, and not acquired in merely biological maturation, for instance, the propensity to grow facial hair on the part of male human beings” (McDowell 2008, p. 220). In short: what we might describe as things that need to be 'enculturated' (McDowell uses the German, *Bildung*).

Non-human animals can acquire a second nature: crows can use tools, parrots can learn sounds, dogs can learn to follow commands, cats can learn to bury their faeces, and so forth. But *human* second nature, according to McDowell, is distinctive insofar as it 'opens our eyes' to 'the space of reasons' (McDowell 1996, p. 88), thus of reflecting on what one does, holding other agents to account for what *they* do, being able to justify what one says. Whilst this second nature is developmentally distinct from first nature, which is certainly represented as preceding it causo-temporally, for McDowell it is no more or less 'natural' than its law-governed counterpart. Being *gebildet* into the space of reasons is, for McDowell, just one of the things that the human animal *does*.

McDowell thus has a conception of human nature that is not solely restricted to 'biological' nature but is rather inclusive of human culture, encompassing our reflective, reason-giving practices ('soft naturalism'). Hence ethical reflection is not, for McDowell, something which can proceed with

reference to some 'natural' standard that is itself placed wholly 'outside' of these practices. And, as McDowell is at pains to point out in 'Two Sorts of Naturalism', this is a conception of human nature which Foot appears to share.^v

That Foot's conception of human nature extends beyond the merely biological can be witnessed in a passage such as the following:

“Human good is *sui generis*. Nevertheless, I maintain that a common conceptual structure remains. For 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 to be 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 a living thing a human being is” (Foot 2001, p. 51).

At another point in *Natural Goodness*, Foot quotes P.T. Geach as claiming that “Men need virtues as bees need stings” (p. 35), a thought which, as she later makes clear, she fully approves of.

“... if we ask whether Geach was right to say that human beings need virtues as bees need stings... the answer is surely that he was. Men and women need to be industrious and tenacious of purpose not only so as to be able to house, clothe, and feed themselves, but also to pursue human ends having to do with love a friendship” (p. 44).

'The virtues', here, are portrayed by Foot as exhibiting what she calls, via Anscombe, 'Aristotelian necessity' (for human beings).

“Aristotelian necessity': that which is necessary because and in so far as good hangs on it. We invoke the same idea when we say that it is necessary for plants to have water, for birds to build nests, for wolves to hunt in packs and for lionesses to teach their cubs to kill. These 'Aristotelian necessities' depend on what the particular species of plants and animals need,

on their natural habitat, and the ways of making out that are in their repertoire. These things together determine what it is for members of a particular species to be as they should be, and to do that which they should do. And for all the enormous differences between the life of humans and that of plants or animals, we can see that human defects and excellences are similarly related to what human beings are and what they do... Those free-riding individuals of a species whose members work together are just as *defective* as those who have defective hearing, sight, or powers of locomotion” (pp. 15-16).

Thus understood in a McDowellian, soft naturalist vein, Foot's position appears to be something like this: for her, EHF is *not* merely biological, but also inclusive of – and expressed through – our specifically cultural practices. EHF can be invoked to assess such practices in an immanent way: for instance, it can tell us that in order to flourish *qua* human being we require food, shelter, loving relationships – if we are unable to obtain these things, then our lives will be somehow lacking or defective. And, if we are not equipped *to be able to* have them, we will therefore count as a defective member of our species. Honesty, for instance, is cited by Foot as an example of a 'good human disposition', insofar as it matters that a human community can trust each other, or is characterised by mutual respect (p. 48). A psychologically perverse individual, who was always compelled to lie, hence could *not* count as a good human being, or at least would have to show they could overcome this deficiency in order to be considered one.^{vi}

The most obvious advantage of making this move – broadening out our conception of human nature to include 'second nature' – would be that it appears to avoid the problem of alienation. On the biologicistic picture, ethical reflection was to be done in line with a standard represented as external to our ethical practices, including our practices of reflection themselves. On the non-biologicistic picture, by contrast, these practices are just *part of* what counts as human nature, hence part of what we are, in ethical reflection, reflecting *on*: we must, when we are engaged in such reflection, be reflecting on what is good for specifically *rational* creatures. And, for Foot, this works

the other way as well: as per the argument of chapter 4 of *Natural Goodness*, a conception of the human good is constitutive of the possibility of exercising rationality in ethical judgement itself.

This is actually how Foot gets round something that – she thinks – is a key problem for her view, already briefly touched upon in the discussion of biologism above: the fact that (*prima facie*) critical reflection seems like it must be radically open-ended – that we can always ask, e.g. 'but why *should* I be a good human being?' For Foot, it just *is rational* to want to be a good human being, to live a good human life: this is what rationality aims at, it is what our reason-giving practices pertain to; the human good precedes, constrains, and determines rationality.

“If a sceptic... goes on saying that he has not been shown that there is a reason for acting as a good person would act, it is no longer clear what he is asking for. To ask for a reason for acting rationally is to ask for a reason where reasons must *a priori* have come to an end. And if he goes on saying 'But why *should* I?' we may query the meaning of this 'should'” (p. 65).

So far, so good: alienation has, it seems, been avoided. But the risk of conservatism, I think, remains. In the final chapter of *Natural Goodness*, Foot presents a rather strident critique of 'immoralism', a position her main example of which is Nietzsche's critique of morality, and his correlative attempt at a 'revaluation of values'. Foot portrays Nietzsche as a thinker who (despite denying the existence of free will) was a radical individualist, advocating an ethical picture on which there is no “'intrinsic badness' in the doing of any kind of act,” but that “the true nature of an action [depends] rather on the *nature of the individual who did it*” (p. 110). This means that Nietzsche is (apparently) happy to endorse acts of plunder, murder, and rape, provided these acts were done by the right sort of people – for instance, “the nobles of earlier times,” who had the appropriate disposition to plunder and rape with impunity, their horrific actions even being characterised by 'playfulness' (p.111). This, according to Foot, explains why the Nazis found so much in Nietzsche's thought that they believed complemented their barbaric ideology; Foot is in partial agreement with J.P. Stern when she quotes him as saying that “No man came closer to the

full realization of self-created values than A. Hitler” (p. 103).^{vii}

Hence Nietzsche's immoralism, Foot implies, could lead to our endorsing a monstrosity that would place us somehow *beyond* the human.

“In human life it is an Aristotelian necessity (something on which our way of life depends) that if, for instance, a stranger should come on us when we are sleeping he will not think it all right to kill us or appropriate the tools that we need for the next day's work. In human life as it is, this kind of action is not made good by authenticity or self-fulfilment in the one who does it” (p. 114).

The danger of Nietzsche's thought, then, is that it might tempt “those who see themselves as exceptional to think that when *they* murder and torture they are doing nothing wrong” (p.115). But according to Foot, such a Nietzschean villain would not just be *any* monster, they would – perhaps still worse – be a monster who is philosophically *mistaken*. As Foot has it, Nietzsche's immoralism stems from a certain confusion as to the role of reflection in our ethical practices, one which ignores the way in which reflection is informed by what, Foot believes, is essential to life itself.

“[Nietzsche] was engaged, as he insisted, on a revaluation of values. And this is not an incomprehensible enterprise. For, unlike members of other species, humans, having the power of abstract thought, can *consider* their own ways of going on. We humans have ourselves developed and can criticise our own practices. We can ask whether human life might not be better conducted if Nietzsche's doctrines were taught. But then we must think about *how* human life could be carried on. Nietzsche believed that under his influence a higher type of man could develop on earth, and wrote as if he could imagine his new being: as if he saw the possibility of a new species or life form that could develop from our own. My point is that it is only for a different species that Nietzsche's most radical revaluation of values could be valid. It is not valid for us as we are, or are ever likely to be” (ibid).

Now, as various remarks in this paper up to this point ought to have made clear, I agree entirely

with Foot when she suggests that some notion of the human good is essential to ethical reflection. But unlike Foot, I do not think – even remotely – that this is somehow *incompatible* with the radical criticism of our existing ethical practices. In the passage above, it strikes me that Foot is articulating a notion of the human good as something univocal, and ultimately unchanging – something that every human being, who has ever existed, is subject to in ethical reflection in exactly the same way. This would, at least, explain why Foot thinks that the sort of 'revaluation of values' Nietzsche envisages could only be valid for creatures who were somehow more – or *less* – than human; why she is so starkly opposed to Nietzsche's 'individualistic' variety of ethical criticism as likely to do profound violence to human nature.

Now, clearly Foot's thinking on this score is at least *somewhat* conservative – after all, it seeks precisely to *conserve* a (normatively significant) notion of human nature as something that she is claiming has, in at least some sense, 'always' been present in us as a species. But is it *unduly* conservative, that is: does it manifest the problem of conservatism? I want to argue that it does – to the extent that it involves a conception of EHF that could be invoked to shut legitimate criticism of our practices down.

To see this, let's start by invoking as an example a virtue our society clearly affirms: I'll use 'industriousness', namely the quality of being enterprising and hard-working. Earlier in this section I quoted Foot as stating that, in order to flourish, human beings need to be “industrious and tenacious of purpose not only so as to be able to house, clothe, and feed themselves, but also to pursue human ends having to do with love and friendship” (p. 44). I'm confident that any individual existing in the Anglo-American world from the 19th century onwards, or probably even before then, is going to be all-too-well aware of this piece of ideology. Indeed, today, the virtue of industriousness is blared out at us from every possible trumpet, its heralds resonating across our ideals of social justice; our culturally-engrained (Protestant) ethics; and our official advice about health and well-being.

So, our society is organised to help industrious human beings flourish – that much is clear, and to

this extent I am in agreement with Foot's statement. But surely any reasonably sensitive observer must also be aware of how our collective valorisation of industriousness works to *damage* human life. For instance, our valuing of industriousness is part of why the state feels licensed to victimise long-term welfare recipients with impunity, including even disabled people.^{viii} Relatedly, this narrative informs the fact that we are often obliged to taking boring, exhausting jobs in order to pay for the things – such as food, or housing – that we need to survive. In the long-term, this can lead to adverse health conditions such as depression, heart disease, and diabetes – either directly, or indirectly through things like substance abuse or lack of sleep. Moreover, the particular value our society places on industriousness might cause people who are hard-working, but little else, to consider themselves morally superior to their lazier – though perhaps more generous, more open-minded, more sensitive – peers: thus, entitled to a greater share of resources than they are.

Now, imagine that everything in our society and culture was just as it presently is: the dominant social tendency valorises industriousness as something essential to good human functioning, and this valorisation is having all the negative effects described above. But imagine that – in contrast to how things presently are, I hope – there exists only *one* critical individual, who through whatever quirk of fate is the only member of their society to possess the wit to conceptualise these negatives *as* negatives. In such a situation, it seems, our critical hero would be entirely *justified* in forming a judgement of the form: “society is wrong about industriousness; *I* see things differently, and *I'm* the one who is right. We need to radically transform our understanding of industriousness in some way, altering its application or perhaps even discarding it as a virtue.”

Such a critical judgement would, I think, be two things. Firstly, it would be individualistic. Just one single, brittle, isolated individual is forming it, against how 'people in general' see things. It is *not* individualistic of course in the sense that our critical hero is claiming industriousness is bad *only for them*, although to be honest their peers could well prove unable – or unwilling – to tell the difference. Secondly, such a critical judgement would be very radical – it would entail the

reevaluation of something that – at least according to Foot – has previously been settled as part of what we agree to constitute 'human nature': it thus recommends that a *new conception of human life* emerge in this old notion's place.

As such Foot would, I think, be obliged to reject the legitimacy of this judgement: to the extent that it is both radical and individualistic, it is analogous in form to the 'immoralism' she condemns. This still holds even if our isolated social critic's intentions are – as Foot might well admit – better than those of the 'Nietzschean' critic who advocates stabbing people in their sleep.

Foot's anti-Nietzscheanism thus shows her up as being subject to the problem of conservatism because, in her straining to avoid immoralism, she ends up forcing herself into affirming a version of EHF which cannot accommodate the possibility of this sort of radical ethical criticism – criticism which, it now seems clear, *could* in fact be carried on in the service of human life. The reevaluation of values isn't inhuman: what *is* inhuman, is the insistence that our present mode of existence might somehow exhaust the possibilities of the human animal, obliging us to remain the diminished beings we are at present, brutalised by capitalism and beset with inequality.

To close this section: it must be noted that this conservatism, likewise, is expressive of a form of alienation. This is because it represents essential human form as being something importantly *beyond* the critical reflection of the individuals who bear it: a logic that, as we have established above, is paradigmatically alienating. As on the biologicistic account where, as we saw, alienation dragged conservatism along in its wake, so for the non-biologicistic account any conservatism seems like it must let alienation back in via the back-door. We therefore have good reason to think that the two problems will need to be defeated together.

4. Practical and Observational Knowledge

So how can the two problems be defeated? By which I really mean: how can they be defeated whilst

simultaneously preserving what matters about NAEN? I will begin to move towards a solution by first asking: why might Foot feel the need to install the form of conservatism she does into her account in the first place? One theory, of course, could just be that it is a matter of personal disposition. After all, we we can hardly expect an eighty year-old Oxford don (as Foot was at the time of writing *Natural Goodness*), who was from a background so privileged that her mother was literally born in the White House, to be a barricade-bothering revolutionary. Well, that might be part of it – and certainly, I think it would be naïve to *entirely* discount a philosopher's social position when analysing their thought – but it isn't especially theoretically satisfying, smacking of *ad hominem* and besides which having none of the hardness of a logical 'must'.

So here's another possible explanation: Foot is drawn into a sort of conservatism about human nature as a result of the model of *knowledge* about EHF that she affirms. There are, I want to claim, two ways in which we could obtain knowledge about EHF. The first I will label the 'observational model'. This would mean: standing within our society and culture, and forming inferences about human nature based on what human beings *in fact* do. So for instance, if we observed flourishing human beings to be industrious, we would conclude that industriousness was a virtue. If we observed human beings engaging in regular ceremonies of religious worship, we would conclude that religion served some important human need, and so forth.

This sounds fine. But consider how we are here treating the *object* of this empirical investigation into human nature. We are, it seems, obliged to treat it as something analogous to the object of the empirical, natural sciences: something that, at least for the purposes of our study, is represented as static and unchanging, bound by our observation in the form of a law. And *that*, of course, is precisely the problem.

So here's my hypothesis: even though we can (with McDowell), read Foot as a sort of soft naturalist, it nevertheless seems as if she transmutes, wittingly or unwittingly, a scientific paradigm of knowledge onto her ethics.^{ix} Foot, of course, never actually *tells* us she is doing this – although as

far as I know she never said anything to the contrary either.^x For this reason, I don't want to claim that my ascribing an 'observational' model of knowledge to Foot represents any great breakthrough in the field of Foot Studies. Rather, I simply want to say this: if Foot *does* hold an observational model of EHF, then that allows us to make sense of her conservatism as being something more than simple caprice. If she doesn't, then maybe it really is just a matter of personal disposition.

More importantly, describing what Foot's position *would* look like – if she *did* hold such a model of ethical knowledge – allows us to draw a contrast with a second model, associated with G.E.M. Anscombe and – more recently – Michael Thompson. This is the model of ethical knowledge that I want to agitate for.

For Anscombe, ethical knowledge is expressly *non-observational*. Anscombe dedicates some of the most intriguing passages of her study of *Intention* to articulating this notion of 'non-observational' knowledge. She starts with a fairly trivial example: that of knowing the position of one's limbs. Nothing, Anscombe says, *shows* us the position of our limbs: it is not as if we have to feel a tingle in our knee, to be aware of where it is (Anscombe 2000, p. 13). This ought to resonate with our experience, I think: we don't know where our body is by looking at it, or even by feeling things in it – we just have a sort of kinaesthetic intuition of it, inhabiting it as we do from the inside.^{xi} And yet, Anscombe claims, this rather nebulous 'intuition' can form the basis of a knowledge claim, because it is the sort of thing we might be *mistaken* about: we could, conceivably, intuit that our knee is bent when it is straight – someone being mistaken in this way “might be surprising,” Anscombe notes, “but it is not particularly obscure” (p. 14).

Anscombe then extends this category of non-observational knowledge to encompass knowledge of one's intentions – how I know, for instance, that I am trying to open the window.

“This is difficult. Say I go over to the window and open it. Someone who hears me moving calls out: What are you doing making that noise? I reply 'Opening the window'. I have called such a statement knowledge all along; and precisely because in such a case what I say is true

– I do open the window; and that means that the window is getting opened by the movements of the body out of whose mouth these words come. But I don't say the words like this: 'Let me see, what is this body bringing about? Ah yes! the opening of the window'. Or even like this 'Let me see, what are my movements bringing about? The opening of the window'. To see this, if it is not already plain, contrast this case with the following one: I open the window and it focuses a spot of light on the wall. Someone who cannot see me but can see the wall, says 'What are you doing making that light come on the wall? And I say 'Ah yes, it's opening the window that does it, or 'That always happens when one opens that window at midday if the sun is shining'" (p. 51).

It is plausible to suggest that we know our intentional actions 'without observation' because, for any action we might will, there is *no one observable thing* which could possibly count as evidence that this is what we, in fact, wish to do. For instance: I may intend to paint my wall yellow. If the person I've just spent the night with asks what I am doing when I abruptly leave the house to walk to the hardware store and buy some yellow paint, I might reply that I'm painting my wall yellow. But of course I do not know this because I have *observed* it: I've not painted my wall yet. If, in my hungover state, I accidentally buy some green paint, and then paint my wall green, there might well be no *external* evidence that I ever intended to paint it yellow at all – at least if I don't make a big fuss about it in front of my new friend. And yet, I still know what I *intended* to do – and it wasn't any of this. This is why I can successfully paint my wall green, but it can still be a mistake. And there are plenty of other things I can do successfully, which might prove to be mistakes as well.

So far so good – and, for what it's worth, I think that Anscombe is deeply right about the nature of intention.^{xii} But my real interest in her book proceeds from the way in which she uses her reflections on intentional action in order to posit a big, daring hypothesis about the nature of ethical knowledge. Following her discussion of intentional action as involving non-observational knowledge, Anscombe asks:

“Can it be that there is something that modern philosophy has blankly misunderstood: namely what ancient and medieval philosophers meant by *practical knowledge*? Certainly in modern philosophy we have an incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge. Knowledge must be something that is judged as such by being in accordance with the facts. The facts, reality, are prior, and dictate what it is to be said, if it is knowledge. And this is the explanation of the utter darkness in which we found ourselves. For if there are two knowledges – one by observation, the other in intention – then it looks as if there must be two objects of knowledge; but if one says the objects are the same, one looks hopelessly for the different *mode of contemplative knowledge* in acting, as if there were a very queer and special sort of seeing eye in the middle of the acting” (p. 57).

Towards the end of her book, Anscombe cites Aquinas in suggesting that “Practical knowledge is the cause of what it understands.” This draws a contrast with 'speculative' knowledge, “which is derived from the objects known” (p. 87). This might sound somewhat mystifying – and Anscombe does not, perhaps, do enough work in spelling it out. But the underlying insight is actually quite simple. 'Speculative' knowledge, here, is Anscombe's analogue for the 'observational' knowledge I have been describing in this section above: the paradigm of knowledge associated with the natural sciences. It pertains to things that are *there in any case*, regardless of whether or not we are aware of them. Thus one might obtain knowledge of the life cycle of the swallow, by observing swallows in their (various) natural habitats. But one would not – at least, one hopes – by means of this observation *alter* the relevant facts about swallow life.^{xiii}

Practical knowledge, by contrast, pertains to activities one is *undertaking*. To invoke a trivial example: I am baking a loaf of my famous cheese-and-pickle bread. I could – probably – write down instructions as to how one would go about baking this bread. But in truth, there's a lot of improvisation, the quantities are different every time, depending on what I have in the fridge I might use a different type of cheese, or I might put beer in it instead of water, and that beer could be

anything from a stout to an IPA; in truth, no two loaves of my famous cheese-and-pickle bread are ever identical. But when I bake it, I know what I'm doing – crucially, I know what it would look like if I *failed* to make it. If *you* followed my instructions, you probably wouldn't know what you were doing in the same way – at least not initially. You might pick it up, over time. But of course, in so doing, you would – through the sort of understanding you obtained – be able to establish your own unique spin on the recipe as well.

The upshot of this is as follows: I have practical knowledge as to how to go about baking my famous cheese-and-pickle bread. If I didn't have this knowledge, there would *be* no cheese-and-pickle bread, at least not of the 'my famous' variety. And, likewise, my practical knowledge has grown and adapted as I have cooked loaf after loaf of this bread. This is, I suppose, a sort of practical *expertise*. There's probably something similar going on when one hangs a doorframe, or reviews a manuscript for an academic journal. One learns through doing; sustains the activity in the practice; and to whatever extent each individual engaged in the practice has leeway to develop their own way of doing it for themselves.

In truth, of course, the phrase “practical knowledge is the cause of what it understands” probably only makes sense, in most cases, if we expand our conception of 'practical knowledge' beyond what any given individual knows about *their own* activities. Some one person learning to hang a doorframe can't possibly be the *cause* of doorframe-hanging existing as an activity (unless, perhaps, they're the inventor of the door). But the fact that there exists some expert body of knowledge called 'carpentry', sustained by experts called 'carpenters', quite plausibly sustains the activity of doorframe-hanging in whatever actuality it presently exhibits. Compare a craft that has been lost or declined, such as making wrought iron.

Inevitably, in a paper like this my treatment of such ideas is going to be rather sketchy. Perhaps there are problems with the view that I haven't foreseen, all manner of creases that need to be ironed out, even gaping holes that philosophers far more careful and insightful than I am would struggle to

fill in. But it seems, to me at least, that there's something deeply plausible about all this. When I reflect on the idea of practical knowledge, of a kind of knowledge that is the cause of the thing known, I see ways in which it can account for everything from my knowledge of how to teach a philosophy class; to my inability to hold a pool cue correctly; to our shared knowledge of when it is – or is not – appropriate to us certain words.

But how does all this apply to knowledge of essential human form? Anscombe doesn't really tell us, but Michael Thompson, in a 2013 paper published on his academia.edu profile, makes some useful speculative remarks in this direction. Thompson – for rather different reasons, I think, to myself – is also convinced that it makes no sense to consider EHF as something we apprehend disinterestedly – that is, observationally. Rather, as he puts it:

“The HUMAN form, my form, what I am, the unity to which I bring my thoughts, etc. is evidently also exhibited in the specific unity, outlined by Anscombe, of... intentional action; coming into possession of this form is coming into possession of a will, if all goes well”

(Thompson 2013, pp. 31-32).

By which, I think, he means: *what it is to be human*, in the most basic sense, is something sustained in the various activities that comprise, precisely, *being* human. The human animal is something that eats, drinks, feasts, binges, has sex, falls in love, builds houses, exploits other human beings for their labour, destroys the natural environment, etc. etc.; we know this, *in the way that we know it*, because we are, ourselves, human beings engaged, in whatever way, in those activities – 'from the inside'. We precisely do *not* know these things about human life in a manner analogous to how we might know facts about birds, or fish, or trees – although interestingly enough, Thompson notes, our knowledge of such creatures presupposes some intuition that such life is *not* like our own, that there is something important that we do *not* share with them (p. 32). Compare, perhaps, our knowledge of human beings from radically different cultures, or time periods – where, no matter how little our way of life may resemble theirs', the opposite is somehow the case.^{xiv}

5. Ethical Naturalism as Practical Realism

So here is my suggestion. Let's take Foot's non-biologistic essentialism, and assume that she affirms an Anscombe-style, 'practical' model of knowledge about EHF – as opposed to an 'observational' one. Human form is now, we might say, to be understood as a notion that is practically rather than empirically real – so let's call this position, 'Practical Realism'. Does Practical Realism represent a version of NAEN – an ethics proceeding according to some normatively significant notion of essential human form – that is able to overcome the problems of alienation and conservatism?

Foot's original account was – before it hit the conservative rocks – able to avoid alienation quite straightforwardly; and we have no reason to think that Practical Realism ought to be subject to a regression on this score. *Of course* we can't be letting anything external to specifically ethical thought *boss our ethics about*. The object of ethical reflection is, on the Practical Realist account, precisely something that is manifested in our activities, including our practices of reflection themselves. So much, then, for the problem of alienation.

But what about conservatism? It strikes me that the central problem with Foot's position, as I have been describing it, is that she seems to think ethics ought to be bound by human form as it is *presently* manifested. Her version of essentialism thus cannot accommodate the possibility that it might be better – precisely, *more human* – for our values, our way of life, even our *selves* – to be made otherwise than they/we presently are. This is the point at which her conservatism becomes problematic – because it winds up seeming like an apology for all existing inhumanity. So, can Practical Realism accommodate this possibility?

I want to claim that it can. To see this: imagine that we are all playing a game, over the course of which we come to realise – at first perhaps somewhat tentatively, individually, but then later loudly and collectively – that one of the rules of the game we are playing is curtailing our enjoyment of it:

the game would be improved if this rule was altered, or perhaps even eliminated entirely. We're all players of the game – the game wouldn't really exist without us, at least not as played. So it looks like we ought to be free to alter the rules. We'll all, we decide, play a different version of the game we've invented, with the rules slightly changed. But of course it's in essence still the same game. It's just a *better* version of itself.

Now imagine that someone comes along and says: wait a minute. I've been observing games like this since they were first invented. Players of this game have always played it with this rule you don't like. Since you've abandoned it, you can't be playing the game properly. *Either* you're not playing the game at all, and you should just admit this; you've gone beyond the game in some important way. *Or* – and this is if you want to be good players of the game you *think* you're playing at – you ought to switch back to the rules as they were originally written, and attempt instead to play *that* version, as well as you possibly might. The nature of the game just isn't up to you as you think.

Obviously in this example, the game is supposed to be acting as a metaphor for our society and culture as it presently exists. The specific rule that the players want to amend is supposed to stand in for a value or a practice – such as 'industriousness', or the institution of capitalist wage-labour – which society affirms, but that said society's members might come to believe is detrimental to them, and seek to alter. The person who comes along and tells the players they can't change the rules is, of course, a conservative ethical naturalist, carrying with them a list of observed facts about human nature that (they believe) any good member of the human species *must* conform to. The players of the game who seek to amend the rules, by contrast, are actualising a possibility that must, I think, always be present for Practical Realism. *We're* the ones doing it, being human. Without us to sustain it, there would *be* no 'human nature' to refer to in our ethics at all. So the question of what it is to live a good human life *can't* simply be a matter of conforming to some pre-set criteria as old as the human species itself. It's something that we must be able to reflect on and, to whatever extent,

decide for ourselves.

Of course, all of this might sound like there isn't much point to our affirming any version of essentialist ethical naturalism at all. For, on the Practical Realist account, what conceivable *limits* does essential human form place on ethical deliberation? From the sounds of it, not very many. For the Practical Realist, the question of what it is to be a good human being is – at least in some sense – to be decided by *us*. What guidance, then, can essential human form possibly provide? Basically *none*: for the Practical Realist, human nature is radically – even vertiginously – open-ended. Perhaps we really will start arguing that it's Actually Good to stab other human beings in their sleep after all.

But that's not *quite* right. Because even if we are to be afforded ultimate, as it were judicial responsibility over what it means to be human, we are nevertheless always – as the bearers of this responsibility – thinking and reflecting as a specific type of creature, a certain sort of animal, with certain hedonistic preferences and survival needs. In the game example, the rule wasn't amended for *no reason at all*. It was amended because it was *felt to be detrimental to the game*. The game, the players believed, would be more fun if the rule was changed. In a game, this is enough; in human life, a more profound reason may perhaps be needed – but of course those reasons often present themselves.

As a human being, I need certain things in order to survive: to live in an oxygen-rich environment, for example; or to have sufficient food and drink not to die of thirst or malnutrition. It will usually hurt when I get hit over the head, so I will probably do my best to avoid getting hit over the head; likewise, I am going to be drawn to activities and experiences that give me pleasure (equally, I suppose, I could be a psychologically perverse individual who enjoys being hit around the head, but then surely I'm going to have to find some way of dealing with the effects of regular concussions). I am probably also going to need certain things in order to count as a 'well-developed individual' of my species: for instance, to form meaningful friendships, or to pursue activities ('industriously' or

otherwise) which count in some way towards my community's shared good.

In each of these examples – from the need for oxygen, to the need for friendship – we are given something that stands, as it were, as a sort of *naturally-derived limit* to ethical reflection. As the sort of animal that I am, I am presented with these things as *natural needs*. But acknowledging that these things might count as limits to our reflection need not then oblige us to endorse a problematic conservatism. Practical Realism can accommodate these limits not as cold, dead facts that will hang around forever, but rather as something manifested in (and contingent upon) a particular practice – in the most general sense, our activity of *being human*, our active engagement with the world as a member of the species *Homo Sapiens*; in a somewhat less general sense, my activity of being a member of a certain society at a certain period of time^{xv}; in the most specific sense, my activity of being *me*, the distinct individual that *I* am. These limits do not provide us with *answers* to ethical questions, pre-set in advance – rather, they provide us with a framework within which we can deliberate on what we should or shouldn't do. According to a Practical Realist ethical naturalism, it is just in such ethical deliberation, situated within the context of an active engagement with the world, that the scope of the ethical pertains.

Conclusion

I have argued that NAEN can avoid the problems of alienation and conservatism by adopting a 'Practical Realist' conception of EHF. Such a conception treats essential human form as a 'practical' rather than as an empirical concept, which means that it is sustained in the various practical activities human beings undertake – as opposed to existing, in some important sense, *beyond* them. This means that our ideas about the essentially human are always subject to revision, pending the appropriate sort of critical reflection. I have sought to convince the reader that this Practical Realist version of NAEN is the most plausible one we might affirm. Therefore, NAENs ought to adopt

Practical Realism about EHF.

This brings us on to something that I think is really important. Namely, that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism – this school of thought that stretches back to Anscombe via Thompson, McDowell, Foot, and others – is *only really coherent* as a philosophical position if it features, in some way, the possibility of *radical* moral criticism. This, in my view, allies the tradition to radically emancipatory political thought – from Marx, to the Frankfurt School, and beyond. Soft naturalist thinkers – including McDowell – have done much in recent years to expand, as it were, the naturalistic franchise. What I have been arguing for, is effectively a further growth: from hard, to soft, to radical naturalism.

This move might be surprising, to anyone familiar with Foot's small-c conservatism (in the anti-Nietzsche chapter in particular), or McDowell's apolitical quietism.^{xvi} But it need not seem at all strange to anyone familiar with the early Marx (see especially Marx 2000), or recent scholarship on Theodor Adorno's 'naturalistic' ethics (Freyenhagen 2013, Whyman 2016, 2017). These thinkers both, to my mind, espouse a version of ethical naturalism that – aside from being based upon a thoroughly historicised account of human nature – is directed critically *against* our society and culture as it presently exists. There is plenty more to spell out with regards the exact affinity between these two traditions. But – at a minimum – I hope to have convinced the reader that contemporary Anglo-American philosophical naturalists would do well to pay more attention this alternative tradition's legacy. If we're interested in doing ethics in a naturalistic, humanistic way, we also need to be interested in the emancipation of humanity from capitalist and other forms of oppression.^{xvii}

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- i Ethical naturalists themselves often tell us that it is problematic; see e.g. Foot 2001 p. 37, or Thompson 2013 p.2.
 - ii It's worth noting that this sort of argumentative strategy is often associated with far-right politics: the idea that women, or certain racial minority groups, ought 'naturally' to assume a subordinate role. This strategy is premised on the hypostatization of historic injustice.
 - iii For the distinction between 'hard' or reductive and 'soft' or liberal naturalism, see the essays collected in De Caro and MacArthur (eds.) 2004. 'Hard' naturalism is associated with scientific reductionism – most naturalists working in the analytic tradition have been hard naturalism. Soft naturalism emerged, especially through the work of thinkers such as P.F. Strawson, Hillary Putnam, and John McDowell, as a way of challenging hard naturalism without necessarily abandoning the idea that science affords us some special insight into the natural world. See the opening paragraphs of section 3 for more on McDowell's soft naturalism, and the Conclusion for some brief comments on where I think my paper leaves the hard-soft naturalism debate.
 - iv This is a point at which the biologicistic essentialist seems like they are going to be subject to a great deal of conceptual confusion. Just *how* are we supposed to restrict the scope of the biological, and on what grounds? Fink (2008) poses similar problems for the scientific naturalist.
 - v Having said that, I don't think that McDowell holds *exactly* the form of essentialism I will be articulating in this section: his own position is much more Platonistic than Foot's. McDowell is of the view that there exists an essential ethical good, *sui generis*, that human beings with the appropriate second nature are simply well-equipped to 'resonate' to (McDowell 1996, pp. 82 ff). This position doesn't quite fit into the structure of the argument I'm giving in this paper, so I will not be presenting it in any detail here. I should note, however, that in my view McDowell's form of ethical naturalism – despite its robustly anti-scientific credentials – nonetheless involves what I will later refer to as an 'observational' model of how we are supposed to obtain knowledge about EHF – insofar as he represents the essential human good as something that exists *anyway*, outside of us, that we are supposed to

somehow *discern* and adopt our thinking *towards*. See my 2017 for a fuller, critical treatment of McDowell 'naturalised Platonism'.

- vi It would be interesting to know how Foot would fit disabled people into her account. Some people are disabled in such a way as to be *unable* to fully participate in what Foot would define as a flourishing human ethical community. For instance, Foot claims that being “industrious” is necessary for one to live a good human life (2001, p. 44 – see also main body of this paper above), but all sorts of people may be unable to pursue their ends in an 'industrious' way: for instance the physically disabled, or the chronically depressed. Meanwhile, non-neurotypical people, such as those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, may well be unable to participate in a human community in what is, for Foot, the 'right' way – perhaps struggling, for example, to form meaningful friendships of the relevant sort. This problem seems to be linked to the problem of conservatism: indeed, I am tempted to view it as an aspect of that problem – to the extent that it treats the human good as somehow univocal. It will be crucial, for any plausible version of NAEN, to do justice to the needs and experiences of disabled people.
- vii I'm honestly not sure how to even begin articulating just how strongly I disagree with this characterisation of Hitler as someone who realised their own 'self-created values'. It strikes me that Hitler was, rather, something much closer to a passive conduit through which the anxieties and prejudices of the interwar German middle-classes expressed themselves.
- viii The process dramatised in Ken Loach's film *I, Daniel Blake* (2016).
- ix And as I say in footnote v above, I would warrant something similar is going on in McDowell. This paper is not specifically about soft/liberal/inclusive naturalism, but if I had a detailed critique of the sort of soft naturalism we can find in McDowell, this would be it.
- x Michael Thompson, who of course knows Foot's work inside-out, implies as much in his 2013, p.2 (at least if one assumes that what he says there is supposed to be cross-referenced with McDowell's 'Two Sorts of Naturalism').
- xi Just to be clear, Anscombe does not herself use the language of 'kinaesthetic intuition'. I'm just employing it to help shed some light on what she means.
- xii Although for an alternative view, see Davidson 1978. Thompson offers a defence of Anscombe, against Davidson's criticisms, in his 2013.
- xiii The knowledge is, of course, constructed – as per the end of section 2. But the *facts*, one hopes, are not.
- xiv Thompson himself discusses this at various points in his 2013, for instance at p. 7.
- xv For this reason, we must think, our hedonistic preferences and survival needs are not just natural but *also* historical. See my 2016.
- xvi See McDowell 2002, pp. 297-8 for an intriguing passage in which McDowell, effectively, dismisses the need for his philosophy to involve any sort of Adorno-style social criticism.
- xvii Thompson, in fairness, does mention Marx fairly frequently in his 2013 – though curiously, he seems to lament what he refers to as Marx's “peculiar” political obsessions (p. 2). McDowell mentions 'Alienated Labour' in an important passage from pp.117-119 of *Mind and World* (McDowell 1996).

Radical Ethical Naturalism

Abstract: *In this paper, I identify – and clear up – two problems for contemporary neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism. The first I call the problem of alienation; the second the problem of conservatism. I argue that these problems will persist, both for 'hard' and 'soft' forms of ethical naturalism, unless ethical naturalists adopt what I call 'Practical Realism' about essential human form. Such a Practical Realism leaves open the possibility of radical social and political criticism – I therefore suggest that contemporary ethical naturalists ought to be more interested in exploring the affinities their view shares with Marxist political thought.*

In this paper, I will be discussing what I call 'neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism' (NAEN). Thinkers of this school – the likes of Philippa Foot, Michael Thompson, and John McDowell – are linked by at least two things. Firstly, the insight – however this insight is understood *exactly* – that ethics must make reference to the sort of creatures human beings *are*: thus, the 'naturally-derived human good'. In this paper, I will refer to this as the idea that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists (NAENs) affirm some, ethically significant, notion of 'essential human form' (EHF).

The second trait these thinkers share is a lineage of influence traceable to G.E.M. Anscombe's seminal 1958 paper 'Modern Moral Philosophy': the paper in which the Aristotelian turn in Anglo-American ethical philosophy was first instigated. Indeed, the most prominent NAENs have typically been Anscombe's students, or the students of her students.

I am – or at least, I like to think I am – an ethical naturalist of this sort. In my view, NAEN offers us the most compelling prospect, from all the options laid out on philosophy's normative buffet, of formulating an ethics that is both plausible and robust. *Robust*, because such a naturalism can provide us with an objective basis on which we can answer questions as to what we ought – or ought not – to do. *Plausible*, because this objective basis – unlike its Kantian, utilitarian, or Humean

counterparts – is able to do justice to human life in all its manifest complexities and ambiguities, refusing to reduce away the real uncertainty that constantly confronts us as ethical agents into the gray emptiness of mechanical nature, or the idiot pedantry of some absolute moral principle.

Having said that, it's not like NAEN is entirely without its problems. In this paper, I will identify – and clear up – two related difficulties that the problem faces. I will trace these problems to their source, and I will explain how – by adopting a position which I call 'Practical Realism' – NAEN can overcome them. I should note however that my intention, in doing so, is not solely altruistic: helpfully and eager-eyedly clearing up a couple of obstacles that would otherwise stand in my favoured metaethical position's way. It is, rather, to demonstrate that these obstacles will persist unless the direction in which NAEN faces does not definitively *shift* – away from the polite, small-c conservatism of a Philippa Foot, or the quietism of a John McDowell – towards the social and political radicalism of the early Marx, or Theodor Adorno.

1. Alienation and Conservatism

As I've already briefly noted above: NAEN derives what positive normative content it contains from some notion of EHF. NAENs must, therefore, be in the business of making some fairly definite claims about how human life *ought* to be carried on: indeed, it is only by asserting such claims that NAENs are going to be able to formulate meaningful, action-guiding ethical propositions. A very broad, vague formulation of the relevant sort would be: human beings need to be healthy in order to count as living well; there are certain things human beings need to do in order to be healthy (consuming certain foods, avoiding others, exercising regularly, etc.); therefore human beings ought to do these health-giving things. Or: courage is a virtue; therefore human beings ought to be courageous; here is a list of criteria for what counts as courageous activity; it is good for human beings to pursue these activities.

This sort of essentialism, however, is *prima facie* problematic – indeed, it is from it that the two problems I will be discussing in this paper appear, at first glance, to emerge.¹ The first I will label the problem of 'alienation'. Essentialist ethical naturalism appears to proceed by inference from non-normative facts about human beings (how things simply 'are' with us, in terms of our species-life) to normative statements about what we, as human beings, *ought* to do. To sketch a crude example: in at least some societies, human beings need to hunt for food in order to survive. Adult male human beings are typically larger and stronger than adult female human beings, which – one might imagine – makes them better-suited to hunting large game. Therefore, one could claim, in such societies the role of adult male human beings ought to be to hunt for food, while the females stay at home. This sort of reasoning would be *alienating*, to the extent that it sets out to bind ethical deliberation in conformity to some object external to specifically ethical thought. In the example given, the problem – aside from how flattening it is about gender – is that consideration is only afforded to how humans might most effectively sustain themselves materially. This misses higher-order considerations of the sort we might consider relevant to being 'a good person' – eliminating the question of how these hunter-gatherers might best develop as moral individuals by reducing it away into the question of how they might optimise their chances of surviving to breed. If these higher-order considerations can't be robustly installed into the picture somehow, the risk is that our ethical reasoning will turn out to be little more than the slave of a hungry, dictatorial nature.

Secondly, this form of essentialism appears to imply what Michael Thompson describes as “an alarming and idiotic moral conservatism” (Thompson 2013, p. 2). This is the sort of conservatism that might be expressed in a phrase such as, 'it's just human nature'. Here, the idea would be that 'essential human nature' is something always already realised *just insofar* as there exist human beings who are bearers of this nature. Thus, that ethical knowledge ought to be a matter of simply looking back to what human beings 'have always done' – the wise will be the ones who elect to copy it. In the worst cases, this could lead to NAENs finding themselves obliged to endorse certain forms

of monstrosity – to continue in the vein of our previous example, it could for instance lead to ethical naturalism being invoked to reinforce male sexual domination over females.ⁱⁱ But even if they steered clear of this sort of bigotry, there could still be residual problems brought on by conservatism: for instance, an unduly conservative conception of human nature could lead to certain lines of social and political criticism being shut down as illegitimate, as involving suggestions that 'just wouldn't work' for human beings. At any rate – it's worth noting – the inference involved here is a totally bogus one: just because something is currently done, or has been done in the past, does not *entail* that we should continue to do it in the future: at best, we would need something *else* to support the claim. I call all this, the problem of 'conservatism'.

I have, of course, introduced these two problems in a rather stark way, such that they risk seeming like caricatures: can any sophisticated philosophical naturalist really mean for their account to imply *that*? To which I would reply: well no, almost certainly they don't *intend* it to. But that doesn't mean their logic isn't, amidst all the smoke and mirrors and any waterings-down they might attempt, inexorably drawn towards these problems. I will elaborate on this, in sections 2 and 3, by discussing two distinct forms of EHF, both of which have been attributed to Philippa Foot. The first, which might be associated with a 'hard' form of naturalism, is clearly subject to the problem of alienation – this, I hold, leads to conservatism becoming a problem as well. The second, associated with a 'softer', more liberal form of naturalism, initially seems well-set to avoid alienation, but is demonstrably subject to the problem of conservatism – this, I argue, lets alienation back in, as if via the back door.ⁱⁱⁱ

2. Biologistic Essentialism

Hans Fink (2008) suggests that Foot “comes close to exemplifying” a position whereby:

“All we need by way of ethics can be grounded in facts about the natural world 'as the

province of scientific understanding' including e.g. facts about 'what animals of a particular species need in order to do well in the sort of life they naturally live'" (Fink 2008, p. 53).

I will label this position, 'biologism'. The position consists in the claim that EHF is a specifically *biological* concept. Hence if our ethics proceeded by reference to human form as *thus* understood, all that matters for ethics could be described using the terminology of the natural sciences; ethics would simply be a matter of responding appropriately to what we can think of as *hard, natural facts*. Human biological nature, perhaps, gives us a set of criteria for what is going to count as human flourishing: it's all in our genes, say. Ethics ought to be consistently guided by these facts: were it to be, we would all be a lot better off.

Clearly, there will be some thinkers who are tempted by biologism. In particular, if you are the sort of eliminative naturalist who thinks that everything that can't be described in natural-scientific terms is an outmoded and over-elaborate fiction which simply must be done away with, then you are likely to find the view appealing: indeed, it could seem like this is *our only shot* at developing an objectively valid system of ethics. The New Atheist writer Sam Harris, for instance, defends a form of biologism about ethics, aiming as he does to ground moral philosophy in 'material facts' – in particular, facts about the make-up of the human brain (Harris 2010).

Foot was never going to claim anything quite this stark, but certainly there are points in her work where Fink's characterisation of her position looks to be right, and she affirms something identifiable as importantly *like* this view. For instance, at the outset of *Natural Goodness*, she writes:

“For I believe that evaluations of human will and action share a conceptual structure with evaluations of characteristics and operations of other living things, and can only be understood in these terms. I want to show moral evil as 'a kind of natural defect'... the fact that a human action or disposition is good of its kind will be taken to be simply a fact about a given feature of a certain kind of natural thing” (Foot 2001, p. 5).

So, on (what looks to be) Foot's view here, moral goodness or badness is grounded in facts about human nature, which are analogous in form to facts about animal or plant nature. We assess animal or plant nature with reference to biology: so too should we do this (it seems, she is suggesting) for human beings.

And yet for all this Foot would, I think, be the first to point out problems with this view. Later in the same work, she writes:

“... appearances are against my thesis. For how could there be a human life form that played the same logical role in the determination of goodness here as the equivalent in the case of plants and animals? There will surely be objection to the idea that a natural form of life characteristic of humankind could determine what you or I *ought* to do. What does it matter to me *what species* I belong to? Should we not protest on behalf of individuality and creativity against bringing in the human species when asking what I myself – this particular person – should do?” (p. 37).

Still later, Foot writes that there exists “an apparently unanswerable objection” to her view, namely that:

“... human beings as rational creatures can ask why what has so far been said should have any effect on their conduct. For let us suppose that the normative pattern that I called 'natural normativity' does govern our evaluations of human beings as human beings. Suppose that human beings are defective as human beings unless they do what is needed for human good, including such things as refraining from murder and keeping promises. The sceptic will surely ask 'But what if I do not care about being a good human being?'" (ibid., p. 52).

The problem here is, of course, nothing other than the problem of alienation as described in section 1: what is at issue is the mystery as to how biological facts might come to bear on us *normatively* – how exactly we (as human beings) are supposed to make the leap from how we merely, biologically 'are', to what, ethically speaking, we 'ought' to be. Biology might, as Foot says, give us a set of

criteria about how we are supposed to flourish *qua* human. But it can't get us to *accept* that criteria (at least, not on its own). Bringing about such an acceptance would require an additional sort of reflection – *specifically ethical reflection*. And indeed, engaging in this sort of reflection seems like it must be *just as natural* to human beings as, say, eating food to receive nutrition is, or reproducing through sexual intercourse; things that (I'm guessing) no-one would doubt were part of our 'animal' being.^{iv}

For the biologicistic essentialist, the human good exists in our genes, or in our brain states, or at any rate somehow *outside of* our practices of ethical reflection. For the biologicistic essentialist, there exists a certain set of criteria for ethical reflection, that much is clear, but it's not at all a set of criteria we are afforded any powers to *shape*, or which we can as it were *negotiate* with for ourselves. Whilst this thought might be appealing to certain sorts of authoritarian personality – for it doesn't seem as if the standard in question would be subject to the possibility of human errors in judgement – for the more independently-minded amongst us it seems likely to trigger an understandable recoil.

Suppose, for instance, that scientists discovered the existence of a 'happiness gene' – a gene which some people have, and others lack. Possessing this gene, it turns out, is necessary for one to be truly, deeply happy: happy in a lasting way. Those who lack the gene can *never* be deeply happy, and are likely to make others less so by expressing their congenital dissatisfaction both artistically – say, through their dingy poetry – and in conversation. Suppose we're interested in maximising human happiness; how should we respond to this new knowledge? By stopping people who lack the happiness gene from breeding? By euthanising them wholesale? Suddenly human flourishing seems like it could be maximised by inflicting something on a group of people that is deeply unjust at best, genocidal at worst. As far as I can tell we would have departed from good ethical conduct here. But in order to make sense of this, we need our reflection to be guided by *more* than just biological facts.

And besides which, it is far from clear to me how we ever *could* grasp such an alien standard. The idea of a purely biological standard seems like it presupposes the possibility of our obtaining some knowledge that is legitimate regardless of the particular standpoint occupied by the observer; the product of a 'view from nowhere'. But *I'm* not nowhere, and neither are you. And although I lack much detailed knowledge of how STEM subjects are practised, I don't suppose that *their* researchers are nowhere either. It seems that, far from being a standard which we cannot shape, the relevant 'biological' standard is at least in some sense the *product* of human endeavour. At any rate, it is something that we have arrived at through empirical observation and canonised in the context of a culturally specific type of institutional knowledge. But then there is automatically the danger of this standard functioning as a sort of 'reification' of the ingrained (perhaps, socially derived) prejudices of those who are responsible for articulating it. Hence it cannot act as a reliable guide as to how we ought to reflect on and (potentially) reshape our practices. A 'biological' standard for ethics that was articulated by researchers in a particularly monstrous society, who have themselves been shaped in their views by the monstrousness they've been raised within, is likely to ingrain still more of that monstrousness; worse indeed since this monstrousness can now be validated by dint of a standard posing as 'objective' and hence beyond mere human error. Thus there is a threat of conservatism associated with biologism, entering as if invited as the 'plus one' of the problem of alienation.

3. Non-biologistic essentialism

It is therefore understandable that NAENs should be keen to distance themselves from biologistic essentialism. This is, for instance, the stated purpose of John McDowell's essay 'Two Sorts of Naturalism': to demonstrate that the sort of naturalistic ethics associated with Foot can only be properly understood given a broader conception of the natural than the 'neo-Humean', 'bald

naturalist' (that is to say: biologicistic) view of nature prevalent in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy (McDowell 1998, pp. 174ff). The sort of view on which, as McDowell puts it, “reality is exhausted by the natural world, in the sense of the world as the natural sciences are capable of revealing it to us” (p. 175). In *Mind and World*, McDowell will refer to this view as one on which nature is identified with 'the realm of law' (McDowell 1996, p. 78).

This conception of nature as a realm of law-like, natural-scientific intelligibility – in short, the position I've referred to above as 'hard naturalism' – only captures the aspects of it which McDowell includes under the umbrella of what he calls 'first nature'. McDowell thinks that philosophers in general need to expand their conception of the natural to include what he calls 'second nature', under which fall “any propensities of animals that are not already possessed at birth, and not acquired in merely biological maturation, for instance, the propensity to grow facial hair on the part of male human beings” (McDowell 2008, p. 220). In short: what we might describe as things that need to be 'enculturated' (McDowell uses the German, *Bildung*).

Non-human animals can acquire a second nature: crows can use tools, parrots can learn sounds, dogs can learn to follow commands, cats can learn to bury their faeces, and so forth. But *human* second nature, according to McDowell, is distinctive insofar as it 'opens our eyes' to 'the space of reasons' (McDowell 1996, p. 88), thus of reflecting on what one does, holding other agents to account for what *they* do, being able to justify what one says. Whilst this second nature is developmentally distinct from first nature, which is certainly represented as preceding it causo-temporally, for McDowell it is no more or less 'natural' than its law-governed counterpart. Being *gebildet* into the space of reasons is, for McDowell, just one of the things that the human animal *does*.

McDowell thus has a conception of human nature that is not solely restricted to 'biological' nature but is rather inclusive of human culture, encompassing our reflective, reason-giving practices ('soft naturalism'). Hence ethical reflection is not, for McDowell, something which can proceed with

reference to some 'natural' standard that is itself placed wholly 'outside' of these practices. And, as McDowell is at pains to point out in 'Two Sorts of Naturalism', this is a conception of human nature which Foot appears to share.^v

That Foot's conception of human nature extends beyond the merely biological can be witnessed in a passage such as the following:

“Human good is *sui generis*. Nevertheless, I maintain that a common conceptual structure remains. For 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 to be 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 a living thing a human being is” (Foot 2001, p. 51).

At another point in *Natural Goodness*, Foot quotes P.T. Geach as claiming that “Men need virtues as bees need stings” (p. 35), a thought which, as she later makes clear, she fully approves of.

“... if we ask whether Geach was right to say that human beings need virtues as bees need stings... the answer is surely that he was. Men and women need to be industrious and tenacious of purpose not only so as to be able to house, clothe, and feed themselves, but also to pursue human ends having to do with love a friendship” (p. 44).

'The virtues', here, are portrayed by Foot as exhibiting what she calls, via Anscombe, 'Aristotelian necessity' (for human beings).

“Aristotelian necessity': that which is necessary because and in so far as good hangs on it. We invoke the same idea when we say that it is necessary for plants to have water, for birds to build nests, for wolves to hunt in packs and for lionesses to teach their cubs to kill. These 'Aristotelian necessities' depend on what the particular species of plants and animals need,

on their natural habitat, and the ways of making out that are in their repertoire. These things together determine what it is for members of a particular species to be as they should be, and to do that which they should do. And for all the enormous differences between the life of humans and that of plants or animals, we can see that human defects and excellences are similarly related to what human beings are and what they do... Those free-riding individuals of a species whose members work together are just as *defective* as those who have defective hearing, sight, or powers of locomotion” (pp. 15-16).

Thus understood in a McDowellian, soft naturalist vein, Foot's position appears to be something like this: for her, EHF is *not* merely biological, but also inclusive of – and expressed through – our specifically cultural practices. EHF can be invoked to assess such practices in an immanent way: for instance, it can tell us that in order to flourish *qua* human being we require food, shelter, loving relationships – if we are unable to obtain these things, then our lives will be somehow lacking or defective. And, if we are not equipped *to be able to* have them, we will therefore count as a defective member of our species. Honesty, for instance, is cited by Foot as an example of a 'good human disposition', insofar as it matters that a human community can trust each other, or is characterised by mutual respect (p. 48). A psychologically perverse individual, who was always compelled to lie, hence could *not* count as a good human being, or at least would have to show they could overcome this deficiency in order to be considered one.^{vi}

The most obvious advantage of making this move – broadening out our conception of human nature to include 'second nature' – would be that it appears to avoid the problem of alienation. On the biologicistic picture, ethical reflection was to be done in line with a standard represented as external to our ethical practices, including our practices of reflection themselves. On the non-biologicistic picture, by contrast, these practices are just *part of* what counts as human nature, hence part of what we are, in ethical reflection, reflecting *on*: we must, when we are engaged in such reflection, be reflecting on what is good for specifically *rational* creatures. And, for Foot, this works

the other way as well: as per the argument of chapter 4 of *Natural Goodness*, a conception of the human good is constitutive of the possibility of exercising rationality in ethical judgement itself.

This is actually how Foot gets round something that – she thinks – is a key problem for her view, already briefly touched upon in the discussion of biologism above: the fact that (*prima facie*) critical reflection seems like it must be radically open-ended – that we can always ask, e.g. 'but why *should* I be a good human being?' For Foot, it just *is rational* to want to be a good human being, to live a good human life: this is what rationality aims at, it is what our reason-giving practices pertain to; the human good precedes, constrains, and determines rationality.

“If a sceptic... goes on saying that he has not been shown that there is a reason for acting as a good person would act, it is no longer clear what he is asking for. To ask for a reason for acting rationally is to ask for a reason where reasons must *a priori* have come to an end. And if he goes on saying 'But why *should* I?' we may query the meaning of this 'should'” (p. 65).

So far, so good: alienation has, it seems, been avoided. But the risk of conservatism, I think, remains. In the final chapter of *Natural Goodness*, Foot presents a rather strident critique of 'immoralism', a position her main example of which is Nietzsche's critique of morality, and his correlative attempt at a 'revaluation of values'. Foot portrays Nietzsche as a thinker who (despite denying the existence of free will) was a radical individualist, advocating an ethical picture on which there is no “'intrinsic badness' in the doing of any kind of act,” but that “the true nature of an action [depends] rather on the *nature of the individual who did it*” (p. 110). This means that Nietzsche is (apparently) happy to endorse acts of plunder, murder, and rape, provided these acts were done by the right sort of people – for instance, “the nobles of earlier times,” who had the appropriate disposition to plunder and rape with impunity, their horrific actions even being characterised by 'playfulness' (p.111). This, according to Foot, explains why the Nazis found so much in Nietzsche's thought that they believed complemented their barbaric ideology; Foot is in partial agreement with J.P. Stern when she quotes him as saying that “No man came closer to the

full realization of self-created values than A. Hitler” (p. 103).^{vii}

Hence Nietzsche's immoralism, Foot implies, could lead to our endorsing a monstrosity that would place us somehow *beyond* the human.

“In human life it is an Aristotelian necessity (something on which our way of life depends) that if, for instance, a stranger should come on us when we are sleeping he will not think it all right to kill us or appropriate the tools that we need for the next day's work. In human life as it is, this kind of action is not made good by authenticity or self-fulfilment in the one who does it” (p. 114).

The danger of Nietzsche's thought, then, is that it might tempt “those who see themselves as exceptional to think that when *they* murder and torture they are doing nothing wrong” (p.115). But according to Foot, such a Nietzschean villain would not just be *any* monster, they would – perhaps still worse – be a monster who is philosophically *mistaken*. As Foot has it, Nietzsche's immoralism stems from a certain confusion as to the role of reflection in our ethical practices, one which ignores the way in which reflection is informed by what, Foot believes, is essential to life itself.

“[Nietzsche] was engaged, as he insisted, on a revaluation of values. And this is not an incomprehensible enterprise. For, unlike members of other species, humans, having the power of abstract thought, can *consider* their own ways of going on. We humans have ourselves developed and can criticise our own practices. We can ask whether human life might not be better conducted if Nietzsche's doctrines were taught. But then we must think about *how* human life could be carried on. Nietzsche believed that under his influence a higher type of man could develop on earth, and wrote as if he could imagine his new being: as if he saw the possibility of a new species or life form that could develop from our own. My point is that it is only for a different species that Nietzsche's most radical revaluation of values could be valid. It is not valid for us as we are, or are ever likely to be” (ibid).

Now, as various remarks in this paper up to this point ought to have made clear, I agree entirely

with Foot when she suggests that some notion of the human good is essential to ethical reflection. But unlike Foot, I do not think – even remotely – that this is somehow *incompatible* with the radical criticism of our existing ethical practices. In the passage above, it strikes me that Foot is articulating a notion of the human good as something univocal, and ultimately unchanging – something that every human being, who has ever existed, is subject to in ethical reflection in exactly the same way. This would, at least, explain why Foot thinks that the sort of 'revaluation of values' Nietzsche envisages could only be valid for creatures who were somehow more – or *less* – than human; why she is so starkly opposed to Nietzsche's 'individualistic' variety of ethical criticism as likely to do profound violence to human nature.

Now, clearly Foot's thinking on this score is at least *somewhat* conservative – after all, it seeks precisely to *conserve* a (normatively significant) notion of human nature as something that she is claiming has, in at least some sense, 'always' been present in us as a species. But is it *unduly* conservative, that is: does it manifest the problem of conservatism? I want to argue that it does – to the extent that it involves a conception of EHF that could be invoked to shut legitimate criticism of our practices down.

To see this, let's start by invoking as an example a virtue our society clearly affirms: I'll use 'industriousness', namely the quality of being enterprising and hard-working. Earlier in this section I quoted Foot as stating that, in order to flourish, human beings need to be “industrious and tenacious of purpose not only so as to be able to house, clothe, and feed themselves, but also to pursue human ends having to do with love and friendship” (p. 44). I'm confident that any individual existing in the Anglo-American world from the 19th century onwards, or probably even before then, is going to be all-too-well aware of this piece of ideology. Indeed, today, the virtue of industriousness is blared out at us from every possible trumpet, its heralds resonating across our ideals of social justice; our culturally-engrained (Protestant) ethics; and our official advice about health and well-being.

So, our society is organised to help industrious human beings flourish – that much is clear, and to

this extent I am in agreement with Foot's statement. But surely any reasonably sensitive observer must also be aware of how our collective valorisation of industriousness works to *damage* human life. For instance, our valuing of industriousness is part of why the state feels licensed to victimise long-term welfare recipients with impunity, including even disabled people.^{viii} Relatedly, this narrative informs the fact that we are often obliged to taking boring, exhausting jobs in order to pay for the things – such as food, or housing – that we need to survive. In the long-term, this can lead to adverse health conditions such as depression, heart disease, and diabetes – either directly, or indirectly through things like substance abuse or lack of sleep. Moreover, the particular value our society places on industriousness might cause people who are hard-working, but little else, to consider themselves morally superior to their lazier – though perhaps more generous, more open-minded, more sensitive – peers: thus, entitled to a greater share of resources than they are.

Now, imagine that everything in our society and culture was just as it presently is: the dominant social tendency valorises industriousness as something essential to good human functioning, and this valorisation is having all the negative effects described above. But imagine that – in contrast to how things presently are, I hope – there exists only *one* critical individual, who through whatever quirk of fate is the only member of their society to possess the wit to conceptualise these negatives *as* negatives. In such a situation, it seems, our critical hero would be entirely *justified* in forming a judgement of the form: “society is wrong about industriousness; *I* see things differently, and *I'm* the one who is right. We need to radically transform our understanding of industriousness in some way, altering its application or perhaps even discarding it as a virtue.”

Such a critical judgement would, I think, be two things. Firstly, it would be individualistic. Just one single, brittle, isolated individual is forming it, against how 'people in general' see things. It is *not* individualistic of course in the sense that our critical hero is claiming industriousness is bad *only for them*, although to be honest their peers could well prove unable – or unwilling – to tell the difference. Secondly, such a critical judgement would be very radical – it would entail the

reevaluation of something that – at least according to Foot – has previously been settled as part of what we agree to constitute 'human nature': it thus recommends that a *new conception of human life* emerge in this old notion's place.

As such Foot would, I think, be obliged to reject the legitimacy of this judgement: to the extent that it is both radical and individualistic, it is analogous in form to the 'immoralism' she condemns. This still holds even if our isolated social critic's intentions are – as Foot might well admit – better than those of the 'Nietzschean' critic who advocates stabbing people in their sleep.

Foot's anti-Nietzscheanism thus shows her up as being subject to the problem of conservatism because, in her straining to avoid immoralism, she ends up forcing herself into affirming a version of EHF which cannot accommodate the possibility of this sort of radical ethical criticism – criticism which, it now seems clear, *could* in fact be carried on in the service of human life. The reevaluation of values isn't inhuman: what *is* inhuman, is the insistence that our present mode of existence might somehow exhaust the possibilities of the human animal, obliging us to remain the diminished beings we are at present, brutalised by capitalism and beset with inequality.

To close this section: it must be noted that this conservatism, likewise, is expressive of a form of alienation. This is because it represents essential human form as being something importantly *beyond* the critical reflection of the individuals who bear it: a logic that, as we have established above, is paradigmatically alienating. As on the biologicistic account where, as we saw, alienation dragged conservatism along in its wake, so for the non-biologicistic account any conservatism seems like it must let alienation back in via the back-door. We therefore have good reason to think that the two problems will need to be defeated together.

4. Practical and Observational Knowledge

So how can the two problems be defeated? By which I really mean: how can they be defeated whilst

simultaneously preserving what matters about NAEN? I will begin to move towards a solution by first asking: why might Foot feel the need to install the form of conservatism she does into her account in the first place? One theory, of course, could just be that it is a matter of personal disposition. After all, we we can hardly expect an eighty year-old Oxford don (as Foot was at the time of writing *Natural Goodness*), who was from a background so privileged that her mother was literally born in the White House, to be a barricade-bothering revolutionary. Well, that might be part of it – and certainly, I think it would be naïve to *entirely* discount a philosopher's social position when analysing their thought – but it isn't especially theoretically satisfying, smacking of *ad hominem* and besides which having none of the hardness of a logical 'must'.

So here's another possible explanation: Foot is drawn into a sort of conservatism about human nature as a result of the model of *knowledge* about EHF that she affirms. There are, I want to claim, two ways in which we could obtain knowledge about EHF. The first I will label the 'observational model'. This would mean: standing within our society and culture, and forming inferences about human nature based on what human beings *in fact* do. So for instance, if we observed flourishing human beings to be industrious, we would conclude that industriousness was a virtue. If we observed human beings engaging in regular ceremonies of religious worship, we would conclude that religion served some important human need, and so forth.

This sounds fine. But consider how we are here treating the *object* of this empirical investigation into human nature. We are, it seems, obliged to treat it as something analogous to the object of the empirical, natural sciences: something that, at least for the purposes of our study, is represented as static and unchanging, bound by our observation in the form of a law. And *that*, of course, is precisely the problem.

So here's my hypothesis: even though we can (with McDowell), read Foot as a sort of soft naturalist, it nevertheless seems as if she transmutes, wittingly or unwittingly, a scientific paradigm of knowledge onto her ethics.^{ix} Foot, of course, never actually *tells* us she is doing this – although as

far as I know she never said anything to the contrary either.^x For this reason, I don't want to claim that my ascribing an 'observational' model of knowledge to Foot represents any great breakthrough in the field of Foot Studies. Rather, I simply want to say this: if Foot *does* hold an observational model of EHF, then that allows us to make sense of her conservatism as being something more than simple caprice. If she doesn't, then maybe it really is just a matter of personal disposition.

More importantly, describing what Foot's position *would* look like – if she *did* hold such a model of ethical knowledge – allows us to draw a contrast with a second model, associated with G.E.M. Anscombe and – more recently – Michael Thompson. This is the model of ethical knowledge that I want to agitate for.

For Anscombe, ethical knowledge is expressly *non-observational*. Anscombe dedicates some of the most intriguing passages of her study of *Intention* to articulating this notion of 'non-observational' knowledge. She starts with a fairly trivial example: that of knowing the position of one's limbs. Nothing, Anscombe says, *shows* us the position of our limbs: it is not as if we have to feel a tingle in our knee, to be aware of where it is (Anscombe 2000, p. 13). This ought to resonate with our experience, I think: we don't know where our body is by looking at it, or even by feeling things in it – we just have a sort of kinaesthetic intuition of it, inhabiting it as we do from the inside.^{xi} And yet, Anscombe claims, this rather nebulous 'intuition' can form the basis of a knowledge claim, because it is the sort of thing we might be *mistaken* about: we could, conceivably, intuit that our knee is bent when it is straight – someone being mistaken in this way “might be surprising,” Anscombe notes, “but it is not particularly obscure” (p. 14).

Anscombe then extends this category of non-observational knowledge to encompass knowledge of one's intentions – how I know, for instance, that I am trying to open the window.

“This is difficult. Say I go over to the window and open it. Someone who hears me moving calls out: What are you doing making that noise? I reply 'Opening the window'. I have called such a statement knowledge all along; and precisely because in such a case what I say is true

– I do open the window; and that means that the window is getting opened by the movements of the body out of whose mouth these words come. But I don't say the words like this: 'Let me see, what is this body bringing about? Ah yes! the opening of the window'. Or even like this 'Let me see, what are my movements bringing about? The opening of the window'. To see this, if it is not already plain, contrast this case with the following one: I open the window and it focuses a spot of light on the wall. Someone who cannot see me but can see the wall, says 'What are you doing making that light come on the wall? And I say 'Ah yes, it's opening the window that does it, or 'That always happens when one opens that window at midday if the sun is shining'" (p. 51).

It is plausible to suggest that we know our intentional actions 'without observation' because, for any action we might will, there is *no one observable thing* which could possibly count as evidence that this is what we, in fact, wish to do. For instance: I may intend to paint my wall yellow. If the person I've just spent the night with asks what I am doing when I abruptly leave the house to walk to the hardware store and buy some yellow paint, I might reply that I'm painting my wall yellow. But of course I do not know this because I have *observed* it: I've not painted my wall yet. If, in my hungover state, I accidentally buy some green paint, and then paint my wall green, there might well be no *external* evidence that I ever intended to paint it yellow at all – at least if I don't make a big fuss about it in front of my new friend. And yet, I still know what I *intended* to do – and it wasn't any of this. This is why I can successfully paint my wall green, but it can still be a mistake. And there are plenty of other things I can do successfully, which might prove to be mistakes as well.

So far so good – and, for what it's worth, I think that Anscombe is deeply right about the nature of intention.^{xii} But my real interest in her book proceeds from the way in which she uses her reflections on intentional action in order to posit a big, daring hypothesis about the nature of ethical knowledge. Following her discussion of intentional action as involving non-observational knowledge, Anscombe asks:

“Can it be that there is something that modern philosophy has blankly misunderstood: namely what ancient and medieval philosophers meant by *practical knowledge*? Certainly in modern philosophy we have an incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge. Knowledge must be something that is judged as such by being in accordance with the facts. The facts, reality, are prior, and dictate what it is to be said, if it is knowledge. And this is the explanation of the utter darkness in which we found ourselves. For if there are two knowledges – one by observation, the other in intention – then it looks as if there must be two objects of knowledge; but if one says the objects are the same, one looks hopelessly for the different *mode of contemplative knowledge* in acting, as if there were a very queer and special sort of seeing eye in the middle of the acting” (p. 57).

Towards the end of her book, Anscombe cites Aquinas in suggesting that “Practical knowledge is the cause of what it understands.” This draws a contrast with 'speculative' knowledge, “which is derived from the objects known” (p. 87). This might sound somewhat mystifying – and Anscombe does not, perhaps, do enough work in spelling it out. But the underlying insight is actually quite simple. 'Speculative' knowledge, here, is Anscombe's analogue for the 'observational' knowledge I have been describing in this section above: the paradigm of knowledge associated with the natural sciences. It pertains to things that are *there in any case*, regardless of whether or not we are aware of them. Thus one might obtain knowledge of the life cycle of the swallow, by observing swallows in their (various) natural habitats. But one would not – at least, one hopes – by means of this observation *alter* the relevant facts about swallow life.^{xiii}

Practical knowledge, by contrast, pertains to activities one is *undertaking*. To invoke a trivial example: I am baking a loaf of my famous cheese-and-pickle bread. I could – probably – write down instructions as to how one would go about baking this bread. But in truth, there's a lot of improvisation, the quantities are different every time, depending on what I have in the fridge I might use a different type of cheese, or I might put beer in it instead of water, and that beer could be

anything from a stout to an IPA; in truth, no two loaves of my famous cheese-and-pickle bread are ever identical. But when I bake it, I know what I'm doing – crucially, I know what it would look like if I *failed* to make it. If *you* followed my instructions, you probably wouldn't know what you were doing in the same way – at least not initially. You might pick it up, over time. But of course, in so doing, you would – through the sort of understanding you obtained – be able to establish your own unique spin on the recipe as well.

The upshot of this is as follows: I have practical knowledge as to how to go about baking my famous cheese-and-pickle bread. If I didn't have this knowledge, there would *be* no cheese-and-pickle bread, at least not of the 'my famous' variety. And, likewise, my practical knowledge has grown and adapted as I have cooked loaf after loaf of this bread. This is, I suppose, a sort of practical *expertise*. There's probably something similar going on when one hangs a doorframe, or reviews a manuscript for an academic journal. One learns through doing; sustains the activity in the practice; and to whatever extent each individual engaged in the practice has leeway to develop their own way of doing it for themselves.

In truth, of course, the phrase “practical knowledge is the cause of what it understands” probably only makes sense, in most cases, if we expand our conception of 'practical knowledge' beyond what any given individual knows about *their own* activities. Some one person learning to hang a doorframe can't possibly be the *cause* of doorframe-hanging existing as an activity (unless, perhaps, they're the inventor of the door). But the fact that there exists some expert body of knowledge called 'carpentry', sustained by experts called 'carpenters', quite plausibly sustains the activity of doorframe-hanging in whatever actuality it presently exhibits. Compare a craft that has been lost or declined, such as making wrought iron.

Inevitably, in a paper like this my treatment of such ideas is going to be rather sketchy. Perhaps there are problems with the view that I haven't foreseen, all manner of creases that need to be ironed out, even gaping holes that philosophers far more careful and insightful than I am would struggle to

fill in. But it seems, to me at least, that there's something deeply plausible about all this. When I reflect on the idea of practical knowledge, of a kind of knowledge that is the cause of the thing known, I see ways in which it can account for everything from my knowledge of how to teach a philosophy class; to my inability to hold a pool cue correctly; to our shared knowledge of when it is – or is not – appropriate to us certain words.

But how does all this apply to knowledge of essential human form? Anscombe doesn't really tell us, but Michael Thompson, in a 2013 paper published on his academia.edu profile, makes some useful speculative remarks in this direction. Thompson – for rather different reasons, I think, to myself – is also convinced that it makes no sense to consider EHF as something we apprehend disinterestedly – that is, observationally. Rather, as he puts it:

“The HUMAN form, my form, what I am, the unity to which I bring my thoughts, etc. is evidently also exhibited in the specific unity, outlined by Anscombe, of... intentional action; coming into possession of this form is coming into possession of a will, if all goes well”

(Thompson 2013, pp. 31-32).

By which, I think, he means: *what it is to be human*, in the most basic sense, is something sustained in the various activities that comprise, precisely, *being* human. The human animal is something that eats, drinks, feasts, binges, has sex, falls in love, builds houses, exploits other human beings for their labour, destroys the natural environment, etc. etc.; we know this, *in the way that we know it*, because we are, ourselves, human beings engaged, in whatever way, in those activities – 'from the inside'. We precisely do *not* know these things about human life in a manner analogous to how we might know facts about birds, or fish, or trees – although interestingly enough, Thompson notes, our knowledge of such creatures presupposes some intuition that such life is *not* like our own, that there is something important that we do *not* share with them (p. 32). Compare, perhaps, our knowledge of human beings from radically different cultures, or time periods – where, no matter how little our way of life may resemble theirs', the opposite is somehow the case.^{xiv}

5. Ethical Naturalism as Practical Realism

So here is my suggestion. Let's take Foot's non-biologistic essentialism, and assume that she affirms an Anscombe-style, 'practical' model of knowledge about EHF – as opposed to an 'observational' one. Human form is now, we might say, to be understood as a notion that is practically rather than empirically real – so let's call this position, 'Practical Realism'. Does Practical Realism represent a version of NAEN – an ethics proceeding according to some normatively significant notion of essential human form – that is able to overcome the problems of alienation and conservatism?

Foot's original account was – before it hit the conservative rocks – able to avoid alienation quite straightforwardly; and we have no reason to think that Practical Realism ought to be subject to a regression on this score. *Of course* we can't be letting anything external to specifically ethical thought *boss our ethics about*. The object of ethical reflection is, on the Practical Realist account, precisely something that is manifested in our activities, including our practices of reflection themselves. So much, then, for the problem of alienation.

But what about conservatism? It strikes me that the central problem with Foot's position, as I have been describing it, is that she seems to think ethics ought to be bound by human form as it is *presently* manifested. Her version of essentialism thus cannot accommodate the possibility that it might be better – precisely, *more human* – for our values, our way of life, even our *selves* – to be made otherwise than they/we presently are. This is the point at which her conservatism becomes problematic – because it winds up seeming like an apology for all existing inhumanity. So, can Practical Realism accommodate this possibility?

I want to claim that it can. To see this: imagine that we are all playing a game, over the course of which we come to realise – at first perhaps somewhat tentatively, individually, but then later loudly and collectively – that one of the rules of the game we are playing is curtailing our enjoyment of it:

the game would be improved if this rule was altered, or perhaps even eliminated entirely. We're all players of the game – the game wouldn't really exist without us, at least not as played. So it looks like we ought to be free to alter the rules. We'll all, we decide, play a different version of the game we've invented, with the rules slightly changed. But of course it's in essence still the same game. It's just a *better* version of itself.

Now imagine that someone comes along and says: wait a minute. I've been observing games like this since they were first invented. Players of this game have always played it with this rule you don't like. Since you've abandoned it, you can't be playing the game properly. *Either* you're not playing the game at all, and you should just admit this; you've gone beyond the game in some important way. *Or* – and this is if you want to be good players of the game you *think* you're playing at – you ought to switch back to the rules as they were originally written, and attempt instead to play *that* version, as well as you possibly might. The nature of the game just isn't up to you as you think.

Obviously in this example, the game is supposed to be acting as a metaphor for our society and culture as it presently exists. The specific rule that the players want to amend is supposed to stand in for a value or a practice – such as 'industriousness', or the institution of capitalist wage-labour – which society affirms, but that said society's members might come to believe is detrimental to them, and seek to alter. The person who comes along and tells the players they can't change the rules is, of course, a conservative ethical naturalist, carrying with them a list of observed facts about human nature that (they believe) any good member of the human species *must* conform to. The players of the game who seek to amend the rules, by contrast, are actualising a possibility that must, I think, always be present for Practical Realism. *We're* the ones doing it, being human. Without us to sustain it, there would *be* no 'human nature' to refer to in our ethics at all. So the question of what it is to live a good human life *can't* simply be a matter of conforming to some pre-set criteria as old as the human species itself. It's something that we must be able to reflect on and, to whatever extent,

decide for ourselves.

Of course, all of this might sound like there isn't much point to our affirming any version of essentialist ethical naturalism at all. For, on the Practical Realist account, what conceivable *limits* does essential human form place on ethical deliberation? From the sounds of it, not very many. For the Practical Realist, the question of what it is to be a good human being is – at least in some sense – to be decided by *us*. What guidance, then, can essential human form possibly provide? Basically *none*: for the Practical Realist, human nature is radically – even vertiginously – open-ended. Perhaps we really will start arguing that it's Actually Good to stab other human beings in their sleep after all.

But that's not *quite* right. Because even if we are to be afforded ultimate, as it were judicial responsibility over what it means to be human, we are nevertheless always – as the bearers of this responsibility – thinking and reflecting as a specific type of creature, a certain sort of animal, with certain hedonistic preferences and survival needs. In the game example, the rule wasn't amended for *no reason at all*. It was amended because it was *felt to be detrimental to the game*. The game, the players believed, would be more fun if the rule was changed. In a game, this is enough; in human life, a more profound reason may perhaps be needed – but of course those reasons often present themselves.

As a human being, I need certain things in order to survive: to live in an oxygen-rich environment, for example; or to have sufficient food and drink not to die of thirst or malnutrition. It will usually hurt when I get hit over the head, so I will probably do my best to avoid getting hit over the head; likewise, I am going to be drawn to activities and experiences that give me pleasure (equally, I suppose, I could be a psychologically perverse individual who enjoys being hit around the head, but then surely I'm going to have to find some way of dealing with the effects of regular concussions). I am probably also going to need certain things in order to count as a 'well-developed individual' of my species: for instance, to form meaningful friendships, or to pursue activities ('industriously' or

otherwise) which count in some way towards my community's shared good.

In each of these examples – from the need for oxygen, to the need for friendship – we are given something that stands, as it were, as a sort of *naturally-derived limit* to ethical reflection. As the sort of animal that I am, I am presented with these things as *natural needs*. But acknowledging that these things might count as limits to our reflection need not then oblige us to endorse a problematic conservatism. Practical Realism can accommodate these limits not as cold, dead facts that will hang around forever, but rather as something manifested in (and contingent upon) a particular practice – in the most general sense, our activity of *being human*, our active engagement with the world as a member of the species *Homo Sapiens*; in a somewhat less general sense, my activity of being a member of a certain society at a certain period of time^{xv}; in the most specific sense, my activity of being *me*, the distinct individual that *I* am. These limits do not provide us with *answers* to ethical questions, pre-set in advance – rather, they provide us with a framework within which we can deliberate on what we should or shouldn't do. According to a Practical Realist ethical naturalism, it is just in such ethical deliberation, situated within the context of an active engagement with the world, that the scope of the ethical pertains.

Conclusion

I have argued that NAEN can avoid the problems of alienation and conservatism by adopting a 'Practical Realist' conception of EHF. Such a conception treats essential human form as a 'practical' rather than as an empirical concept, which means that it is sustained in the various practical activities human beings undertake – as opposed to existing, in some important sense, *beyond* them. This means that our ideas about the essentially human are always subject to revision, pending the appropriate sort of critical reflection. I have sought to convince the reader that this Practical Realist version of NAEN is the most plausible one we might affirm. Therefore, NAENs ought to adopt

Practical Realism about EHF.

This brings us on to something that I think is really important. Namely, that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism – this school of thought that stretches back to Anscombe via Thompson, McDowell, Foot, and others – is *only really coherent* as a philosophical position if it features, in some way, the possibility of *radical* moral criticism. This, in my view, allies the tradition to radically emancipatory political thought – from Marx, to the Frankfurt School, and beyond. Soft naturalist thinkers – including McDowell – have done much in recent years to expand, as it were, the naturalistic franchise. What I have been arguing for, is effectively a further growth: from hard, to soft, to radical naturalism.

This move might be surprising, to anyone familiar with Foot's small-c conservatism (in the anti-Nietzsche chapter in particular), or McDowell's apolitical quietism.^{xvi} But it need not seem at all strange to anyone familiar with the early Marx (see especially Marx 2000), or recent scholarship on Theodor Adorno's 'naturalistic' ethics (Freyenhagen 2013, Whyman 2016, 2017). These thinkers both, to my mind, espouse a version of ethical naturalism that – aside from being based upon a thoroughly historicised account of human nature – is directed critically *against* our society and culture as it presently exists. There is plenty more to spell out with regards the exact affinity between these two traditions. But – at a minimum – I hope to have convinced the reader that contemporary Anglo-American philosophical naturalists would do well to pay more attention this alternative tradition's legacy. If we're interested in doing ethics in a naturalistic, humanistic way, we also need to be interested in the emancipation of humanity from capitalist and other forms of oppression.^{xvii}

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- i Ethical naturalists themselves often tell us that it is problematic; see e.g. Foot 2001 p. 37, or Thompson 2013 p.2.
 - ii It's worth noting that this sort of argumentative strategy is often associated with far-right politics: the idea that women, or certain racial minority groups, ought 'naturally' to assume a subordinate role. This strategy is premised on the hypostatization of historic injustice.
 - iii For the distinction between 'hard' or reductive and 'soft' or liberal naturalism, see the essays collected in De Caro and MacArthur (eds.) 2004. 'Hard' naturalism is associated with scientific reductionism – most naturalists working in the analytic tradition have been hard naturalism. Soft naturalism emerged, especially through the work of thinkers such as P.F. Strawson, Hillary Putnam, and John McDowell, as a way of challenging hard naturalism without necessarily abandoning the idea that science affords us some special insight into the natural world. See the opening paragraphs of section 3 for more on McDowell's soft naturalism, and the Conclusion for some brief comments on where I think my paper leaves the hard-soft naturalism debate.
 - iv This is a point at which the biologicistic essentialist seems like they are going to be subject to a great deal of conceptual confusion. Just *how* are we supposed to restrict the scope of the biological, and on what grounds? Fink (2008) poses similar problems for the scientific naturalist.
 - v Having said that, I don't think that McDowell holds *exactly* the form of essentialism I will be articulating in this section: his own position is much more Platonistic than Foot's. McDowell is of the view that there exists an essential ethical good, *sui generis*, that human beings with the appropriate second nature are simply well-equipped to 'resonate' to (McDowell 1996, pp. 82 ff). This position doesn't quite fit into the structure of the argument I'm giving in this paper, so I will not be presenting it in any detail here. I should note, however, that in my view McDowell's form of ethical naturalism – despite its robustly anti-scientific credentials – nonetheless involves what I will later refer to as an 'observational' model of how we are supposed to obtain knowledge about EHF – insofar as he represents the essential human good as something that exists *anyway*, outside of us, that we are supposed to

somehow *discern* and adopt our thinking *towards*. See my 2017 for a fuller, critical treatment of McDowell 'naturalised Platonism'.

- vi It would be interesting to know how Foot would fit disabled people into her account. Some people are disabled in such a way as to be *unable* to fully participate in what Foot would define as a flourishing human ethical community. For instance, Foot claims that being “industrious” is necessary for one to live a good human life (2001, p. 44 – see also main body of this paper above), but all sorts of people may be unable to pursue their ends in an 'industrious' way: for instance the physically disabled, or the chronically depressed. Meanwhile, non-neurotypical people, such as those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, may well be unable to participate in a human community in what is, for Foot, the 'right' way – perhaps struggling, for example, to form meaningful friendships of the relevant sort. This problem seems to be linked to the problem of conservatism: indeed, I am tempted to view it as an aspect of that problem – to the extent that it treats the human good as somehow univocal. It will be crucial, for any plausible version of NAEN, to do justice to the needs and experiences of disabled people.
- vii I'm honestly not sure how to even begin articulating just how strongly I disagree with this characterisation of Hitler as someone who realised their own 'self-created values'. It strikes me that Hitler was, rather, something much closer to a passive conduit through which the anxieties and prejudices of the interwar German middle-classes expressed themselves.
- viii The process dramatised in Ken Loach's film *I, Daniel Blake* (2016).
- ix And as I say in footnote v above, I would warrant something similar is going on in McDowell. This paper is not specifically about soft/liberal/inclusive naturalism, but if I had a detailed critique of the sort of soft naturalism we can find in McDowell, this would be it.
- x Michael Thompson, who of course knows Foot's work inside-out, implies as much in his 2013, p.2 (at least if one assumes that what he says there is supposed to be cross-referenced with McDowell's 'Two Sorts of Naturalism').
- xi Just to be clear, Anscombe does not herself use the language of 'kinaesthetic intuition'. I'm just employing it to help shed some light on what she means.
- xii Although for an alternative view, see Davidson 1978. Thompson offers a defence of Anscombe, against Davidson's criticisms, in his 2013.
- xiii The knowledge is, of course, constructed – as per the end of section 2. But the *facts*, one hopes, are not.
- xiv Thompson himself discusses this at various points in his 2013, for instance at p. 7.
- xv For this reason, we must think, our hedonistic preferences and survival needs are not just natural but *also* historical. See my 2016.
- xvi See McDowell 2002, pp. 297-8 for an intriguing passage in which McDowell, effectively, dismisses the need for his philosophy to involve any sort of Adorno-style social criticism.
- xvii Thompson, in fairness, does mention Marx fairly frequently in his 2013 – though curiously, he seems to lament what he refers to as Marx's “peculiar” political obsessions (p. 2). McDowell mentions 'Alienated Labour' in an important passage from pp.117-119 of *Mind and World* (McDowell 1996).