Flourishing Together

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments 3

Dedication 6

Introduction: Flourishing Together 7

1. Neo-Aristotelian Eudaimonism and the Flourishing of Evaluative Animals 18

2. Acting and Flourishing in the World: Commitment, Involvement, and Enmeshment 54

3. Flourishing Together: Involvement and Enmeshment with Others 99

4. The Ethics of Flourishing Together and the Challenge of Immoralism 149

5. The Ethics of Flourishing Together and the Charge of Egoism 210

Conclusion 243

Bibliography 248

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Dedication

I dedicate this project to my wife Sarai, who is the greatest source of my flourishing on earth. Anything I write that is at all worth reading, at its core, is basically a love letter to her. Thank you Sarai for becoming enmeshed with me.

Introduction: Flourishing Together

"If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I?"

(Rabbi Hillel)[1]

I. Flourishing Together

Human flourishing is a flourishing-together.

The original motivation for this essay is two-fold. First, what initially drew me to Aristotelian virtue ethics, and what continues to make it so compelling, is its contention that part of what makes the ethical life excellent, is that such a life is good for the person living it. Second, there is an opinion shared by a good number of philosophers, sometimes encountered in print, oft heard in discussion, that this feature of virtue ethics somehow makes it irredeemably egoistic. What I find most compelling about Aristotelian ethics indicates to some (perhaps many) philosophers that this normative theory is no longer a viable option. Perhaps it once was (so the story goes) for the ancients, but today we possess a more enlightened moral consciousness and more properly *other*-focused moral theories. Like many Neo-Aristotelians today, I think this response reveals modern moral theory to be impoverished, lacking certain key ethical notions, rather than enlightened, so as to advance beyond them. A big part of the problem is, I think, a failure

[1] *Pirkei Avos*, Chapter 1, Mishna 14

to adequately recognize and account for a seminal feature of Aristotelian ethics: its persistent and deep linkage of distinct individuals such that their flourishing rises and falls together. It is this notion that allows Aristotelians to put an agent's own flourishing at the center of ethical theory, while at the same time avoiding any sort of objectionable egoism. It is this notion that I will consider, develop, and apply in the project that follows. This essay concerns how human flourishing is a flourishing-together.

Humans are social animals.[2] Hence, human flourishing is not a solitary endeavor; it involves us with others. Aristotelian virtue ethics puts this inference front and center. The ethical virtues are dispositions to live well as a social animal. They are (to a large extent) dispositions to excellence in (human) social life.[3] As such they help to organize the lives of humans in community so as to produce a harmonious social whole. Aristotelian ethics connects this description of the ethical virtues with a more controversial one: virtues are dispositions that characteristically advance the flourishing of the virtuous agent. An Aristotelian claims that the virtues are not only good for others (because of the benefits of associating with the virtuous agent), but they are good for the virtuous agent herself. The genius of Aristotelian ethics then is to show how the flourishing of social animals (like ourselves) is something that is achieved together.

This is an essay about the flourishing of humans and how that flourishing is interdependent. One cannot flourish as a human being without becoming involved and enmeshed with others (some quite thoroughly). Below I will detail the variety, extent, and

2 In his *Politics* 1253a Aristotle argues that humans are "political animals" by nature. I use the term social here, since "political" has more specific and negative connotations for some modern ears.

3 I say "to a large extent" here to allow for more inwardly focused ethical virtues. Also, I don't wish to rule out the possibility of the existence of certain virtues concerning human treatment of, and interaction with, the natural world, including non-human animals.

importance of that involvement for human flourishing, and the implications this has for some important and difficult normative questions. My main thesis can be (very) generally stated in three words as 'humans flourish together' and four words as 'human flourishing is social'. More precisely, I claim that human flourishing is interdependent in such a way that the flourishing of others comes to partially constitute (not merely overlap or coincide with) one's own. Unpacking the precise nature and implications of this thesis will ground a virtue ethical answer to the immoralist while allowing the (neo)Aristotelian ethicist to avoid the charge of egoism.

II. Outline of the Project

After several centuries of near-absence, virtue ethics has recently seen a resurgence within the philosophical literature, the most prominent expression of which is Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism. Among the strengths of eudaimonism is its distinctly powerful answer to the immoralist. The eudaimonist can argue that one should be moral because ultimately the morally virtuous life is good for the one living it. This thesis has been criticized as implausible. Moreover, this claim (especially as of late) has invited the charge of egoism. It is argued that the eudaimonist justifies morality merely as that which advances the good of the virtuous person. This essay develops a compelling account of human flourishing and then applies it to address these normative concerns.

This work is prefaced by chapter one, wherein I carry out three preparatory tasks: (1) establish the basic contours of Aristotelian eudaimonism, (2) identify what sort of naturalist I think a contemporary Neo-Aristotelian should be and (3) comment on my

methodology. With respect to the first task I start by outlining the basics of Aristotelian eudaimonism and then go on to develop some unique features of my own Neo-Aristotelian account. The most important of these original features is an account of virtue justification that I term "the mixed account of virtue justification". Next I consider what sort of naturalist a Neo-Aristotelian ethicist should be. Here I present a position I term Aristotelian second-naturalism; I draw on the work of McDowell and Nussbaum to do so. I distinguish this sort of naturalism from a cruder sort that some (mistakenly) attribute to Aristotle and Neo-Aristotelians. I end the chapter with related comments concerning the methodology of McDowell and Nussbaum. I end up endorsing this methodology as the best sort for a Neo-Aristotelian (and the sort that Aristotle adopted himself).

In chapters two and three I develop my account of human flourishing. I end up arguing that one's own flourishing does not merely overlap or coincide with the flourishing of others, but is partially constituted by it; the flourishing of others is a key constituent of one's own. I term this phenomenon enmeshment. I do much in these chapters to show just how pervasive and potent enmeshment is in human life. For an Aristotelian eudaimonist, a good human life is made up of worthwhile activities done well. Through a careful examination of the structures of agency (including intention and a stipulative account of commitment) I argue that many of the most important activities for human flourishing enmesh oneself with others, such that their flourishing comes to partially constitute one's own (and vice-versa).

This enmeshment account of human flourishing bolsters the eudaimonist response to the immoralist. In the first part of chapter four (and a portion of chapter 1) I develop a

Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism I term “The Ethics of Flourishing Together”. In chapter four I argue that the ethical virtues are important for (and vices destructive of) many of the activities which serve as key constituents of a good human life. In this way I advance a hypothetical imperative strategy against the immoralist, presenting ethical virtue as the best strategy to achieve one’s own flourishing (i.e., if one desires to flourish then one should pursue virtue). However, this pursuit involves habituating virtue, which, once gained (to a certain degree), will include a transition of one’s motivations away from the self-interested outlook of the immoralist to a moralized evaluative outlook of the person approximating virtue.

I conclude my project in chapter five by addressing the charge of an objectionable egoism, principally as advanced in the writings of Thomas Hurka. This is a two-fold effort that shows eudaimonism to be neither motivationally nor justificationally egoistic. Motivationally, I argue that Aristotelian virtue ethics encourages motivations proper to virtuous activity. With respect to the rational justification of virtue, I argue that a trait is a virtue if, and only if, it is conducive to virtuous response as defined by the ethical demands of the world *and* when manifest it characteristically results in the flourishing of the agent. These two conditions are necessary, and jointly sufficient, for virtue. This is the essence of what I call the mixed account of virtue justification. Furthermore, because of the phenomenon of enmeshment, advancing one’s own flourishing cannot help but advance the flourishing of others. Hence, this justification of virtue is not objectionably egoistic. On the one hand it references ethical demands external to the agent; on the other

hand it references the flourishing of the virtuous agent which (in light of my enmeshment account) cannot be cleanly separated from the flourishing of others.

Taken as a whole this project develops a compelling form of Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism that provides a strong answer to the immoralist while avoiding an objectionable egoism. As such this essay contributes to the overall attractiveness of eudaimonistic approaches to ethics. It is my hope that this will encourage the continued (and expanded) development and application of Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism within philosophical ethics.

III. Excursus: Why Hope for Progress after 2400 years?

Before I begin my project in earnest, I want to briefly address a worry that threatens to cast doubt on my efforts right from the start. The worry can be stated (somewhat crudely) like this: "Look, Aristotelians have had nearly 2400 years to work out an account of human flourishing. Surely any progress that was going to be made would have been accomplished by now. Why should one think that recent and future efforts of Neo-Aristotelians are likely to make any real progress in this area?" This sort of challenge pairs nicely with a general skepticism that doubts Aristotelian accounts of ethics *in general* have anything worthwhile to offer contemporary ethicists (and contemporary people striving to live ethically). One might point out that Aristotelian views had their day . . . for 2000 years or so, before ultimately falling out of favor during the Enlightenment. One might think that the recent revival of Aristotelian ethics only serves to pull attention away from more promising Enlightenment and post-

Enlightenment views of Kantian, consequentialist, contractualist, or whatever form. These other approaches were developed at a time closer to our own. Ostensibly they are better equipped to deal with our ethical lives. Beyond this there is one big reason for thinking that these newer approaches might yield results, where Aristotelian ethics are not likely to succeed: these newer approaches have (philosophically speaking) only recently come onto the scene and their full development has come even more recently. They have not had 2400 years with which to work; perhaps there is yet still progress to be expected from these less tried and still developing approaches.

I think something like the preceding account lurks behind much of the skepticism concerning contemporary efforts in Aristotelian ethics. So I think it worthwhile to make five preliminary comments to put these worries to the side so that we can pursue a project in Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism without such baggage in the background.

First, it is worth pointing out that part of the reason for the resurgence in Aristotelian ethics is the perceived inadequacies of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment ethical approaches. This point has been made by radical virtue ethicists Elizabeth Anscombe, Alasdair MacIntyre, and more recently in Talbot Brewer's *The Retrieval of Ethics*. I have nothing to say on this front that has not already been said better by these three philosophers. However, one need not accept the Enlightenment project in ethics as a wholesale failure to recognize that it lacks key components of an adequate moral approach. It is not only (radical) virtue ethicists that have recognized a certain inadequacy or incompleteness in Enlightenment ethics. Prominent Kantians and even some consequentialists have recently sought to augment their own theories with

forays into virtue theory.[4] Even in the realm of political philosophy, the contributions of ancient pre-Enlightenment approaches have been recognized as valuable.[5]

Second, the recent explosion of activity both within Aristotelian ethics, and in non-Aristotelian approaches (that nonetheless seek to engage with Aristotelian ethics), should be proof enough that Aristotle has something to offer contemporary ethicists. Consider that after some preliminary calls to return to ancient ethical approaches among radical virtue ethicists (most notably by Anscombe, Murdoch, MacIntyre and Williams)[6] there was a flurry of effort to show that an Aristotelian approach to ethics represents a third viable normative approach alongside various forms of Kantianism and consequentialism. The capstone of these efforts came at the turn of the most recent century when four major works in Aristotelian (or Aristotelian inspired)[7] ethics were published in rapid succession: Alasdair MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999), Rosalind Hursthouse's *On Virtue Ethics* (1999), Philippa Foot's *Natural Goodness* (2001) and Christine Swanton's *Virtue Ethics* (2003). If it was not before, it should now be impossible to deny the potential fruitfulness and importance of Aristotelian ethics within the contemporary normative landscape.[8]

4 A short list would include Tom Hill and Barbara Herman (Kantians) as well as Julia Driver and Thomas Hurka (consequentialists).

5 See for example Nussbaum's *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. See also Mark Labar's article on virtue ethical treatments of political philosophy in *Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*.

6 Most notable among these works is Anscombe's essay *Modern Moral Philosophy*, MacIntyre's *After Virtue* and Williams' *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*.

7 I say Aristotelian inspired because Swanton cites Aristotle as a main inspiration for her virtue ethical theory, but she also turns to the much less traditional virtue ethical source of Nietzsche. Swanton also ends up rejecting eudaimonism.

8 Nussbaum and McDowell have also contributed substantially to Neo-Aristotelian ethics, much of their work coming prior to the Neo-Aristotelian books just cited. Despite her stoic affinities, Julia Annas' has

Third, the 2400 year (or 2000 years in which virtue ethics flourished)[9] figure is misleading. In the west Aristotle was largely lost by the sixth century. It isn't until the efforts of Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (1126-1198) that Aristotle is reintroduced to the west. Shortly after this re-introduction Thomas Aquinas made creative use of Aristotle in developing his own ethical theory. A similar thing might be happening now with the resurgence of virtue ethics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Perhaps the early efforts of philosophers like Anscombe, MacIntyre, and Williams have succeeded in reintroducing Aristotle to post-Enlightenment ethical philosophy. Now we are seeing the firstfruits of creatively applying this largely forgotten and ignored source of ethical insight.

Fourth, the worry of our imagined objector might stem from a misconception about what counts as progress in philosophical ethics, and in particular, in accounts of human flourishing. More than most topics, human flourishing will need to be brought up and worked out anew in each culture and in each generation. In part, this is because the possibilities for a good human life are so varied, complex, and open to future innovation. Moreover, one does not need to be a relativist to accept that what counts as a good human life will change in many of its particulars from time to time and culture to culture. Certain lives that would be good in one culture might not be available, and might not even be good, in another.

also contributed significantly to the explosion of work in Neo-Aristotelian ethics. See especially her *The Morality of Happiness* and *Intelligent Virtue*.

[9] One might want to say "2000" instead of "2400" because virtue ethics fell out of favor leading up to the Enlightenment.

Finally, and most importantly, even if one is unmoved by my first four comments, even if one views (incorrectly) the previous nearly 2400 years as one long uninterrupted failure of Aristotelians to make progress in their account of human flourishing, there remains a very good reason why we might think that there is likely now to be progress in Aristotelian accounts of human flourishing. Briefly stated, the reason is this: we have only recently recognized the full humanity of roughly ***half of humans***; and only recently have we begun listening to that half of humanity concerning what human flourishing might be. I do not think it is a coincidence that the best and most exciting work done in the recent (and ongoing) revival of Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is being done largely by women. I suspect that the flood of recent work in Neo-Aristotelian ethics, and eudaimonism in particular, could not have happened sixty years ago. Scholarship in general has greatly benefitted from the inclusion of women, but there is perhaps no other area from which it could have benefitted more dramatically than in eudaimonism. The systematic silencing and ignoring of half of human life and experience is uniquely damning to the endeavor of figuring out just what sort of thing a good human life might be. Sociologically, women have been systematically placed in certain important roles and strictly barred from others. While unfortunate, this unique experience (unique relative to the experience of men) plausibly led to ethical insights not as readily available to the majority of men who were encouraged to avoid or fill different social roles. One can accept the work of Carol Gilligan concerning the distinctive ethical experience and

perspective of women, while accepting the possibility that similarly placed males would develop similar ethical outlooks.[10]

In light of this I am humbled, optimistic, and excited for what the future will bring. Philosophy, and society more generally, still has a problem with including the voices of women. If this continues to become less of a problem, I suspect work on eudaimonism (and philosophy in general) will continue to be fruitful, exciting, interesting, and in general, good.

10 See Gilligan's landmark 1982 book *In a Different Voice* wherein she (among other things) shows how previous social psychologists discounted or misunderstood the alternate ethical outlooks of girls and women.

Chapter 1

Neo-Aristotelian Eudaimonism and the Flourishing of Evaluative Animals

"This, then, is a sketch of the good; for presumably, we must draw the outline first, and fill it in later. If the sketch is good, anyone, it seems, can advance and articulate it, and in such cases time discovers more, or is a good partner in discovery. That is also how the crafts have improved, since anyone can add what is lacking."

(Aristotle)[11]

I. Introduction: *Filling In* the Accounts of Aristotle and Neo-Aristotelians

In the epigraph heading this chapter Aristotle describes his account of the human good as a "sketch" to be filled in later. This passage comes in book I of his *Nicomachean Ethics*; the filling in process begins in the balance of that work. I say 'begins' because Aristotle himself would grant that he has not completed the project at the end of his *Ethics*. Even if wholly correct (which it is not), and even if we include his *Politics*, there is much of Aristotle's account of the good human life that remains to be "filled in". Recognizing this Aristotle invites others to come after him and join in the work to "supply what is lacking" in his account.

For nearly 2400 years, philosophers have answered Aristotle's invitation. Recently Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonists have produced an explosion of work, much of it filling in the account of the human good Aristotle first sketched in Ancient Greece. My project will add to Aristotle, and this more recent work, by advancing a unique account of human flourishing that fills in a remaining lack. I won't be *merely* filling in; I will also be doing much in the way of correction, extension, and application. I will also have

11 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a20-26.

something to say about just what sort of eudaimonism a Neo-Aristotelian, or anyone, should settle upon.

I begin my project with a brief chapter on Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism in general and my eudaimonist account in particular. This will allow me to put some basic Aristotelian concepts in play and introduce some of my own additions to the general Neo-Aristotelian approach, including a novel way to justify the virtues. I will end the chapter by drawing upon the work of John McDowell and Martha Nussbaum to fill out my account further. In this final section I will address in what way Aristotle should be read as a naturalist and how best to understand Aristotelian naturalism. McDowell's work on evaluative outlooks as second-natures will figure prominently, as will Nussbaum's realist reading of Aristotle and her methodology of Aristotelian reflective equilibrium. In this way, I will show how Nussbaum's and McDowell's thought mesh well and can be combined into a position that is: (a) a form of Aristotelian naturalism (b) independently compelling, and (c) possessed of a methodology apt for a realist Neo-Aristotelian ethics.

II. Human Flourishing: The Aristotelian Picture

My project is not mainly an historical one, nor do I wish to wade very deep into the exegesis of Aristotle. However, I am developing a broadly Aristotelian account of human flourishing and situating it amongst the Neo-Aristotelian accounts on offer today. So it makes sense to begin with a brief treatment of Aristotle's own foundational account. In this section I will outline the basics of Aristotelian eudaimonism. In doing so I hope to present an account that is both (a) a plausible representation of Aristotle's own view and

(b) a neutral starting point for the majority of Neo-Aristotelians. I will not be engaging in detailed exegesis of Aristotle and I will not be concerned with getting the historical Aristotle correct in every detail. For the purposes of my project, I will be satisfied with an account of eudaimonism that is plausibly Aristotelian in the sense that Aristotle himself *might have* adopted it and Neo-Aristotelians would be satisfied with its general contours. This initial account will be filled in further in section III, where I leave neutral ground.

'Eudaimonia' is an ancient Greek term that is often translated as 'happiness'; I will translate it as 'human flourishing'. There is no perfect translation, and mine, like others, has its limitations. I choose to avoid the translation 'happiness' because I think it misleads modern ears.[12] Eudaimonia for Aristotle and Aristotelians is not merely, or even primarily, a subjective phenomenon; however, it is common today to think of happiness as wholly subjective.[13] The most common contemporary definition of 'happiness' brings with it notions of subjective feelings of pleasure, joy, and contentment, about which one is not easily mistaken. However, although eudaimonia has subjective components, it is largely an objective phenomenon. One can be mistaken concerning one's status with respect to eudaimonia. I avoid using the term 'flourishing' on its own, because for Aristotle and Aristotelians, the term 'eudaimonia' does not correctly apply to non-rational entities.[14] Animals, plants, and (in a certain sense) even inanimate objects can flourish.

[12] Although, for a somewhat different opinion, involving an effort to revive a more substantive use of the term 'happiness', see Foot, *Natural Goodness*, pp. 81-98.

[13] Although there is a secondary meaning which stresses more objective elements.

[14] Aristotle does apply this term to the Gods as well as humans (see *Nicomachean Ethics* Book X. 8). In this respect I am artificially constraining the term by limiting it to *mortal* rational beings or rational animals: humans.

For the purposes of my project 'eudaimonia' will refer to specifically human flourishing. Hence I will be using the terms 'eudaimonia' and 'human flourishing' interchangeably.

Eudaimonia is not easily judged in a one-off case or over the short term. Judgments of eudaimonia take into account much more than a single action, arena, or short time slice. Eudaimonia involves a human life going well over the long term; a judgment of eudaimonia concerns either a large portion or the entirety of a human life.[15]

A human life is made up of activities.[16] When people refer to humans in comas (or coma-like states) as vegetables, this is a way of recognizing that such humans are still living, but more in the manner of a plant than of a human.[17] A recognizably human life involves conscious activity to some degree; it cannot be merely a life of nutrition, respiration, and excretion. For a human life to go well, the conscious activities which constitute it must go well. Or, to put a sharper point on it, activities carried out excellently will be the key components of a good human life.[18] For human beings, who possess the capacity to reason and direct their actions accordingly, excellent actions will simply be those guided by good or correct practical reason.[19] This is what separates the conscious activity of a dog from that of a human being. A human can deliberate about potential actions and exercise practical reason in deciding what to do, or for what reasons to act.

15 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I. 7-11 (especially chapter 10).

16 Ibid., I. 7-10.

17 Though I wouldn't endorse this usage of the term 'vegetable', which some may find offensive.

18 While this is a common Aristotelian point, it may be controversial outside of Aristotelian circles. In particular a non-Aristotelian might want to more clearly distinguish an excellent human activity from one that 'goes well' in the sense of contributing to the good of the agent.

19 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 7-10.

An activity carried out excellently is a virtuous activity, and a character trait that disposes one to such excellence in action is a virtue.[20] Note that excellent activity also includes proper emotional response; virtue does not only dispose one to act well, it also disposes one to excellent affective states. A subset of virtues are what we might today term 'moral', but we must be careful to avoid the modern tendency to reduce 'virtue' in general to a merely moral term (and conceive of the 'moral' domain in an artificially limited manner).[21] For example, one could evince intellectual virtues or gain excellence in the activity of chess. Excellences, when exercised in activity, and harmonized with each other, are the content of a good human life. For a human life to go well, the human in question must do things well.

Two additions are necessary before our preliminary sketch of Aristotelian eudaimonia is complete. First, it is not just any activities that, when done skillfully, will make up a flourishing life. One could easily imagine a life that is full of activities done as well as such activities can be done, that still seems to be obviously lacking.[22] One reason for this is that some activities are not worthwhile. A life devoted to counting blades of grass is lacking because it is dominated by an activity that, no matter how expertly undertaken, is without much worth.[23] Furthermore, some activities are so central to human life that a life absent these activities is either lacking, or not recognizably human, even if a host of other worthwhile activities are present.

20 Ibid., II. 1, 5-6.

21 For more on this topic see the excursus at the end of this section. There I lay out how I will employ 'moral' and 'ethical' terms and concepts.

22 Note here that I am avoiding the term excellent, since Aristotle would require that an excellent activity be worthwhile itself (or have some worthwhile end). I might be skilled at a fairly worthless pursuit, but this would not be excellence in action according to Aristotle.

23 This example appears in Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 379-380.

The second addition to our account (or perhaps just a point worth emphasizing) is that virtue itself is not sufficient for eudaimonia; rather, it is excellent activities, that, when complete and harmonized with one another, are sufficient for eudaimonia (assuming a minimum of external goods as well).[24] Aristotle maintains that the virtues are necessary for eudaimonia, but he differs from other ancient Greek traditions and figures[25] in maintaining that they are not sufficient. In addition to virtues various external goods and conditions are necessary for a good human life because they are involved in manifesting the virtues in action; included here are things like a minimum of health, food, and friends.[26] These are things that, when absent, make it difficult or impossible to exercise virtue and engage in excellent activities. An Aristotelian picture of eudaimonia identifies virtuous *activity* as constitutive of eudaimonia; both virtuous character traits and some additional external goods are necessary for the execution of such excellent activities.[27]

So, briefly stated, an Aristotelian account of eudaimonia maintains that human flourishing consists in worthwhile activities carried out excellently (including excellent affective responses), plus some external goods (like health, food, and friends). Excellent activities are key constituent elements of human flourishing; hence the virtues that

24 This parenthetical is controversial. Some read Aristotle as maintaining that external goods contribute directly to eudaimonia, on their own, while others think they only do so by the excellent activities they facilitate or make possible.

25 Most notably the Stoics and Socrates.

26 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 10, X. 8. Also, on the importance of friends and friendship for flourishing see especially books VIII and IX.

27 Again, it is controversial whether these external goods contribute to eudaimonia directly, or only contribute to eudaimonia by making virtuous activities possible.

dispose one to carry out these activities well, will be very important in realizing a good human life.

Now something needs to be said about how this conception of human flourishing figures in the Aristotelian picture of practical life and practical reason. We have already mentioned how reasoning about practical matters is what sets human action apart from merely animal action, and it is what helps make human action excellent (at least when that reasoning is relatively successful). But there is another relation between human reason and eudaimonia. Aristotle famously argues that eudaimonia is a sort of final end, for the sake of which all other ends are sought and all activities are carried out.[28] Now, with respect to immediate motives and reasoning, this is surely false. Rather, Aristotle's idea seems to be something more like this: if one were to ask an agent, "Why are you doing action X, or participating in activity Y?" the chain of practical explanation would have to end somewhere. Aristotle thinks this chain of explanation will end in the good life, or in a constituent element of the good life. Eudaimonia then, for Aristotelians, is that end for which all other ends and activities are pursued or engaged in. Anyone who cares about leading a good life will care about eudaimonia (either explicitly or implicitly). Now of course people can be mistaken about what will result in a good life, but few if any humans will not at least desire a good life (whatever that may be).[29] One can think of Aristotle's project in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as an attempt to show people more clearly just what it is that they already desire for themselves: a good life.

28 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 1-2.

29 It is of course entirely possible for someone to desire a life that is good, without desiring a virtuous life. This would merely be a case in which they desired a good life, but were mistaken about the constituent elements of such a life (or so I will argue in this project, that such a person would be so mistaken).

But what does any of this have to do with ethics? The answer is that although not all virtues are ethical, some very important ones are. Nussbaum identifies the ethical virtues roughly as those that govern contexts of choice that are pervasive throughout human life and are problematic.[30] Aristotle is clear that ethical virtue is central to (and pervasive within) human life. This has to do with what humans are: rational social animals. The ethical virtues are dispositions to choose, act, and feel well in those situations that arise again and again for social beings. They help to organize and harmonize social life in an excellent way. By 'ethical' I will be referring (primarily)[31] to those virtues that govern our relations with others (hence my usage is potentially more narrow than Nussbaum's). Aristotle examines many of these virtues in the middle books of his *Ethics*.[32] The good human life consists in activities executed excellently; that is, it is a life of virtuous activity. Many of these virtues, and virtuous activities, are ethical; most of these ethical virtues, when exercised, characteristically benefit others, either directly or indirectly. One bold further claim that eudaimonists make is that these same virtues that benefit others, characteristically benefit the virtuous agent as well. That is, the good human life is one that is both good for others and good for the one who is living it. So striving to be virtuous is akin to striving to be a good human being and live a life that is good. Such a life, eudaimonists claim, will be good for others because it contains activities characteristic of the ethical virtues like courage, justice, and compassion.[33] It

30 "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach", pp. 247-250.

31 I say "primarily" here to allow for more internally focused ethical. It is clear that most ethical virtues govern relations with others.

32 Specifically III.6-V.11.

33 Aristotle himself does not include a virtue that is straightforwardly akin to compassion, but most Neo-Aristotelians add this (and other) virtues to Aristotle's list.

will be good for the virtuous agent herself because ethical reasoning (as a species of practical reasoning) involves some connection to eudaimonia; eudaimonism is the view that ethically virtuous traits and activities have important links to the flourishing of the virtuous agent. It is hard to say much more without getting into contentious waters. I will now develop this neutral account further, into a non-neutral, but still plausibly Aristotelian theory.

Excursus: Moral vs. Ethical

Before advancing to section III and the further development of my Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism, it is necessary to say a few words of clarification concerning the distinction between the concepts 'moral' and 'ethical'. Several philosophers involved in the recent revival of virtue ethics have pointed out how overly restrictive the concepts 'morality' and 'moral' have come to be in modern philosophy. Such philosophers claim that these modern concepts encompass issues of duty/obligation, praise/blame, justice/injustice and not much else.[34] As a result the wider more inclusive concepts of 'ethics' and 'ethical' are often preferred among virtue ethicists. I recognize this problem within *philosophical* ethics, but I think it is less clearly a problem in *popular* usage. I think the average person places much of what the virtue ethicist cares about within the concept of morality. This includes thought concerning virtuous/vicious dispositions to choose, act, and feel. Hence, in popular contemporary usage the 'ethical' and the 'moral' have become largely synonymous. However, I do recognize that, in Aristotle's (and many Aristotelians') usage, the concept of ethics is wider than the concepts of the moral/ethical

[34] For arguments against the narrow usage of the term 'moral' and the corresponding narrow focus of modern moral philosophy, see especially: Anscombe, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (especially Chapter 10), and Foot, *Natural Goodness*, pp. 66-80.

as employed by present-day non-philosophers. One clear example of this is the Aristotelian ethical virtue of wit. All of this has led me to adopt the following conventions of use.

Though I will favor the use of ethical terms/concepts, I will also occasionally employ the terms/concepts 'moral' and 'morality'. When I do so these should be read in the more popular, less narrow sense that I described above. Hence these concepts ('moral', 'morality') as I use them will encompass matters concerning most of the traditional ethical virtues and vices. However, I recognize that there are some virtues/vices on Aristotle's list that do not comfortably fit within the sphere of the moral, even on the wider reading. Moreover, for Aristotelians, there are other properly ethical concerns for which moral concepts are not entirely apt (such as 'What counts as a worthwhile activity?'); for these issues I will exclusively employ ethical terms and concepts.

One final note is relevant here. The exact boundaries of the ethical are unclear and I do not intend to precisely define them in this essay. What I have said above concerning the ethical is sufficient for the purposes of this project. When I use ethical terms in this essay I am most often interested in those concerns included within the wide notion of morality that I laid out above. The inability of ethical terms to clearly rule out virtues that are only awkwardly moral (like wit) will not hinder my argument or meaning in these instances.

III. Neo-Aristotelian Eudaimonism

The account so far has been neutral, among competing interpretations of Aristotle's project, but as a consequence, rather spare. In this section I raise a series of questions concerning Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism. In answering these questions I will further develop the contours of my own account.

Question 1: What is the causal connection between ethical virtue and eudaimonia?

This first question suggests several other related questions including: "Is ethical virtue sufficient for eudaimonia? Is it necessary? Will ethical virtue pay off in every instance, in every life, in most? Is it merely characteristic of human flourishing or one's "best bet"?

It will be helpful to start by ruling out what my position is not. Like Aristotle, my Neo-Aristotelian position will avoid the extreme view which maintains that ethical virtue is sufficient for eudaimonia. This position, often attributed to the Stoics, can be advanced in two forms. Either the mere possession of ethically virtuous dispositions is sufficient for eudaimonia, or the mere exercise (to some extent) of ethically virtuous dispositions is sufficient for eudaimonia. It is clear that the first option is incompatible with an Aristotelian framework. This is because the key constituents of human flourishing are not dispositions to act excellently, but rather are the excellent actions and activities themselves. Aristotle argues against this first position by asking us to imagine a virtuous

person asleep; if this state were perpetual, such a person would not flourish, even though they possess every virtue relevant for a good human life.[35]

But, is the *exercise* of the ethical virtues sufficient for eudaimonia? While this question is more difficult, I think the answer is still no. Perhaps, it would be better to say that the exercise of the ethical virtues is sufficient to secure the closest approximation of eudaimonia that the circumstances allow (assuming other relevant non-ethical virtues and a minimum of external goods are also present). It remains the case that even if one possessed and exercised all relevant excellences of action, one still might fall well short of eudaimonia. This is where Aristotle departs not only from the Stoics but also Socrates, and perhaps Plato as well.[36] The world is such that tragedy might befall even the most supremely virtuous among us; even those who have lived an entire life characterized by virtue. Aristotle gives the example of King Priam, who has an otherwise eudaimon life marred at the end with the death of his son and the fall of Troy.[37] Nussbaum observes that with Aristotle luck plays a larger role in the life of the virtuous; the human good is recognized as a fragile one.[38] Tragedy can strike, and an otherwise eudaimon life can be marred or made impossible.

35 See *Nicomachean Ethics* I.8. Rejecting this Aristotelian move allows Stoics to accept the extreme (and highly implausible) position that even a person being tortured to death on the rack does not have their flourishing marred, if only such a person maintains virtuous character traits.

36 Socrates famously claims in the *Apology* (lines 30c-e) that a good man cannot be harmed by bad men . Ostensibly this is because, while the masses can take one's material possessions, liberty, and life, they cannot disfigure one's soul (by forcing one to be vicious). It is controversial if this is also Plato's view. For an extended consideration of Plato's view concerning the fragility of eudaimonia for the virtuous see Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Part II).

37 *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.9.

38 *The Fragility of Goodness*, (Part III).

Now, this example involves a lifetime of exercising virtue and despite this a eudaimonia marring tragedy. However, one might note that in one sense the exercise of virtue can still be seen to guarantee eudaimonia in the life of Priam, as long as it is exercised. That is, what changes at the end of his life is that he is tragically unable to continue exercising the virtues involved in ruling a city or being a father to a son. For now, I am willing to accept that in this sense the exercise of the virtues guarantees eudaimonia *while exercised* (assuming an adequate array of excellent activities and a minimum of external goods).

So far, I have dismissed the less plausible extremity concerning the causal relation between ethical virtue and eudaimonia.[39] Few doubt that the ethically virtuous can come to terrible ends.[40] But is there any causal relation at all between ethically virtuous activity and human flourishing? Obviously a eudaimonistic theory must posit some relation, otherwise eudaimonism would reduce to an account of human flourishing which has no relation to the possession or exercise of ethical virtue. Moreover, Neo-Aristotelians will clearly deny (what perhaps some of us in a pessimistic mood may believe) that ethical virtue systematically detracts from human flourishing. Hence there are three broad, plausibly Aristotelian, positions remaining concerning a causal link: (a) ethical virtue is necessary (but not sufficient) for eudaimonia, (b) ethical virtue is necessary (but not sufficient) and characteristic of eudaimonia and (c) ethical virtue is characteristic of eudaimonia (but neither necessary nor sufficient). I will say more concerning my position

39 This is the less plausible extremity at least for moderns; it would perhaps be more contentious for the ancients.

40 If you do doubt this then you will perhaps be especially receptive to my eventual appeal to the immoralist. However, I will not be arguing for the rejection of the Stoic extreme.

in chapter 4 when I develop my case against the immoralist. For now I will indicate that I adopt option (c), but with the qualification that the link between ethical virtue and eudaimonia, though not necessary, is very strong. To paraphrase the view of Rosalind Hursthouse, ethical virtue is one's "best bet" for a good life.[41] That is, if one is seeking to live a good human life (including a life good for oneself) then it behooves one to pursue and exercise the ethical virtues. This project might ultimately bring one to ruin, but this possibility is more rare than people often assume. Moreover, oftentimes when an ethically virtuous person comes to ruin, there is no alternative for human flourishing; eudaimonia has been made impossible for whatever reason.[42]

Question 2: Is there any justificatory relationship between the ethical virtues and eudaimonia?

Beyond the causal relation between human flourishing and ethical virtue, there is the issue of rational justification. In what way (if any) is an ethical virtue (and virtuous action) rationally justified, as excellent? Another way to phrase this is, what is it that makes a virtue a virtue? Often the charge of an objectionable egoism has as its genesis the sort of eudaimonism (thought to be shared by contemporary and ancient eudaimonists alike) that identifies a trait or action as virtuous/excellent, and thereby rationally justified, because it promotes or constitutes the flourishing of the virtuous agent herself. On such an account a virtuous trait or action *just is* the sort of trait/action that is sufficient, necessary, or somehow (causally) characteristic of human flourishing. In paraphrasing

41 Hursthouse makes this case in her *On Virtue Theory*, especially in chapter 8.

42 This leaves open the troubling possibility that one's context is so systematically dysfunctional or unjust that the traditional virtues will clearly be a bad bet for one's own flourishing. I will address this possibility in chapter 4 when I confront the challenge of immoralism.

Hursthouse (as a representative eudaimonist), Christine Swanton identifies a virtue thusly: "It is a necessary condition of a trait being a virtue that it characteristically (partially) constitute (or contribute to) the flourishing of the possessor of the virtue."[43]

In *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* Swanton rejects this sort of eudaimonism despite her general affinity for Aristotelian ethics.[44] Instead of justifying virtuous actions via their link to eudaimonia, Swanton justifies them by their connection to the demands of the world. Briefly put, on her account, "A virtue is a good quality of character, more specifically a disposition to respond to, or acknowledge, items within its field or fields in an excellent or good way."[45] Later, Swanton writes that "[w]hat makes a trait a virtue is that it is a disposition to respond in an excellent (or good enough) way (through the modes of respecting, appreciating, creating, loving, promoting, and so on) to items in the fields of the virtue."[46] For Swanton each virtue has an appropriate target or targets, which are the ethical demands of the world, and virtuous action hits (or approximates) these targets of excellence, while a virtuous character trait disposes one to such excellent response.[47] Here 'response' need not be cashed out only in terms of external actions, but can also include things like emotion, appreciation, and acknowledgment.

Swanton does think that the ethical virtues reduce the tension between the morally good life and the flourishing life. She expresses this in part with her "constraint on

[43] Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, p. 77. This is not Swanton's view (she ultimately rejects eudaimonism); here she is merely presenting the view of Hursthouse.
[44] See pp. 77-95.
[45] Ibid., p. 19.
[46]Ibid., p. 20.
[47] Ibid., Chapter 1, especially p. 29.

virtue".[48] This constraint states that, "[a] correct conception of the virtues must be at least partly shaped by a correct conception of healthy growth and development which in part constitute our flourishing."[49] Elsewhere Swanton states that, "[a] virtue [is] a good quality of character in a human, is a disposition to acknowledge the 'demands of the world' in ways suitably constrained by *human* nature. However, this constraint does not reduce virtue to health. The constraint entails only that, although there are many possible ways of meeting the demands of the world, some of these ways are not excellences in *humans*."[50] The idea seems to be that we need not achieve superhuman moral heroism in response to the demands of the world; virtues are relative to human physiological and psychological capacities. Moreover, it would approach incoherence if a virtue (which is a human ***excellence***) systematically and characteristically worked for the ultimate destruction of the virtuous agent's health and development (physiological or psychological). Additionally, Swanton wants to allow generous room for self-realization as one important demand the world makes. Beyond these general considerations Swanton is not very precise concerning the contours of this "constraint of virtue". Despite this bringing of the moral life and the flourishing life closer, Swanton rejects the label of 'eudaimonist'. This is because she thinks a eudaimonist must include in her justification of virtue the flourishing of the virtuous agent; she rejects this move. The constraint on virtue only *constrains* what can be considered a virtue; the ultimate justification of

48 Swanton advances her account of the constraints on virtue mainly in pages 60-68 of her *Virtue Ethics*.

49 Ibid., p. 60.

50 Ibid, p. 65.

particular virtues still bottoms out in the demands of the world within the particular virtue's field.

I think there is room for a eudaimonist view that is positioned between the view attributed[51] to contemporary eudaimonists (like Hursthouse) and Swanton's own view. In brief, I think the rational justification of a virtue is mixed. Part of what makes a virtue a virtue is that it is a trait that disposes one to respond excellently to the world's relevant demands, hitting what Swanton terms the "target[s] of the virtue."[52] However, a virtue is also a trait that when exercised characteristically results in the flourishing of the virtuous agent. I will term this sort of rational justification of virtue the 'mixed view of justification' or (MV). Each element of MV is necessary for an ethical virtue and jointly they are sufficient for it. That is, a trait is a virtue if and only if it is conducive to virtuous response as defined by the demands of the world in various ethical contexts ***and*** it characteristically results in the flourishing of its possessor.[53] When both of these elements obtain you have an ethical virtue.

I am advancing MV in part because it allows a stronger response to the charge of egoism than does the un-mixed eudaimonist account of justification presented above. However, there are other reasons. First, I think what has often been identified as the eudaimonist approach to justification does not comfortably fit Aristotle's own account. It is clear in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that virtuous activity is choiceworthy in itself, and not

[51] I say attributed here, because it is often difficult to tell if this is in fact the view of contemporary Neo-Aristotelians, or if some more complex position is adopted.
[52] *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, p. 29.
[53] I will address the the relevance of the agent's virtue status below.

valuable merely as a means to eudaimonia.[54] The activities of virtue, and the ends relevant to them, are worthwhile in themselves. It is only secondarily that we can identify them as constituent parts of eudaimonia. This point is already implicit in the concept of the "worthwhile". Worthwhile activities (done well) are constituent elements of flourishing, but it would be odd indeed if all (or even most) such activities had no other point than the advancement of the flourishing of the agent in question. The order of explanation is more naturally read the other way round. An activity is worthwhile because it is an excellent response to the world: it produces, promotes, appreciates, etc . . . as it should. It is because of this that the person who engages in it has an enriched life as a result. At the same time, if a trait characteristically led to activities that did not constitute a flourishing human life, then the trait would not be a virtue for a human. This account will be made more specific as applied below, in responding to the immoralist and the charge of egoism in chapters 4 and 5 respectively. The intuitive idea is that it is part of what makes a virtue a virtue that it characteristically advances the good of the one manifesting it. An excellent response to the world is an excellent way of being human; it would be odd if an excellent way of being human characteristically detracted from a human's life.

One should note one particular strength of MV; it allows for a natural justification of a virtuous action as an excellence, even if in a particular instance it detracts from the flourishing of the agent. In such instances it would be inapt if all that justified such action as an excellence *in that instance* was that *in other* instances it was likely to contribute to

54 One may value activities because they are constituent elements of eudaimonia, but they are only such elements because there is something valuable or worthwhile about the activity itself. Otherwise, it would not be choiceworthy *qua* constituent element of eudaimonia.

flourishing. When the characteristic relationship between virtue and flourishing fails, a virtue does not cease to be a virtue for the very natural reason that it does not cease to be a disposition to respond excellently to the demands of the world. This of course leaves open the possibility that one may act virtuously to one's ultimate detriment. It furthermore might provide a sort of answer to the difficult case of a society that is so systematically dysfunctional and unjust that virtues cease to advance the flourishing of the virtuous. In such unfortunate cases, virtues do not cease to be dispositions to respond excellently, but flourishing (at least to some extent) ceases to be a possibility in such a society. In such a society virtue ceases to be a good strategy to secure eudaimonia because no strategy is reliable in securing such a life (note: this rules out that a strategy of vice is more apt to secure eudaimonia in such extreme cases). One qualification to mention here is that such cases are less frequent than often thought; this is due in part to the wide array of lives that might count as eudaimon for the virtuous person.

Question 3: Is eudaimonia a concept separable from the concept of ethical virtue? (OR) Is eudaimonia a necessarily moralized concept?

My answer to this question is also an attempt to split the horns of a seemingly exhaustive dichotomy. On the one hand, it just seems obvious that we can think of a general concept of what it means to flourish, and this is separable from our concept of ethically[55] virtuous action.[56] Of course, we already know that we can conceive of virtuous action and character as separated from eudaimonia, when we accept the ultimate

[55] I use the term 'ethically' here to note a focus on the ethical virtues (as opposed to other sorts of virtues, like the intellectual). The ethical virtues are not the only one's involved in eudaimonia, but they are arguably the most important.

[56] Perhaps akin to what Hursthouse terms "the smile factor", see her *On Virtue Ethics*, pp. 185-186.

downfall of the virtuous as possible (and actual). Similarly, I think, in a general way, we can conceive of human flourishing apart from ethical virtue. We have a general notion of someone who is doing well as a human being. A person who is physically and psychologically healthy, engaged in life, pursuing what she values, interested in what she pursues, contentedly engaging in a variety of activities. None of these thoughts need explicitly involve ethical virtue. And yet, I think when we seek to fill out such a life in any detail, the ethical virtues will come into the picture quickly. So, while there is some concept of a flourishing life that does not necessarily involve virtue, it is only a general and vague one. Examining the details of human life means coming up against the vital role of ethical virtues.

This impinges on a question related to *question 1* above, but that I chose to leave unanswered until now. If ethical virtue is only *characteristic* of eudaimonia, can the positively vicious ever lead a flourishing life? I am at least committed to it being the case that vice characteristically detracts from one's flourishing. However, I have not said that it is impossible to flourish as a vicious person. For now I wish to leave this question unanswered. I think we can imagine truly vicious people who obtain some degree of flourishing, in this more general vague sense of psychological and physiological health. A Nazi after the war, sunning, untroubled, on some pristine South American beach. However, if we were to get into the details of this Nazi's life, I have grave doubts that what we found we would end up classifying as eudaimonia. Also, we will judge that the cause to which he has dedicated his life has not been a worthwhile one (and of course, it

ultimately failed). This would be enough to bar him from eudaimonia. However, there are more subtle examples, so I leave the question open.

Question 4: Do virtues and vices come in degrees, and how is this related to eudaimonia?

Like human flourishing in general, it is plausible that both virtues and vices come in degrees. One can be more or less virtuous, just as one can be more or less vicious. On the eudaimonist picture, all things being equal, this difference in degree (in virtue and vice) will characteristically result in more or less flourishing. So, in general, to approximate virtue is to approximate flourishing and to approximate vice is to approximate withering (or the opposite of flourishing).

Question 5: What about naturalism?

What has preceded is sufficient for the execution and understanding of my project. However, since many Neo-Aristotelians identify themselves as naturalists, and since Aristotle is most plausibly read as some sort of naturalist, I thought it best to conclude with some comments on this front. What follows is not strictly essential for my project; hence, it is possible to reject my reading of Aristotle (and my adoption of the McDowell/Nussbaum position of second-naturalism) while still accepting my conclusions in subsequent chapters.

IV. The Aristotelian (second)Naturalism of McDowell and Nussbaum

It has been common to read book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as offering an account of human essence that is continuous with Aristotle's teleological biology. Some

interpreters think that Aristotle subsequently founds his ethical theory on that account. Particularly important for this reading is Aristotle's function argument.[57] One way to briefly express this sort of reading is thusly:

(1) Aristotle is seeking to know what it is for a human life to go well; or what is the final or ultimate good for human beings. This he terms eudaimonia. To live a good human life then is to achieve eudaimonia.

(2) In order to know the content of eudaimonia we need to know what sort of thing a human is.

(3) In order to know what sort of thing a human is, we need to know the distinctive function of human beings. The function of humans is the end for which they are fitted. Just as every living thing in nature has a function or end to which it is fitted, so do humans.

(4) Reason is what sets humans apart as unique. It is the function of humans to use their reason well. Insofar as humans are active beings (as all animals are), it is their function to guide their actions according to reason.

(5) Actions guided according to *right* reason are virtuous or excellent actions. Hence, eudaimonia, which is the human good, is constituted by virtuous activity (over an entire life).

This is an abbreviated version of what Aristotle does in key parts of Book I.[58] Some have read Aristotle here as offering a metaphysical definition of human essence that is continuous with the teleological structure that he ascribes to nature. Some who have advanced this sort of reading see this as a substantial weakness of Aristotle's ethics, especially when attempting to translate Aristotelian eudaimonism to a post-Darwinian world. Such philosophers contend that since we have jettisoned a teleological view of biology for a Darwinian one, any ethical theory tied to such a defunct account must be

57 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 7.
58 I. 1-2, (and especially) 7.

jettisoned also.[59] Others (indeed most Neo-Aristotelian ethicists)[60] agree that ethics grounded in a teleological biology must fail (or at least they do not pursue this as their project). A subset of this group would also agree that Aristotle himself is engaged in no such task. Within this subset an attractive Neo-Aristotelian position is to be had by drawing on the thought of John McDowell and Martha Nussbaum to develop an Aristotelian *second*-naturalism.

Nussbaum and McDowell (among others) believe that the project of finding a value-neutral or non-evaluative starting point (like biology) from which to make eudaimonistic and subsequent ethical judgments is bound to fail. To paraphrase Nussbaum, it is human evaluation all the way down.[61] Nussbaum and McDowell reject the cruder Aristotelian naturalist project in favor of what I term Aristotelian Second-Naturalism or (ASN).[62] What does it mean to say that eudaimonistic judgments are

59 Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, pp. 30-53.

60 Here I have in mind not only Nussbaum and McDowell, but also those commonly referred to as Aristotelian Naturalists, including Philippa Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Michael Thompson. Many have attributed the project of founding ethics upon a value-neutral biology to this group of philosophers, especially Foot. Thanks to my conversations and correspondence with Talbot Brewer and Micah Lott I have become convinced that this is a misreading of Foot's project (and by extension a misreading of Aristotelian Naturalists in general). For more on this see Hursthouse, "Human Nature and Aristotelian Virtue Ethics". On page 174 she writes, "Everyone who is taking the Aristotelian naturalist line takes it as obvious that they are not pretending to derive ethical evaluations of human beings from an ethically neutral human biology, but are already thinking about human beings in an ethically structured way. Perhaps thereby we divide ourselves from some of the proponents of the other sorts of normative ethical theories. Perhaps, amongst those proponents, there are still some stalwarts who believe they are, or who aspire to be, in the business of justifying their moral beliefs in some rational but ethically (and culturally) neutral way, whereas we virtue ethicists know we are not and are not even trying to be."

61 In her book *The Fragility of Goodness*, Nussbaum talks about the foundation of the dialectic of philosophy ultimately bottoming out in appearances (see p. 251). These appearances are the result of human subjectivity, and in the case of ethics, human evaluation.

62 Note 'Aristotelian Second-Naturalism' is my term, not Nussbaum's or McDowell's. For McDowell's alternative reading of Aristotle see "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics" and also his essay "Two Sorts of Naturalism", pp. 149-151. For a similar reading from Nussbaum see "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach" and especially "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics." Ultimately I am combining elements of Nussbaum's and McDowell's thought in order to construct this position. They do not necessarily do this themselves, but I think I have identified elements of both

evaluative all the way down? In simple terms it means that one cannot get outside, beneath, or beyond human evaluation in making eudaimonistic judgments. An adequate account of eudaimonia will include elements that can only be recognized from within a second-natural evaluative outlook; eudaimonistic or ethical judgments ultimately bottom out in evaluative judgments. Of course the range of second-natural judgments will be influenced and constrained by first-natural facts concerning the human species.[63] Humans share much in common with respect to their bodies, minds, and environments. This is why there is so much cross-cultural unity concerning virtues and vices, and ultimately this will help ASN avoid devolving into a sort of relativism. I will now introduce the ideas of McDowell and Nussbaum that develop ASN as an alternative to the cruder Aristotelian naturalism (henceforth CAN) outlined above. This presentation will include some methodological points. Hence, by the end of the chapter I will have presented and adopted ASN and its related Neurathian methodology of Aristotelian reflective equilibrium.[64] In this way I will situate my own (to be developed) account of eudaimonia within the ASN fold.

A. McDowell on Secondary Qualities, Second-Nature, and Moral Judgment

McDowell thinks that much of the motivation for grounding ethics in an extra-ethical (and thereby extra-evaluative) reality originates in a desire to assimilate ethics to

philosophers' thought that mesh well and result in a strong Neo-Aristotelian alternative to the cruder Aristotelian naturalism outlined above.

63 McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism", pp. 175.

64 Here and below when I refer to 'reflective equilibrium' I am referring to what has come to be known as a wide reflective equilibrium as opposed to a narrow one. In brief, a narrow reflective equilibrium only involves one's personal ethical principles and one's considered moral judgments (often involving particular cases). A wide-reflective equilibrium greatly expands what is to be considered to include at least some leading ethical alternatives to one's personal view and a host of relevant empirical facts, and theories. For more on this distinction and the debate surrounding it in the Rawls literature see Norman Daniels' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article "Reflective Equilibrium", especially section 3.

the methods of empirical science.[65] Empirical science (appropriately enough) seeks to engage with reality in a dehumanized and non-evaluative manner; this is why in its most basic descriptions of the world it avoids trading in secondary qualities like color and flavor, which are irreducibly subjective. One way to account for the desire to assimilate ethics to empirical science is by referencing Mackie's queerness objection to moral realism: moral facts or moral properties, if they were to exist, would be entities of an especially queer sort.[66] Mackie claims that moral realism requires moral facts that are akin to the primary qualities with which science deals; however, these moral primary qualities resist normal empirical methods. Instead, treatment of moral properties requires some strange faculty of moral intuition.[67] McDowell undermines the queerness objection, and the scientistic methodology it leads to, by advancing an account of moral judgment and moral properties that features second natures and secondary qualities.[68]

McDowell thinks that the recognition of moral properties, or the ethical demands of a certain context, is the result of a sort of perception. This perception is akin to a sensitivity to what is morally salient or apt.[69] For example, a kind person has a reliable sensitivity to situations which call for kindness.[70] This sort of perceptual capacity is involved in moral judgments and is habituated as a second nature. Moreover, McDowell thinks this capacity is akin to the human capacity to perceive secondary qualities like

65 See McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism".

66 Mackie, Inventing Right and Wrong, pp. 95-100.

67 This is precisely what G. E. Moore had in mind in his *Principia Ethica* when he argued against naturalistic theories of morality in favor of non-naturalism.

68 McDowell, *Two Sorts of Naturalism*, especially pp. 170-179.

69 See McDowell, "Virtue and Reason" and "Values and Secondary Qualities."

70 Mcdowell, "Virtue and Reason," p. 142.

color.[71] Consider the color red. If asked to give a definition, one might mention wavelengths of light reflected off of surfaces with certain physical properties. One might even go into the details of the causal chain stretching from the reflective surface, through the retina, through the optic nerve all the way to the occipital lobe in the brain. However, none of this is the color red.[72] Red is irreducibly phenomenal. In order to define it to someone else, the best one can do is point to an example.[73] Red is a secondary quality; in order to identify it or adequately define it, one must ultimately have recourse to the subjectivity of a human perceptual capacity. Empirical science does not trade in secondary qualities like red, and red does not occur in nature apart from human subjectivity; yet, this does not make it especially queer or any less real. McDowell wants to conceive of certain evaluative properties and judgments in a similar manner. He writes that it would be confused to think that some things are intrinsically disgusting independent "of their relations to us"; disgustingness is "a property of which our feelings of disgust constitute a kind of perception"; however, "that this notion is confused" does not preclude there actually being things that are disgusting.[74] Similarly, moral judgments cannot be made, and moral properties do not exist, apart from human subjectivity; but this does not mean that they do not exist at all.

In the case of ethics, the subjectivity in question involves the evaluative outlooks that humans habituate as a second-nature. To make an ethical evaluation, or to evaluate

71 McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities."

72 Frank Jackson argues this convincingly with his example involving Mary the color scientist, in his article, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," pp. 471-472.

73 Perhaps one might also try to get the other person into a good position to view the redness of the instances of red (i.e., turn on bright white light, take off their sunglasses, etc. . .).

74 McDowell, "Projection and Truth in Ethics," p. 215.

the flourishing of a human life, one has to be already within an evaluative outlook which is the product of a human institution or culture.[75] Just as engaging in color identification must draw upon the phenomenal perception of humans, evaluations of human flourishing, or ethical evaluations in particular, must utilize second-natural evaluative outlooks. Similarly, Nussbaum claims that Aristotle's ethical method (which she endorses) relies on appearances as recognized by particular agents in concrete ethical contexts.[76] Ethical appearances are how concrete ethical contexts and behaviors strike the subject herself, and this striking occurs from within an already developed second-natural evaluative perspective.[77] One cannot get completely beyond these, and ultimately practical judgments derive their authority from how they can account for such appearances. Thus both McDowell and Nussbaum agree that a completely non-evaluative standard is out of reach when making evaluative judgments. This is why CAN must fail. McDowell and Nussbaum recognize that first-natural biological facts about humans may constrain or influence second-natural evaluation;[78] however, such facts fall far short of accounting for the entirety of ethical evaluation, or a complete account of human flourishing.

I think that McDowell succeeds in advancing a framework that makes moral realism intelligible (and not in any way queer) without assimilating it to the methods of empirical science; however, much more needs to be said to fill out ASN. In particular there is the question of how moral investigation and critique is supposed to progress if

75 McDowell, "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics," p. 218.

76 Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 245-251.

77 This seems to be what Aristotle has in mind, though he does not use the terms 'second-natural' or 'evaluative perspective'.

78 McDowell, "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics", p. 218.

there is no point external to morality from which to conduct such an endeavor. If moral reasoning must occur within an already evaluative second nature, how is one to proceed?

B. The ASN Reading of Aristotle and Neurathian Ethical Methodology

Nussbaum and McDowell have a particular reading of Aristotle's *Ethics*. I think the ASN reading is a plausibly Aristotelian one, and more importantly, I think it can better serve as a foundation for a Neo-Aristotelian ethical methodology. It will be helpful to briefly recount how the ASN reading of Aristotle differs from the CAN reading.

The CAN reading of Aristotle sees him as advancing a conception of humanity that is continuous with, and dependent upon, his teleological biology.[79] The ASN reading favored by Nussbaum and McDowell rejects this notion; instead, this reading views Aristotle as immune to the foundationalist worries that motivate the CAN reading.[80] On this ASN reading Aristotle's strategy is not to offer a conception of human nature external to our second-natural evaluations, but rather to show how certain actions, traits of character, and forms of life (or lack of any of these) accord with or contradict our deeply held beliefs about what humans are and how we should evaluate human life.[81] Some changes to ourselves are nearly unthinkable because to undergo them would be to become a different sort of thing, something no longer recognizably human.[82] Other changes merely detract from what we consider to be apt for a human being.

79 See above the section on the CAN reading of Aristotle's *Ethics*.

80 McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," p. 156. For a similar point see also McDowell, "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics," pp. 216-217.

81 Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics," p. 105.

82 Ibid, p. 105.

One such change Aristotle asks his readers to consider is a life without friends.[83] Aristotle assumes his readers will recognize that friends are so important for any human life that their absence threatens to make a life no longer recognizably human; certainly such a life fails to be good.[84] This is not a biological judgement, or a non-evaluative judgment of the human essence; rather, it is a judgment internal to human evaluation. It is only from within an already evaluative standpoint, immersed in social practices and institutions, that such a friendless human being appears as lacking. If Aristotle encountered someone who denied the importance of friendship, or sociality more broadly, the argument (if there is one to be had)[85] would consist in Aristotle trying to show that this denial implies further denials of values already inextricably tied to that person's way of life. Moreover, Aristotle would admit that some forms or levels of vice puts an agent beyond the reach of such appeals. In such cases moving forward would involve uncertain and long efforts of ethical rehabilitation.

When Aristotle inquires into the human function, Nussbaum reads this as an inquiry into what people believe, upon reflection, to be the characteristic activity of humans; it is not meant as a reference to some evaluatively external biological standard.[86] Part of the project of Aristotle's *Ethics* is to lead readers through this sort of reflection concerning the characteristic activity of humans. In asking about the human function Aristotle is investigating just what it is that, if it were absent from human activity, would

83 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII. 1, IX. 9-10.

84 Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics," pp. 106-107. These are harsh words for religious hermits, but one could perhaps argue that they are cultivating a friendship with God. Thanks to Talbot Brewer for bringing this point to my attention.

85 I say this because of the possibility that someone may have been so poorly brought up that a certain amount of evaluative rehabilitation would be necessary before any fruitful dialog could occur.

86 Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics," p. 113.

call into question humans having their own distinctive way of being over and above other animals. Aristotle identifies this key element as the exercise of practical reason to guide one's activity. This is that element of human life that is most central to eudaimonia, since the main constituents of eudaimonia are excellent activities (which are activities guided by right reason). Calling this into question would involve using the very capacity questioned. It involves calling into question what the questioner undoubtedly engages in on a daily basis: practical reasoning. Humans do not merely act on instinct or brute inclination, they act according to reasons. Hence, this sort of radical questioning is self-defeating. Denying the importance of practical reason for a flourishing human life threatens the very picture of human life that a questioner is likely working with and within.[87] Having established the primacy of practical reason with the function argument, Aristotle goes on to investigate in the rest of the *Ethics* just what it is to reason well in practical life.[88]

The ASN reading of the *Nicomachean Ethics* stresses that Aristotle's audience is comprised of young men who have already been well brought up (or at least brought up decently).[89] As a result his audience already has what McDowell refers to as the 'that' of ethics (broadly correct ethical beliefs); Aristotle merely seeks to impart or investigate the 'because'.[90] That is, the well brought up already have decent ethical instincts, and

87 See Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," pp. 272-275, for more on how this sort of argument would work.

88 As I stated earlier in this chapter, he leaves much left to be filled in by later ethical thinkers.

89 There is evidence of this in an early methodological remark by Aristotle at 1095b 4-6.

90 McDowell, "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics," pp. 212-215, 218. The that/because distinction is also found earlier in the writings of Miles Burnyeat. See especially, "Aristotle on Learning to be Good". The terms themselves are a literal rendering of text in Aristotle's *Ethics* (thanks to Talbot Brewer for pointing this out in discussion).

roughly correct ethical opinions, but need to gain a better understanding of how all of these normative beliefs hang together. The "because" provides the larger rationale or justification of these normative facts which serves to harmonize them. This involves scrutinizing the sort of evaluative outlook that one has already habituated as second nature (the that) through a decent upbringing.[91] McDowell thinks this process is captured well in what he calls the Neurathian method in ethics; this method is well illustrated with the activity of gradually repairing a ship.

Consider a ship that one gradually repairs board by board, piece by piece, as time goes on. To make the connection to the Neurathian method in ethics we must imagine that these repairs are made at sea. That is, a defect is found and a repair must be made, but there is nowhere to dock in order to make the repair; boards must be replaced while the ship is underway.[92] This is a good illustration of the preferred ASN ethical methodology. One does not begin making ethical or eudaimonistic judgments until one has already habituated a second-natural evaluative outlook (in a particular culture) from within which these judgments are made. By the time an agent makes her first ethical judgments she is already launched on the sea of ethical life, aboard a ship of a particular evaluative outlook. There is no standard external to her ship at which she can dock in order to get out and make repairs. To exit her evaluative outlook ship, would be to exit the only place from within which one can make any (ethical) repairs at all.

91 Although Aristotle does not explicitly use the term 'second nature' it seems pretty clear that this is the sort of thing he has in mind. On this point see McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," especially pp. 166-167.

92 The original use of the ship example to illustrate a methodological point is by Otto Neurath.

The evaluative ship that we largely inherit from our family, institutions, and culture of origin, McDowell refers to as the ‘that’ of ethics. This inherited ‘that’ is that with which one begins ethical reflection; it is the mass of our unreflective ethical and evaluative perceptions. The Neurathian process of ethical reflection and critique (the process that McDowell and Nussbaum think Aristotle is guiding his reader through in *Nicomachean Ethics*), is a process of testing these unreflective ethical perceptions in order to move from the that of ethics, to a because (from ethical beliefs to an understanding of those beliefs).[93] It is important to note that the process of coming to a because is not limited to merely understanding better the connections of one’s inherited that. Rather, Neurathian reflection can completely unseat and replace one “that” with a whole new “that” (for example, if one’s starting beliefs are sufficiently indecent or incoherent). Note here that I am consciously widening the concept of a ‘that’ in ethics from its original usage above (where it consisted of largely correct, though unreflective, ethical opinions) to include mistaken, even grossly unethical, ‘thats’. So, the process of moving from a that to a because is not a process whereby we dock the ship of evaluative judgment and make repairs from a foundational standpoint external to all evaluation. Rather, it is a process in which one comes to “comprehend the *that*, by appreciating how one’s hitherto separate perceptions of what situations call for hang together, so acting on them can be seen as putting into practice a coherent scheme for a life.”[94] In carrying out this Neurathian ethical reflection, moving from a that to a because, “one has no material to exploit except the initially unreflective perceptions of the that from which reflection

93 McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle’s Ethics,” pp. 213-214.
94 Ibid., p. 213.

starts. One reflects on one's inherited scheme of values, or the perception of choiceworthiness in action in which that scheme of values expresses itself, from inside the ethical way of thinking with which one finds oneself."[95]

So the ship of one's ethical outlook must be repaired while underway. This does not prevent each piece from eventually being replaced. McDowell points out that this procedure may reveal that one's unreflective ethical perceptions do not hang together well ... or at all. Such a procedure may result in a radical revision of one's inherited outlook. Aristotle may not adequately recognize this potential, but it is easy to augment his theory to account for this possibility.[96] Indeed, the possibility of such an augmentation serves as a partial defense of Aristotle's ethics against charges that he advances a dogmatism, or a conservatism that merely reifies the status quo.

C. Nussbaum and an Aristotelian Reflective Equilibrium

At this point it is helpful to introduce Rawls into our methodological discussion. Rawls' concept of reflective equilibrium involves meshing ethical theory with our considered moral judgments via a dialectical process.[97] Preliminary moral intuitions are themselves considered, and those that look suspicious because of likely irrational bias, extenuating circumstances known to corrupt judgment, or obvious contradiction with stronger moral intuitions or other beliefs, are jettisoned. What remains are considered moral judgments. These serve as provisional set points in the process of moral reflection.

[95] Ibid., p. 213.

[96] Ibid., p. 214. One could argue that Aristotle at least implicitly recognizes this possibility of radical revision. Throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle catalogues received views, and then sorts out where they are right and where they go wrong. Thanks to Talbot Brewer for pointing this out to me.

[97] The following account of Rawls' concept of reflective equilibrium is drawn from his work *A Theory of Justice*, especially pp. 18-19 and 40-46. See also John Arras' excellent compact summary of this method in "The Way We Reason Now: Reflective Equilibrium in Bioethics," pp. 49-53.

Then one takes these set points and attempts to account for them with a favored ethical theory or ethical framework. Some moral judgments will not mesh with the theory, and thus will not immediately be brought into a coherent framework with other moral judgments. When this occurs one is to engage in a process whereby either the initial judgments are relinquished or the favored theory is altered (or jettisoned completely for a better one). In this way one goes back and forth trying to better approximate a coherent whole. Achieving apparent coherence under a theoretical framework is to achieve reflective equilibrium. Of course this equilibrium is not set in stone.[98] Further information, the introduction of new ethical frameworks, additional experience, and encounters with other evaluative outlooks, can all result in an unsettling of this equilibrium. In that event the process continues until a new equilibrium is reached. With experience, moral maturity, and cultural exposure, one's equilibrium may become increasingly stable and future alterations increasingly minor.

In this reflective equilibrium conception of ethical methodology, Nussbaum recognizes a strong similarity to Aristotle's own ethical method.[99] She also notes an affinity with her own position. In advancing this ethical method Rawls himself writes, "I believe that this view goes back in its essentials to Aristotle's procedure in the *Nicomachean Ethics*."[100] Having presented the ASN reading of Aristotle, including the

98 Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 19.

99 For an extended description from Nussbaum concerning the method of arguing towards a reflective equilibrium see her *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, pp. 101-104. See also *The Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 10-13, where Nussbaum recognizes the Aristotelian pedigree of this Rawlsian methodology and provides a compact summary of this Aristotelian/Rawlsian method. She considers at length Aristotle's ethical method in chapter 8 (pp. 240-263) of the same book.

100 Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 45 (note 26).

Neurathian ethical procedure favored by McDowell, we are in a position to see why this is the case.

The Aristotelian-Neurathian procedure is very similar, and complementary, to the reflective equilibrium procedure of Rawls. Nussbaum herself advances a methodology which she refers to as an Aristotelian reflective equilibrium. This method does not involve searching for some foundation beyond, beneath, or outside of all ethical evaluation. Rather, it involves scrutinizing one's ethical intuitions in order to arrive at provisional fixed points. One then tries to account for these with a larger theoretical framework. This is an effort to form one's ethical beliefs into a coherent whole, moving from a mere unreflective 'that' to a reflective 'because'. In the process one will also balance ethical considerations against other areas of knowledge. Aristotle and Nussbaum differ from Rawls in that they do not start with the original position procedure in order to arrive at a favored ethical framework.[101] However, despite this difference, the general method of Rawls and these Aristotelians is largely the same. Theory and considered moral judgments are balanced and altered in light of one another. Aristotle is a thinker who recognizes the importance of concrete particular ethical experience, even as he tries to reach a better coherence of this material by engaging in ethical theory.[102]

By way of summarizing this methodology material, and for the purpose of showing how close Aristotle's approach is to the Rawlsian and Neurathian methods, I will now conclude this section with an extended quote from Nussbaum. This passage clearly and concisely sums up just what it is to go about ethical theory in an Aristotelian

101 For a description of this procedure see Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 15-19.

102 In her preface to the second edition of *The Fragility of Goodness*, Nussbaum affirms her commitment to ethical theory and how such a commitment is thoroughly Aristotelian; see xvi, xxiv-xxvii.

manner. This also represents a summary of the sort of method I hope to approximate in the rest of this project.

> "The conception of ethical theory on which I rely . . . is roughly an Aristotelian one . . . It holds that ethical theorizing proceeds by way of a reflective dialogue between the intuitions and beliefs of the interlocutor, or reader, and a series of complex ethical conceptions, presented for exploration. (This series, as Aristotle puts it, should ideally include the views of both 'the many' and 'the wise'.) Such an inquiry cannot get started without readers or interlocutors who are already brought up as people of a certain sort. Its aim is to arrive at an account of the values and judgments of people who already have definite attachments and intuitions; these must, ultimately, be the material of the inquiry. And yet this does not mean that the outcome of inquiry will be a mere repetition of the account of his or her view that the reader would have given at the start. For, as Aristotle stresses (and as Socrates showed before him), most people, when asked to generalize, make claims that are false to the complexity and the content of their actual beliefs. They need to learn what they really think. When, through work on the alternative and through dialogue with one another, they have arrived at a harmonious adjustment of their beliefs, both singly and in community, this will be the ethical truth, on the Aristotelian understanding of truth . . ."[103]

This Aristotelian method is simply a method of reflective equilibrium suitably combined with the Neurathian considerations above. This method makes the historical Aristotle more ethically plausible (i.e., less mired in a simplistic cultural conservatism).

In the end the best argument in favor of an ethical approach like ASN is for it to be tried and/or fully considered. In order for this to happen the ASN account needs to be given fuller more concrete content. We need a particular eudaimonist account within the ASN approach to be adequately developed such that its coherence, plausibility, and compellingness can be judged by human practical reasoners. It is to the elaboration of such an account that we now turn.

103 Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 10-11.

Chapter 2

Acting and Flourishing in the World: Commitment, Involvement, and Enmeshment

"During the first period of a man's life, the greatest danger is: *not to take the risk*."
(Soren Kierkegaard)[104]

I. Introduction

I will now focus on a few key elements of human flourishing. I will be working within the broadly Neo-Aristotelian account of eudaimonia introduced in chapter one. This chapter and the next will highlight the unique importance of interdependence for human flourishing. Ultimately I will argue that one cannot flourish as a human being without becoming involved and enmeshed with others (some quite thoroughly) and that this means that one's own flourishing will be partially constituted by the flourishing of others.[105] Chapters two and three will cover the variety, extent, and importance of involvement (and enmeshment) for human flourishing and how these concepts interact with commitment and the formation of one's practical identity. Then we will make the transition to ethics and see what implications all this has for some normative problems in chapters four and five.

Before starting in on this task I would also like to stress, by way of introduction to both chapters two and three, the primordial and pervasive nature of human involvement

[104]From Kierkegaard's journals, as quoted in *The Soul of Kierkegaard: Selections from His Journals*, p. 192.

[105] I will give definitions for the terms involvement and enmeshment. Right now their ordinary meanings will suffice.

and enmeshment. We are not primarily or primordially atomic individuals that become entangled with others only as a matter of great contingency, sometimes by choice and sometimes by luck. Rather, we are foremost, and first, enmeshed entities, that develop an individual identity and agency only by way of participating in corporate structures. Involvement and enmeshment are not only incredibly common elements to a recognizably human life, they are also prerequisites for its inception and ongoing development. To see this let's start at birth.

II. Enmeshment and Human Development

In advancing his conception of the state of nature Hobbes asks us to imagine men as if they had just emerged from the earth like mushrooms, already fully mature.[106] Hobbes of course knew that this is not in fact how any person came about; such an image is invoked, not as a historical reality, but as an imaginative exercise useful for considering what it might be like to exist as an atomic individual with little to no structures of community or state. However, thinking of people in this way is highly artificial and can lead one to think of humans in quite *in*human ways. Seyla Benhabib argues that this mushroom metaphor is a poignant expression of a certain picture of autonomy that is both pervasive throughout modernity and highly misleading.[107] This picture treats the individual as if they sprung up, fully mature, unentangled, and without a history. Described in this way, we know this picture to be false. However, something not unlike this myth persists in the way many view individuals. In the United States in

106 Hobbes, *De Cive*, viii.1.
107 "The Generalized and Concrete Other", p. 156.

particular it is common to laud the self-made person, who continues to make her way on her own, in a largely individual effort. The allure of this way of thinking seems to reassert itself with each election cycle, and, perhaps more troublingly, with each individual achievement.

In her book *The Autonomy Myth* Martha Fineman highlights how the concepts of ‘autonomy’, ‘independence’, and ‘self-sufficiency’ have come to dominate the civic and political landscape in America. In particular she shows how these concepts often serve as means of erasing from consciousness contributions made to individual success and flourishing by (a) one’s family of origin and (b) an ongoing network of societal relationships.[108] Like Fineman and Benhabib I think it is important to remind ourselves that our flourishing is substantially dependent upon our intense involvement with others in early development and in relationships that continue to sustain us throughout adult life. This is the thrust of my positive account in chapters two and three of this project. I will preface these efforts here by highlighting one way to develop the theme of independent, self-sufficient, autonomy and where it goes wrong. One might be tempted to think about an individual life as one that is increasingly less involved with, and less dependent upon, others. The truth, however, is very near the reverse. We shed dependencies only to enter into new ones, and the flourishing individual is not (characteristically) self-sufficient in the sense of being mostly uninvolved and independent of others. In the process of healthy

108 See especially chapter one of Fineman’s book.

development one becomes increasingly involved and enmeshed in the world and its people.[109]

Most will acknowledge that we begin life as completely dependent on another life (our mothers'). We flourish to the extent that we are extensively and healthily enmeshed[110] with a healthy mother. First we flourish in the womb, gaining nourishment, sharing the very blood and body heat of our mothers. We have, quite literally, bodily continuity. Then we are born. One way to think of this birth is that it begins a (hopefully long and gradual) process of becoming less and less enmeshed with, and less dependent upon for our flourishing, our mothers (and subsequently other caregivers). Life then can be seen as a gradual shedding of the near total enmeshment in which we all partook while in our mothers' womb, and an ever increasing development of atomic individuality. This way of stating things, though more plausible than the picture of a mushroom person, remains misleading in its de-emphasis of the process of forming new involvements.

While it is true that birth punctuates a period of intense physical enmeshment, we should remember that we are born essentially as fourth trimester fetuses. We continue to need others in order to survive. Just as the umbilical cord is cut, severing the final physical continuity with our mothers, new involvements and enmeshments begin to form. Just as we lose the body heat internal to the womb, we seek the warmth and softness of being swaddled in a caregiver's embrace. Just as we lose the nourishment of our mothers'

109 In one sense this is obviously false, since it is difficult to think of a more enmeshed entity than a fetus, sharing her mother's blood and body heat. However, as the child grows and forms a self, that self develops through enmeshments with others. I am here highlighting those mostly non-physical enmeshments.

110 For now I will use the term enmeshed in a colloquial manner. Later in the chapter I will sharpen its definition to do more technical work.

blood, we seek our mothers' milk.[111] We are born unable to feed ourselves. We are unable to move away from danger and pain, or toward safety and comfort. Biologically speaking, in the beginning, we are little more than practically-blind eaters, excretors, criers, and sleepers. Even in these basic functions we need the help of others. And to the extent that we are involved with others in this early life (at least in a minimally decent way), we will flourish.

Of course we soon become much less dependent on our caregivers. We eventually gain the ability to sit up and move on our own, to recognize food and to some extent feed ourselves. We gain an ability to entertain and even soothe ourselves when upset. And so one might think that, after all, life after birth is mostly one continuous process of becoming increasingly less involved with others; we increasingly become more independent, individual, and autonomously separate. We can easily come to think of ourselves as eventually achieving a largely "disembedded" autonomous state after leaving the original embedding of the caretaker relationship.[112] [113]

111 To be clear, I am not making the strong causal claim that every time a form of enmeshment is relinquished a new one is invariably formed. Rather, I am making the point that while an infant becomes less enmeshed in some ways it is also involved in an intense process of becoming increasingly enmeshed in others.

112 This term is owed to Seyla Benhabib "The Generalized and Concrete Other", p. 157.

113As Benhabib points out, this picture of autonomy as unencumbered with particular involvements is a prevalent strain in modern ethics, stretching back to Kant, who holds that we are most autonomous when we abstract from all our particular concrete involvements (see pp. 155-156). More recently this approach is well illustrated in Rawls' procedure associated with the original position (See *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 15-19 (especially Section 4)). In the original position one succeeds in making good moral decisions only by

However, this association of increasing disembeddedness with autonomy is ultimately untrue to the human condition.[114] With each new independence comes the opportunity (and much of the time, the necessity) to form new involvements.[115] Moreover, if we don't form those new involvements our development becomes stunted. With each new function, it turns out that we do better with this function when involved in the lives of others. Toys are chosen and given to us that help us entertain ourselves, learn, and develop motor skills. Words are spoken to us before we can respond in any intelligible manner and help us to develop the rudiments of language. We learn our very own emotions by seeing them mirrored in the countenance of others.[116] In this way, we become aware of others long before we become aware of ourselves as separate selves. Self-awareness is a product of other-awareness and it is only possible within a

placing oneself behind a veil of ignorance, with no knowledge of one's own particular involvements with other people, values, and ways of life.

114 There is a substantial literature in feminist philosophy that emphasizes the role of embedded relationality in making possible, and even constituting, autonomy. For a start see Diana Tiejtens Meyers, *Being Yourself: Essays on Identity, Action and Social Life* and Andrea Westlund's, "Rethinking Relational Autonomy."

115 I am going to continue to use the term 'involvement' rather than enmeshment because, as I will eventually spell out more carefully, involvement is the more general concept that includes enmeshment within it as a species.

116 There is a large literature in developmental psychology that details the vital nature of caregiving relationships for the emotional development of babies and toddlers. Toddlers actually learn about their own emotional lives through the emotional cues displayed to them by caregivers. A few select studies from this literature include Eisenberg, Nancy, Amanda Cumberland, and Tracy L. Spinrad. "Parental Socialization of Emotion." *Psychological inquiry* 9.4 (1998): 241–273; Tronick, Edward Z. "Emotions and emotional communication in infants." *American Psychologist*, Vol 44(2), Feb 1989, 112-119; Malatesta, Carol Zander and Jeannette M. Haviland. "Learning Display Rules: The Socialization of Emotion Expression in Infancy. *Child Development*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Aug., 1982), pp. 991-1003; Malatesta, Carol Z., Clayton Culver, Johanna Rich Tesman, Beth Shepard, Alan Fogel, Mark Reimers and Gail Zivin. The Development of Emotion Expression during the first Two Years of Life. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Developmen*t Vol. 54, No. ½ (1989), pp. i+iii+v+1-136.

community of other selves. Every new skill we acquire seems to make us more independent, but this independence is only brought about and exercised via relationships of involved *dependence*. Moreover, some skills facilitate categorically new forms of involvement.

In learning language, early on we learn the word 'no' and begin to develop our independence in a new way. We also learn early on that making our bodies go limp can make it difficult (or nearly impossible) for our caregivers to get us to do something we do not want to do. However, after we learn a bit more, caregivers can begin to go through the rudiments of reasoning with us. "We need to leave the playground now, so that we can go eat". "You need to eat those vegetables, so you can become big and strong like mommy". "If you don't go to bed now, you will be too tired tomorrow and won't get to go to the park with daddy." These first attempts at reasoning with a child invite the child into a new world, one in which they can come up with their own reasons, and lobby for their own basic projects.[117] This world of reasoning is one in which they are more independent, but this increased independence only comes about because of new forms of involvement. At the same time, this process opens up new vistas of future involvement with others. A child can take part in a discussion and help make a plan.

117 For a good extended consideration of how a child is brought into the world of practical reasoning, and how this depends on being involved with others, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, chapter 8.

Beyond this, even more subtle and complex skills can be developed. The child learns from caregivers and teachers, not only how to give reasons and the structure of conversations that involve them, but also which reasons might be good, bad, apt or inapt. This process again gives the child greater independence. Gaining a facility with practical reasons allows a child not only to develop her own plans, but also to develop relatively good plans, without the help of others. Still, with this step the child has entered into a world that is too large to navigate in a solitary, self-sufficient way. There are many things to reason about, and much to learn about good and bad reasons. The child will need to depend on caregivers, teachers, and then friends to develop her capacity to reason well about practical and theoretical matters.

It seems that with this step we have crossed a significant threshold. On the one hand, with some ability to deliberate about action and act on (good) reasons the child seems to have entered into the last stage of developmental independence. On the other hand this stage involves a process of development that can last a lifetime, and this development continually involves the child with others. Indeed, it is often the case that the people we find most wise or intellectually admirable are the same ones who consider themselves lifelong learners in this practical sphere. Such people seek to learn how best to conduct their lives through experience, deliberation, and discourse with others. In addition, it is at this developmental stage that the child enters into groups separate from

caregivers and teachers. In these new groups the child (and subsequently the young adult) will have to learn how to get along with others in joint efforts. Much of the time this will involve joint deliberation, or failing that, at least acting for reasons that others find minimally good or decent (or sane), or, failing that, acting in ways that mimic the behavior of those who do act for widely accepted reasons.

Now we have arrived at my main point. Unless one becomes a hermit, it looks like entering into this last stage of development, in which one achieves the most potential for independence in thought and action, involves entering into a world of pervasive involvement with other people, a world shot through with (inter)dependence. The process that began with gaining increasing independence from one's mother and subsequent caregivers ends (unless one becomes a hermit or has one's development stunted) with being enmeshed and involved with many, *many* others, in a host of activities and undertakings. Far from a process of continual dis-embedding and un-enmeshing that eventually arrives at a largely self-sufficient, independent atom, human development is a continual process of trading one involvement for multiple others. Becoming increasingly autonomous does mean that one becomes less enmeshed in some ways, but it also involves forming numerous new involvements. In this and the next chapter I will be looking at the nature, extent, and variety of these involvements and how they relate to one's flourishing.

III. The Pervasiveness of Involvement and Risk

I will now consider the concepts of involvement and enmeshment as they function in the realm of action. This realm is the one in which human flourishing will occur if it is to occur at all, since (at least according to the Neo-Aristotelian framework within which we are working) the most important elements constituting eudaimonia are actions and activities carried out well. Let's begin these efforts by returning to Aristotle.

Aristotle famously departs from earlier thinkers like Socrates by rejecting the notion that virtue is sufficient for eudaimonia. One way he argues for this is by considering the virtuous person asleep (or otherwise inactive).[118] Such a person, though she possesses all of the virtues, would not be flourishing; this is because human flourishing consists in activity.[119] That is, eudaimonia is constituted not by the mere possession of virtuous dispositions, but by excellent actions that manifest these dispositions in life. Eudaimonia is not a state, or composed of states, it is an activity or composed of activities. This seems obvious enough, but in admitting this point one allows that the flourishing of the virtuous person is somewhat fragile.[120] This is because virtuous dispositions are not sufficient to produce excellent actions on their own; acting well, or at all, involves a person with the world and the world is to a significant extent out of one's control. Virtuous action requires external resources, and often, the cooperation

118 *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.6.1095b33-1096a3 and I.8.1098b30-1099a7

119 Here "activity" should be broadly construed to include mental activities like contemplation.

120 Nussbaum details how the avoidance and management of fragility within the good human life was a major focus for the ancient Greeks; see her *Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. A key question for Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle was 'How much luck and contingency is compatible with a good human life; or, how fragile is the human good?" A major distinction between Socrates and Plato on the one hand and Aristotle on the other, was that the latter gave a larger role to luck and contingency within the good human life. Part of my project will involve supporting Aristotle in this effort by highlighting fairly contingent entities that are nonetheless vital for human flourishing.

of others. Moreover, some virtuous action may not contribute (or contribute much) to one's flourishing unless it is successful in achieving its end. A courageous rescuer may duck into a burning building; her life surely goes better if she returns with the imperiled child that she sought. The point here is this: in order to constitute eudaimonia, virtuous action depends on many things (external resources, cooperation, success, etc . . .) that are contingent (sometimes highly so).

Flourishing requires activity, and activity necessarily involves us with a world not in our control. To even attempt to flourish, then, is to live a life of risk. However, one is subject to risk in most any action at all, not just those that might promote or constitute flourishing. The human choice is not between a risky endeavor to flourish, or a risk-free life that wistfully forgoes flourishing. When it comes to risk the only choice is to live with it or not to live. To live a human life at all, to have any agency that is even plausibly human, one must dare to involve oneself with a world that often disappoints, and sometimes closes off the possibility of a decent life altogether. But while daring to act risks harm to oneself, not so daring forecloses the possibility of a self altogether, flourishing or otherwise.[121] So the real choice for humans is not whether to risk, but rather, how much risk to take.

I have highlighted risk because I think the apparently prosaic world of everyday action is not so mundane after all. The same structures operative here are involved when the stakes are high and, consequently, the risks more apparent. I want to highlight that the structures involved in the momentous movements and achievements of human life are the

121 This is basically just Kierkegaard's point from the epigraph to this chapter. Without taking risks, one risks the greater danger of lacking a compelling life.

same structures that are involved in the minor and inconsequential fluctuations of the everyday. Commitment, as I will be conceiving of it, is not reserved for marriages and important causes, it is also (usually) involved in making a cup of coffee.[122] Eventually I will argue that strong commitments to fairly contingent things will be necessary to flourish as a human. These commitments are particularly risky, but the possibility of flourishing is worth the level of risk. Here I want to show that, although one can indeed avoid most (perhaps all) strong commitments, one cannot avoid commitment (or risk) altogether. It is pervasive in any life that includes action in the world. This means that the basic elements for a compelling picture of human flourishing are already present in seemingly unremarkable tasks like making coffee and playing a game of ping-pong. Let's turn now to some of these basic elements: intention and commitment.

IV. Intention and Commitment

In beginning to discuss intention and commitment I immediately face a dilemma. On the one hand I do not wish to advance a full blown theory of intention (and commitment); my project does not require this and I certainly would like to avoid taking a determinate stand on a variety of issues that are difficult, controversial, and of little import to my project. On the other hand, in order to say what I wish to say about the relation of commitment to human flourishing I will need to say something determinate, and not merely proceed with vague generalities. In order to forge a path between these alternatives I will begin by giving the basic elements of Michael Bratman's planning

[122] I say "usually" here because one could make a cup of coffee out of completely unthinking, mechanical habit perhaps, wholly without intention even. As I use it below, though commitment is a wide term, it must include at least an intention.

theory of intention and then focus on the elements of this theory most important for my current project. Bratman's planning theory of intention has the twin virtues of (a) being consonant with our commonsense notions of agency and (b) stressing elements of intentional action that are important for connecting commitment with human flourishing.[123] However, I do not think the success of my project or the truth of its main conclusions depends on Bratman's particular theory being true. I will myself depart from it at points in the following pages. The main lines of what I will say could be couched in several different theories of intentional action. I encourage the reader to perform this translation of my case into her favored theory. For now I will use Bratman's planning theory to provide some determinate language to begin considering intention, commitment, and their relation to human flourishing.

A. Bratman's Planning Theory of Intention: A Brief Outline

Bratman accepts intentions as distinct pro-attitudes not reducible to a belief-desire complex.[124] Desires are also pro-attitudes, but whereas they merely influence conduct when weighed against other desires, intentions are conduct-controlling pro-attitudes.[125] Bratman explains, "If my future directed intention manages to survive until the time of action, and I see that the time has arrived and nothing interferes, it will control my action then."[126] Essentially if the future directed intention survives until the relevant moment, it will become a present directed intention and be manifested in action. Bratman uses the term 'commitment' to account for this difference between desires and intentions; for

123 Though this is no focus of Bratman's.

124 Bratman, *Intentions, Plans, and Practical Reason*, p. 7-9, 16. All citations in the rest of section IV. *A*, unless otherwise noted, are to this same 1987 book by Bratman.

125 p. 16.

126 p. 16.

Bratman intentions involve a commitment to act when the time comes (though this commitment is defeasible).[127] As I will detail below, I use the term commitment in a slightly different manner and hence allow for the existence of bare intentions which lack any commitment element.

Returning to Bratman, besides the volitional aspect, commitment also has a rational aspect. In the interim between the inception of a future directed intention and its consummation in action, a commitment involves the intention playing certain roles. It constrains one's actions so as to keep the intended future action open, it disposes one to reason in certain ways about preliminary steps, or in the forming of sub-intentions necessary to carry out the more general one. Intentions must play these roles because they usually function as part of larger plans.[128]

Bratman takes future intentions (intentions to do or refrain from doing something in the future) as the paradigm case of intention; however, he also recognizes intentions operative in present action (the intention *with which* one acts, as opposed to the intention *to* act). Bratman's theory is called the 'planning theory of intention' because it makes sense of intention via a central phenomena of human life: plans. Humans are planning agents; we use plans to coordinate our own life (actions, goals, etc . . .) through time and to coordinate our actions with the actions of others.[129] Intentions then, according to Bratman, usually come embedded in a larger plan. This plan, however, is usually partial,

[127] pp. 15-17, 107.
[128] p. 107.
[129] pp. 9-12, 108-109.

to-be-filled-in at a later time.[130] This is because although humans are planning agents, they are epistemologically limited; they are also limited with respect to time and the other resources involved in deliberation.[131] We often have to act on less than full information and begin to take a course of action before we can work out all of the details. Perhaps the details are in principle impossible to work out ahead of time for a finite human mind. This means that a future intention to which I have committed must retain a certain open-ended element; it will demand future improvisation to bring about the intended action in changing circumstances, or to decide if such an action is still warranted given the strength of one's commitment. I will now focus on these last few elements of commitment (and intention) and advance my own stipulative (yet similar) account, which involves presenting commitment as a particular sort of second-order intention.

B. Intention and Commitment: My Account and Some Implications

As Bratman outlines, a future directed intention is involved in planning an action and if it survives it will become a present intention that is acted upon. It is an aim to-be-carried-out. One moves forward in time towards some intended act or actions, or one moves forward by presently carrying out an intended act. Intentions will most often involve sub-intentions. If I form an intention to make coffee this will involve various sub-intentions stateable in the moment. I will (sub)intend to get out of bed, walk into the kitchen, open the coffee filter drawer, get the coffee out of the left cabinet, etc . . . My stipulative definition of ***commitment*** characterizes it as a secondary, higher-order intention, to form future intentions (and commitments) that are necessary to carry out

130 p. 3.
131 pp. 10-12.

one's original intentions (and sub-intentions). Commitment is an open-ended second-order intention allowing for the follow-through of first-order intentions. Commitment also usually (but not always) involves an affective component, in which one becomes emotionally invested (to some degree) in the successful execution of the relevant actions or activities to which one is committed, or the flourishing of the entity to which one is committed.

As I am conceptualizing things the vast majority of intentions will be accompanied by commitments; very rarely do human intentions occur in isolation as (what I will call) "bare" intentions.[132] In lacking second-order intentions (commitments), bare intentions lack the open-endedness and adaptability most intentions possess to some degree. Unlike Bratman I distinguish intentions from mere desires by the volitional aspect itself, which may be present without a commitment (i.e., without a second-order intention). A bare intention, lacking a commitment, is distinguished from a desire by its volitional nature. Desires may influence volition, but are not themselves volitional. I may desire all sorts of things but have no volition to act. As I use the term *commitments* are not mere volitions to act when the time comes, they are second-order intentions to form future intentions necessary to carry out the first-order intention.

So it is this open-endedness that helps distinguish what I call 'commitment', from a bare intention (and its sub-intentions). It makes sense to say that I intend to do something, or become a sort of person. But it does not make much sense to say that I intend a value, organization or a person. It continues to sound odd if I say instead, that I

132 Bratman also refers to "bare" intentions. His concept is similar but slightly different. His bare intentions are not embedded in plans (see p. 8).

intend the spread of a value, or the good of another person. It sounds perfectly normal to say that I am committed to a value or organization or a person (or the spread of a value or a person's good). Commitment in this sense seems to imply that I intend to carry out or refrain from pursuing various actions in the future, which means that to commit to something involves, at least in part, the intention of forming other intentions in the future (many or most of which perhaps I cannot predict at this moment). In Bratman's terminology, this is part of the rational role that commitment plays.

Commitments are open-ended; however, being open-ended does not imply that commitments must always be serious or linked to some substantial cause (like the good of another person); a commitment to perform a fairly brief and simple task also has an aspect of open-endedness.[133] If I am committed to making a cup of coffee, I might feel confident in telling you exactly what that will entail while I am still lying in my bed. But, if when I get up, I discover I no longer have any coffee filters in the house, then I will need to form a new (unforeseen) intention to improvise a filter out of paper towels (or to go to the store). In terms of plans, Bratman might say that a partial plan to have coffee was filled in further once more details about one's context became known. I, however, would say that a plan, complete with sub-intentions, had to be altered. I originally (sub)intended to use coffee filters, and now I must change that sub-intention in order to still carry out my more general intention of having coffee. In this way the more general intention serves in the role of a plan, the details of which sometimes need to be filled in, but at other times need to be altered.

133 On this point Bratman and I coincide. Our conceptions of commitments allow for them to function in mundane and unimportant contexts.

If I only had an intention to make coffee (including sub-intentions to get up, walk into the kitchen, open the drawer of filters, etc . . .) and lacked any commitment to form future unforeseen intentions, then minor obstacles would keep me from completing this (and other) minor tasks. For instance, if my wife had moved the filters one drawer over, my original (sub)intention to retrieve a filter from the filter drawer would be decisively frustrated. If I am going to follow through on any number of mundane, everyday actions, I need more than bare intentions (and their attendant sub-intentions); I also need commitments to form new intentions should the need arise (i.e., an intention to check other drawers for the coffee filters). So intentions, if they are to be effective (much of the time) will require commitments which are open-ended; and this is because the future is unpredictable (at least for finite human minds). A commitment is not just a commitment to carry out a future directed intention when the time comes, it is a commitment to (some extent) bring it about that the time for the intended action actually comes, despite unforeseen obstacles.

In addition to unpredictability, commitment is open-ended because it is future-directed and ongoing. That is, commitment involves intentions to realize or carry out the activity to which one is committed, in a process through time. If the good aimed at is sufficiently complex, and the time frame sufficiently long, this process will be akin to what Talbot Brewer has termed a "dialectical activity."[134] Briefly stated, a dialectical activity is an activity into which one enters not fully or clearly knowing precisely what good is to be realized in carrying out the activity. As one begins to participate in the

134 For an extended presentation of this fruitful concept see chapter two of Brewer's *The Retrieval of Ethics*, especially pp. 37-55.

activity one gets a better idea of the good to be realized in it or by it. This in turn informs or refines one's practice, which in turn allows one to gain a better or clearer idea of the good to be gained or realized in the particular activity. So there is a virtuous feedback loop involved in committing to (sufficiently complex) ongoing activities.[135] In participating in such an activity one gains a refined conception of the good of it; this guides the refinement of further practice, which allows for an even better conception of the relevant good, and so on. This sort of virtuous dialectic is clearly operative in a wide variety of commitments.

Consider a student's commitment to succeed in his first year of college. It is plausible to think that he might make this commitment, and fully intend to carry it out, based on less than full knowledge of what precisely this will entail. He will start out by having a vague and fairly general idea of what will constitute success in this first year and what will be required to achieve that success. He knows that he will need to attend class, study, and care for his own basic needs of physical and mental health. As he begins to progress through the year these areas will be revealed to have much more particular content and demand much more particular intentions (most of which could not have been predicted at the start). Perhaps the stress of the first year reveals an anxiety disorder that had gone largely unnoticed in the student's home environment. Dealing with this anxiety might require counseling and coping strategies unimagined at the start of the fall semester. Of course, this and other particular efforts, falls under the general effort to 'succeed in the first year of college'. The point is that these more particular efforts had to

135 If an activity is sufficiently simple, such that its good is pretty well displayed on its face, it will admit of little to no dialectical development as it proceeds.

be initiated and improvised once the student had already committed to, and began engaging in, the activity of attending college. In committing to collegiate success he commits to many things that remain unspecified (and unspecifiable) in the moment, but will become clear through the practice itself. And when they become clear, this will further guide the student's activity, which will help to further specify what is involved in carrying out the relevant activity well. In Bratman's terms the student's partial plan is gradually filled out as he begins to engage in putting it into action. This is especially important when considering human flourishing because activities that are complex enough to admit of and demand such dialectical development are the same activities that tend to be important constituents in a flourishing life.[136]

Additionally, commitment does not merely involve intentions to do (or refrain from doing) certain (many times unforeseen) things, it also involves intentions to become certain sorts of people (also often unforeseen). Commitments to rather demanding and/or complex entities or activities might involve a commitment to do what is necessary to habituate certain character traits requisite for the carrying out of the relevant commitment. For example, if one commits to becoming a high level athlete, among other things, one is committing to an onerous regime of training and a life of competition in which one will often be subject to struggle and defeat. Carrying these out will most likely require some tenacity; the more elite one becomes the more tenacity is likely to be

136 It is important to note that the views of Bratman and Brewer are compatible only so far. For example Bratman's view is meant to accommodate anti-realism about value and Brewer's view would make little sense without value realism. I will not attempt here to adjudicate the differences between Brewer and Bratman. I myself am committed to value realism and do not think anything in my project here (or elsewhere) precludes this view. Indeed, the Neo-Aristotelian view I developed in chapter 1 is most naturally read as a realist view with respect to value.

required. In the process of doing the required training and competing (including losing), one will most likely need to perform actions that further habituate tenacity. One will need to persist in training, even (especially) when it is painful, onerous, and monotonous. One will need to continue competing against the best, even though it is the best that are most likely to be unbeatable. In persisting through intense training and crushing defeat one develops an incipient tenacity into a mature trait that will in turn help one achieve more in the realm of training and competition. This achievement then may lead to a further strengthening of this and other relevant traits. In this way a commitment, carried out over time, can lead to the development and strengthening of a practical identity.

So far I have employed a fairly broad conception of commitment as a secondary intention. This makes it the case that most intentional activities, even the most mundane, involve commitment. This is largely (though not completely) consonant with Bratman's view of commitment and its relation to intention, but for some it will make my conception appear stipulative. This is because my conception of commitments (and Bratman's) allows them to be fairly minor and to be oriented towards rather inconsequential things, ends, and activities (indeed any intentional activity at all can, and usually does, involve a commitment; bare intentions are the rare exception to this rule). The way I am using the term 'commitment' allows it to encapsulate both very weak and very strong varieties; whereas often the term is reserved for only strong or substantial commitments, or at least not weak and insubstantial ones. On my definition, it is perfectly proper that most commitments should be defeasible, many rather easily so. If, for example, I form an intention to have brand X coffee when I wake up, this will involve

sub-intentions to walk into the kitchen and open the coffee drawer. It will also involve a commitment to form other intentions as needed. If the coffee is not in the proper drawer my commitment to the intended activity of drinking brand X might lead me to look into nearby drawers or the cabinet where the filters are. However, if my search of the kitchen reveals that I only have brand Y coffee, I will probably alter my original intention (my original plan), and make brand Y coffee instead. My commitment to drink brand X specifically is probably strong enough to make me look for it in other areas of the kitchen, but it is probably not strong enough to send me to the store when another brand of coffee is available. Moreover, if I did go to the store and it was also out of brand X, I certainly would not then form an intention to drive twenty miles to another store that I knew had that brand. If my commitment to have brand X was strong enough to generate such an intention, my commitment would be too strong given the rather minor good at which it is aimed. Hence, the commitment to drink a specific brand of coffee, like many commitments, is aptly weak and easily defeated.

It will be proper for some commitments to be not so easily defeated. Some commitments, like those a person has to a spouse, the well-being of a child, or to a worthy cause[137], should be very difficult to defeat and involve a willingness to (attempt) to overcome many quite substantial unforeseen obstacles. I will simply call these 'strong commitments' and assume that commitments fall somewhere on a continuum from weak

137 Note: most of these more aptly strong commitments involve the well-being of people. Even most (but not all) worthy causes are somehow linked to advancing the flourishing of others. This will be important when we link human flourishing to ethics in chapter four.

to strong.[138] Most often this will correspond to another continuum involving the goods to be realized or achieved in the activities to which one is committed, ranging from minor/insubstantial to vital/substantial. It is natural enough to assume that a strong commitment is most apt when it is paired with a great potential good (or the avoidance of some great potential bad) and weak commitments are more apt when the stakes are less weighty. There is also another continuum that commitments often roughly track: that of one's involvement with the entity to which one is committed. Usually the more thorough the involvement the more apt a strong commitment is (and vice-versa).[139] Let's now look more closely at involvement.

V. Involvement, Commitment, and Agency

Up until now I have used the term 'involvement' much as it is commonly used. Now I want to sharpen the use of this term to make an explicit connection to human flourishing. From here on ***a human becoming involved with an entity, means that the flourishing of that entity affects that human's flourishing (for good or ill).*** One caveat is necessary here. With respect to entities for which the concept 'flourishing' is not apt, either 'well-functioning', 'being a good specimen of its kind' or some other kind-apt

138 I leave open the likely possibility that more might be involved in certain strong commitments. Perhaps, as Scanlon thinks, certain strong commitments involve us no longer weighing reasons against one another, but silencing certain sorts of reasons altogether.

139 Things get interesting, and difficult, when an activity is sufficiently complex such that one does not know precisely what the good to be realized by the activity is until one becomes thoroughly involved in it. By that time one will be so involved it may be quite difficult to un-enmesh oneself from the activity, if its good turns out to lack much worth.

approximation of flourishing will take the place of 'flourishing'.[140] This caveat is needed to account for involvement with entities that are not living, and for which the term flourishing is strained and/or misleading. Ultimately I am interested in how the flourishing of particular living things, namely other humans, is related to one's own flourishing, but I do find it helpful to recognize this analogy between the role a hammer and a human might play in one's flourishing.[141]

The flourishing of entities with which one is involved can both contribute to, and/or detract from, one's own flourishing. The idea here is simple. Like humans, most of the entities in the world can flourish or fail to flourish to some degree (or function well/poorly or be a good/defective specimen of its kind). Since human action requires the use of, and interaction with, these entities, their flourishing will matter to the success of this action. And since actions and activities are the key constituents of human flourishing, the flourishing of many things in the world will come to impinge on the flourishing of any particular human. For example, in constructing a table I become involved with a hammer. If the hammer is not a good hammer (i.e., it is broken, or has an overly light head, or is made of glass) then my activity, and hence my flourishing, will suffer. Likewise if my car ceases to function well and breaks down, this can easily ruin my day. If the repairs are expensive enough, this can ruin my week or month. If a key part on the car fails as I am changing lanes near a semi-truck, the car's lack of proper function can ruin my life (and the life of the truck driver). Moreover, in some circumstances it is the

[140] I will not repeatedly mention this in future general statements about involvement; this caveat should be assumed throughout.

[141] If some entities still are not covered by this caveat, then it turns out humans cannot be involved with them in the sense outlined here. This is not a troubling result since I am advancing 'involvement' here as a technical term.

flourishing of an entity (not the lack of it) that may detract from one's own flourishing. The flourishing and proper function of a bomb may significantly detract from one's own flourishing if one becomes involved with the bomb by walking into its blast radius. It is easy to see how, through action, one becomes involved with many things in the world, but human involvement is not limited to material artifacts. Humans can become involved with activities themselves, goals, projects, values, and, most interestingly, other humans.[142]

The connection between commitment and this more specific type of involvement should now be clear. Actions involve humans with the world. Since, as I have defined it, commitment is what helps humans carry out many of their intended actions, commitments facilitate the inception, maintenance, and strengthening of these involvements. Some activities are ongoing and some things to which one commits demand activity over a long time. Others are more momentous in their import and consequence. These longer and more momentous commitments have the potential to involve us with the world much more thoroughly. Being more thoroughly involved just means that the flourishing of the entity with which one is involved has a greater potential to affect one's own flourishing (for good or ill).

This relation of involvement and commitment is what is behind my claim that action (nearly?) always implies some sort of risk. Actions are usually carried out with some sort of commitment (however weak) and these commitments involve us with a contingent and unpredictable world. This world can disappoint us and frustrate our

142 The kind-apt approximations for flourishing here may be 'go well', 'are achieved', 'executed well', 'are promoted or realized' respectively for activities, goals, projects, and values.

efforts, oftentimes decisively so. It is true that actions on their own, minus commitments, involve us with the world and that such non-committal actions would make us much less vulnerable to luck (though not invulnerable). This is because if something in the world failed to cooperate with our intended efforts we could merely abandon our original intention (i.e., if the coffee is in the wrong drawer I need not even trouble myself to look elsewhere, I can just give up having coffee altogether). It is only because of commitment that one will persist and will have to go to some extra trouble in order to overcome an unforeseen obstacle and complete one's intended act.

Of course, in recognizing this, no one seeks to relinquish all commitments so as to be able to avoid the trouble of adapting to unforeseen obstacles and complications. Commitments (both weak and strong) make possible many goods (both mundane and substantial) and so, on the whole, commitment and some degree of vulnerability to risk, is preferable to no commitment and little to no vulnerability. Commitments also make possible the plans that organize our agency over time so that we do not dissipate into what Bratman terms "time-slice agents".[143] To see why this is the case let us consider a few strategies one might employ to avoid having one's commitments make one vulnerable to risk. Considering these strategies will also reveal more connections between commitment and practical identity.

First, consider the possibility of an extreme individualism of commitment. Let's consider a person that has only one commitment, and it is to herself (not anything else in the contingent and unpredictable world). *Prima facie*, this looks to be problematic. It

143 Bratman, *Structures of Agency*, p. 28-29.

seems clear that one has to be *about* something other than simply oneself.[144] What would it even mean to be committed only to oneself? This commitment will lack any interesting content unless the self committed to is committed to other things. Phrases like "be true to oneself" enjoin more than simply an imperative to sustain in existence a certain biological organism that happens to support this consciousness that you are. It usually involves not compromising values, supporting various causes, carrying out certain activities, and striving to become a certain sort of person that is in line with a value (or values) one has adopted.

Now, perhaps a person could lack all commitments (as we have defined them above), except the single commitment to himself, and otherwise merely have bare intentions. This would provide some content to the "self" that is the object of one's sole commitment. So perhaps one could be committed to oneself in the sense of being committed to carrying out one's intentions. If all we had were intentions, without the one commitment, then every intended act would falter in the face of even the most minor unforeseen obstacle.[145] This is because, by my definition above, bare intentions lack the open-endedness of a commitment, which involves the secondary intention to form further intentions apt to carrying out the first intention. So, it looks like we need at least the one commitment to oneself, which for now will just mean a commitment to carry out one's intentions, whatever they happen to be.

144 Ibid., p. 37.

145 A less extreme example of an agent who constantly abandons her commitments is suggested by Linda Barclay in "Autonomy and the Social Self", p. 61. Barclay notes that such a person would lack autonomy and instead would be merely anomic; part of autonomous action is closing off certain possibilities and persisting in others.

But now consider, what sort of person would this singular commitment agent be? I contend he would be an odd sort of person that few people would admire or aspire to be like. Consider our single commitment agent on a particular morning; let's call him Don. Don wakes up and forms the specific intention to have some of the special coffee that his wife brought back with her from her recent trip to Ecuador. He walks into the kitchen, only to discover that his wife finished off the last of this rare coffee the day before. If Don had no commitments whatsoever, that would be the end of it. If the coffee was in a different drawer than normal (unforeseen to him at the time he formed the intention) this would be enough to sideline an intention that lacks the secondary intention of a commitment. Fortunately, Don does have a commitment and it is to follow through on his intentions. However, his intention is not to have just any coffee, it is to have this special coffee that is only available in Ecuador. So, on the strength of his commitment to his intentions, Don forms the further intention to travel to Ecuador to get some more of this delicious coffee. This involves Don in further intentions of getting online and booking a flight, canceling his classes for the next week and selling his car to pay for the unforeseen expense.

Of course, no one in their right mind would do such a thing. Most would simply give up on the intention to have special coffee and drink something less exotic instead. But why would seemingly normal people do this, instead of following through on the original intention by forming these outlandish further intentions? I contend, this is because we have other more important commitments that conflict with our commitment to follow through on this intention to drink the special coffee. For example, if I put

myself in Don's shoes I find several relevant commitments. I have a commitment to teach classes on a weekly basis; I also have a commitment not to make major expenditures without consulting my wife. I also have a commitment to avoid becoming (or behaving like) a person who spends money frivolously. Furthermore, what determines the standard of frivolous spending involves certain other values I have, to which I am committed (in the sense of committed to living by the values).[146] So I have other commitments that conflict with, and are stronger than, my commitment to follow through with the intention to drink the Ecuadorian coffee. For normal people, few commitments are unconditional or unlimited. In fact, many commitments are easily defeated, and this is due in large part to the presence of stronger conflicting commitments.[147]

But perhaps the role of all of these commitments can be filled by other intentions. Consider our single commitment agent Don. He discovers that if he is to have some of the special coffee he will need to travel to Ecuador. But then he remembers his intention to teach his classes and not spend frivolously. These intentions are also backed up by Don's sole commitment to follow through on his intentions (whatever they may be); this is his commitment to himself and the content of his self is (largely) constituted by these bare intentions. So we have conflicting intentions, and Don is committed to following through on all of them. How then does Don decide what to do? This is unclear, unless

146 While I am myself a realist, this section should not be read as giving an argument for a realist theory of value. What I have to say here concerning commitment is neutral between realist/externalist views of values and less realist more internalist views.

147 Again, it is important to note that for myself and Bratman commitments can be involved in fairly mundane and unimportant activities. This means that commitments will often be aptly weak and easily defeated. Of course this does not preclude the presence of strong commitments. I will have more to say about strong commitments later. Here I will note that part of what makes a commitment aptly strong is one's involvement with it such that it integrates a significant portion of one's agency. Another important factor is the worthwhileness of the end to which one is committed.

Don has some overriding intention to adjudicate between conflicting intentions in a certain way. Perhaps Don will consider the values he intends to live by in order to make such an adjudication. Perhaps Don intends to be a person who is dependable (and does not skip out on his classes for an impromptu trip to Ecuador) and perhaps he intends to spend money carefully, avoiding frivolous spending. But notice now where we have arrived. Don is beginning to look a lot like myself; he is beginning to look a lot like he is committed to things and values other than himself and committed in such a way that he is prepared to abandon other less important conflicting intentions and commitments.

So, it looks like we have two options when considering our single commitment agent Don. On the first option Don remains a rather ridiculous person. He follows through on whatever intention he happens to have until it is either complete (or perhaps it is clear that the intention is no longer possible to complete). Such a person would end up going to great lengths for rather mundane and minor intended goals. They would be pulled in many disparate directions. Such a person would lack the integration proper to a minimally decent human life. Far from the pursuit of a self, such an agent resembles a recipe for the dissolution of self. On the second option, Don has various overriding intentions that can conflict with intentions he happens to have in the moment. But these conflicts demand some sort of adjudication procedure, and this will involve various values. These intentions to behave according to values begin to look very much like commitments to things other than the self. So, our one commitment agent begins to look more like a normal agent, with a myriad of commitments.

This thought experiment is just an illustration of the claim that humans, in order to have a self with a minimally decent content and integration, will have to be committed to various entities (values, goals, activities, people, etc. . .) other than themselves. A self can choose what to be committed to (I also accept less voluntaristic commitments)[148], and there is a great plurality of possibilities that could result in a flourishing life. However, I contend that ***a self cannot choose simply not to be committed (or to be committed only to oneself), because this would be to choose the disorientation and ultimate dissolution of self.*** People need to be *about* something in order to consistently carry out intended actions at all, and in order to make a minimally decent life possible these things must be other than themselves. With these considerations in place we are now ready to consider further how one's involvement helps form one's practical identity and how this interacts with flourishing in interesting ways.

VI. The Gravity of Ping-Pong: Enmeshment, Constraints on Flourishing, & Identity

I have been using the word 'enmeshment' much as it is commonly used, to indicate a particularly thorough involvement; now I will give it a more precise definition. ***Enmeshment*** is a type of involvement such that the flourishing of an entity comes to *partially constitute* one's own flourishing (the same caveat applies here as with

148 Note that I do not mean to imply that all commitments can be formed at will. Indeed, I think there are some important commitments that may resist such voluntarism. Also, I think there are commitments that one can discover apply to oneself. One way this is possible is that a heretofore unnoticed implication of other commitments is suddenly brought to light. One might be committed to any number of causes implicitly even though these implications have yet to come to one's explicit conscious awareness. For more on this phenomena see Talbot Brewer's article "Two Kinds of Commitments (And Two Kinds of Social Groups)."

involvement).[149] In the example above, executing the project of table construction *involves* me with the hammer, and it *enmeshes* me with the activity itself. The activity becomes a constituent part (however minor) of my flourishing. If the activity goes well, this partially constitutes my life going well. Of course, as with involvement in some circumstances the flourishing of an entity with which one is enmeshed can work against one's flourishing. That is, it can partially constitute one's lack of flourishing, or withering. This might be the case if the activity with which one is enmeshed is ultimately worthless or pernicious.[150]

Humans can become enmeshed with objects, projects, goals, and activities. More important for my project will be the enmeshments we form with other humans. Before I consider these, first, I will consider further the nature of involvement and enmeshment and how these structures impact the formation and maintenance of one's identity.

Actions involve us with things in the world. Certain actions are part of activities which result in more thorough involvements. Commitments, when maintained, often lead to more thorough involvements and enmeshments. Many involvements impact the formation of our practical identities as agents. More thorough involvements and enmeshments will tend to have a greater impact. This in turn influences future commitments, involvements, and enmeshments. Some commitments become so central to one's identity that to break them (unjustifiably) would be to become a different person.

149 That is, if "flourishing" seems like a concept inapt for a certain entity, then some appropriate analogous concept should be employed (e.g., well-functioning).

150 Though, perhaps one would want to claim that a worthless activity cannot flourish. Here I will continue to talk about the flourishing of worthless activities and understand that to be a sort of success according to whatever the end of the activity happens to be (i.e., there may be better and worse ways of counting blades of grass even if the activity itself is worthless).

Let’s consider another everyday example of involvement (and enmeshment), this time one that includes another person: a friendly game of ping-pong. We will see how a commitment, and the involvement/enmeshment it makes possible, can affect one’s flourishing (and identity) differently as time goes on.

Let’s say I am laying on the couch reading a bit of philosophy when my friend Nick walks in and challenges me to a game of ping-pong. Having read for several hours, I decide that I deserve a break and that such a game would be a fun diversion. So I agree to the game. Put another (less natural) way, I have entered into a joint commitment with Nick to play a game of ping pong. This commitment involves various intentions to do certain things and form certain further intentions should the need arise. One intention I may consciously have is to get up and walk down to the basement where the table is located. One intention that I am prepared to form, should the need arise, might be to look for the second paddle which has been misplaced somewhere in the basement. Both Nick and myself have intentions like this once we have made the joint commitment (assuming we made it in good faith) and we no doubt think the other party has similar intentions.

Now, let’s assume that after having already agreed to the game, I subsequently abandon my commitment to play. Consider two ways this might occur. In the first scenario halfway down the basement steps I tell Nick that I changed my mind, and I no longer want to play. In a second scenario the score is eight to nine. Nick and I have sweat on our brows and are breathing heavily. As I am about to serve the next ball, I put my paddle down and tell Nick that I changed my mind and I no longer wish to play. In both of these scenarios I abandon a commitment after its inception, and perhaps can be faulted

in some moral fashion. However, the fault is very slight in the first scenario and more serious in the second. I think this is the case because in the second scenario Nick and I are much more enmeshed in the activity to which we have committed than in the first.

In the first scenario Nick and I have started walking and have started acting on the assumption that for the next ten to twenty minutes we will be engaged in a game of ping-pong. This involves various expectations, one of which is probably that we will have some fun. When I inform Nick of my change of heart he may be disappointed at me getting his hopes up (however briefly), and in the few feet of wasted walking effort. These minor annoyances point to ways Nick (and I) had already become enmeshed in our commitment. In beginning to carry out our joint commitment, Nick and I had already started to constitute our agencies around a future end or, put differently, we had already begun to project our own agencies into the future in a new way. We had already begun to organize this future self around the *telos* of the ping-pong game. We started to think of ourselves as moving towards that end, and we invested effort and hope (however minor) in that game. On the stairs we have not organized much of our lives around the ping-pong game, so the disappointment and disruption is minor; however, the longer we participate in the game the more invested we become in its successful completion.

In the second scenario, this process of enmeshment is much further along. We have worked up a sweat and are well into our game. The result is in doubt, and each person probably has hopes of winning. Each may look forward to an exciting finish, and each may even be thinking of various strategies to use to get the better of the other. Before I quit the game, each person is projecting himself into the future as someone who

sees this game to its completion, hopefully as the winner (but failing that, at least as someone who gave it a good try and had fun giving the other player a challenge). To be enmeshed in a commitment is, in part, to organize an interval of one's life around it in ways that make it possible for you to carry it out successfully. Similar to Bratman's planning theory, I maintain that an intention, with an attendant commitment, acts as a plan that organizes one's life going forward and coordinates it with the lives of others. And the extent of this organization often increases with time. In the midst of the game both Nick and myself have organized a larger portion of our lives around this activity than we had before it began. We have invested time and effort to achieve the good of a successful completion of the game. Moreover, the good to be achieved in this activity is more salient or vivid now that we are involved in the game. We are having fun and wish for it to conclude in the natural course of the game. We have become the sorts of people that will be frustrated by the abrupt ending of the game because we have come to expect its proper resolution. If the game miscarries for some reason, without achieving adequate resolution, we may feel that we have wasted our time. What appeared to be a worthwhile diversion to be satisfyingly completed, becomes a disappointing ellipsis to be left frustratingly undone.

As I have described it, the further along the process of enmeshment proceeds, the worse off one is when the commitment is unsuccessful or prematurely terminated.[151] This is why my fault in abandoning my original commitment to play the game is more serious

151 Note, this only applies when the entity with which one is enmeshed actually contributes to one's flourishing instead of detracting from it. There are many potential enmeshments that detract from one's flourishing the further they progress. Some enmeshments may contribute to one's flourishing up to a point, and then past that point become unhealthy and detract from it.

once the game is well underway. Nick has become more invested in the proper resolution of the game, hence I do him more harm in cutting it short (I also do myself some harm (however minor) by calling my own agency into question, since I too had organized my life around the game). Perhaps one could say that I would have to be a bit callous to drop this commitment for no reason other than that I no longer felt like it (more realistic to common conversation, Nick might say that I'm being a "real jerk" . . . or worse). We could also imagine a scenario where my cutting the game short does Nick some good, and this example will bring to light the possibility of being over-involved.

Let's say that the game is going a little longer than Nick thought it would, and he has an appointment to meet with his dissertation advisor soon. Let us assume that Nick calls up his advisor and cancels his meeting. One might think, based on what I have said thus far, that the stakes for my backing out of the game have become even more serious, and this is because Nick has become even more enmeshed in the successful completion of his game. He altered an important conflicting commitment so as to see his current commitment to completion. In doing this he has organized more of his life around this contest. Now when I back out of the game even more of Nick's agency is called into question, because he has oriented more of his future projects and actions around this, now unsuccessful, end. Nick has become more enmeshed, and hence more effort has been wasted. However, some enmeshments that are initially good can go bad because one becomes over-enmeshed. It seems like this last scenario is just such a case and that Nick should have terminated the game (moreover, if Nick doesn't suggest this himself, as a

good friend I should have offered to terminate the game to allow him to make his meeting).

Nick has become over-enmeshed in the ping-pong game because he has sacrificed a much more important prior commitment to a rather unimportant current commitment. Nick's commitment to meet with his advisor is an integral part of his larger commitment to make good progress on his dissertation; this commitment organizes much of Nick's life. Moreover, the potential goods of this commitment make it clear how worthwhile it is. In comparison the ping-pong game is a minor endeavor. Abandoning it midstream has little negative consequence beyond a minor frustration; moreover, the potential good of its completion seems paltry in comparison with getting timely feedback on one's latest dissertation chapter. This is just a particular instance of a general guideline, that when commitments conflict one should consider how worthwhile and weighty their ends are, and how much of one's life is (and ought to be) organized by such a commitment. One might also take into account how fungible this particular game is compared with others, and how much less fungibility advisor meetings have. Thus, in this last scenario I should urge Nick to abandon the game and keep his much more important commitment with his advisor. This ultimately will be best for Nick and (if I have even a minor commitment to Nick's well-being as his friend) the best for me.

This point is part of a larger point: some enmeshments are bad (some even from the start); thus, it is not always to one's benefit to preserve or deepen an enmeshment, just as it is not always to one's detriment to dissolve or lessen such involvements. For example, commitment to the procurement and use of methamphetamine is to one's

detriment right from the start; this is largely because (due to its extremely addicting nature) meth tends to draw one into becoming increasingly enmeshed very quickly. The further enmeshed with meth one becomes the worse the enmeshment is for one (i.e., the negative consequences can pile up fast). Moreover, the sooner one dissolves such an enmeshment the better (i.e., before one's health deteriorates or before a job is lost). In this sense, failure, and even early failure, would be the best end for an endeavor to procure and use meth.[152] There are of course much more subtle, complex, and controversial examples; we will examine some of them in the chapters to come. My point here is that enmeshment is eudaimonistically ambivalent. One cannot flourish without such involvements, but many are such that they will detract from human flourishing. Two important factors by which activities contribute to one's flourishing are: (a) the extent that one is enmeshed with the activity and (b) the value of the activity (sometimes this must be judged in relation to other conflicting activities, like in the example above).[153]

Nick's case is a key example of enmeshment, in part, because it involves his flourishing via practical identity. In this example Nick's flourishing comes to be partially constituted by the success of some commitment because, to some extent, he has organized his agency and/or practical identity (at least over a brief interval) around the commitment. If one thinks the activity of recreational ping-pong is much too minor to

152 Note here that the activity of meth procurement and use can go well in the sense that the activity has certain standards of success internal to the practice of using ultimately harmful drugs. So the meth activity can "go well" even if it succeeding on its own terms means things do not go well (eudaimonistically) for the drug user.

153 Note: this is not meant to be an exhaustive list of the many complex ways activities can contribute to and detract from one's flourishing. I am glossing over certain complex features of activities in order to highlight other features important for my argument. Moreover, it seems clear that the same activity may realize certain goods that contribute to one's flourishing, but also certain bads which detract from it. Hence, a single enmeshment, not just enmeshments in general, may be eudaimonistically ambivalent.

even slightly affect one's practical identity, this point still applies to more serious failed commitments with a similar structure. In general, the longer a process goes on, and the more of one's agency one organizes around a particular commitment, the more that success (or flourishing) of that commitment constitutes one's own flourishing, or in the case of bad enmeshments, one's own withering.

This process of enmeshment is involved in many commitments. As we have seen, it is a process that comes in degrees and often grows over time. The more enmeshed one is, the more one is invested in the commitment and the more that is at stake for one in continuing the commitment. Another way to put this is that, the more enmeshed one is in a commitment the more one's practical identity comes to be based upon it or organized around it. I might be able to back out of a ping-pong game without thinking too much of it. But the situation would be much different if I were to back out of my PhD program (or even a meeting with my advisor). I have come to thoroughly identify myself as a PhD student; I have developed this practical identity over many years. I have organized much of my life around the commitment to complete my degree. I have developed certain traits along the way and adopted certain values. For this commitment to end unsuccessfully would be to call much of my life into question; the potential for harm to my flourishing is great. And this more extensive enmeshment is not simply a function of time (though greater temporal length is a characteristic element of more substantial enmeshments); it is more properly a function of how much of one's practical identity and agency one has organized around the relevant commitment.

One may become so enmeshed in some commitments that to relinquish them would be akin to abandoning oneself, or ceasing to be an agent continuous with the agent one previously was. In the early 1960's the average northern college student who backed out of a freedom ride going south to Alabama might not have done much damage to her practical identity. Perhaps the original decision to participate came in the heat of the moment, after her first civil rights rally. However, consider if in the early 1960's Martin Luther King, Jr. had decided that the work of civil rights was too difficult, and that he was going to retire early to a quiet life on the farm. This surely would have been a much more drastic blow to his practical identity. By the 1960's little of his life was untouched by his commitment to the cause of civil rights. Few of his values had not been brought in line with this cause. To cease to champion civil rights at that point may have been to cease to be himself.

This brings us to a further aspect of commitment via involvement and enmeshment: it places constraints on how one can flourish. I believe that human flourishing is fairly pluralistic. Human nature itself places some broad constraints on how one may flourish, but within those constraints there are many unique possibilities (including many no one has thought of yet).[154] However, in the process of living one makes (or comes to have) and carries out various commitments; and some of these commitments involve substantial involvement and transformation. With this involvement and transformation come certain constraints on one's flourishing. An example will help to illustrate.

154 This is one reason why Nietzsche's call to experiments in living can be so compelling.

Consider a high school athlete who decides that she wants to be a world class powerlifter. Let's call her Aurora. Aurora begins a lifting and eating regimen appropriate to this pursuit, and continues carrying out this commitment all the way through college. Eventually, she builds enough muscle and skill to have a shot at the US Olympic team in the clean and jerk event. Consider what might now contribute to Aurora's flourishing. One substantial contribution would be to qualify for the US Olympic team. She could then exercise her long developed lifting capacity at the highest level of competition. Now imagine that a few days before the Olympic trials Aurora decides that she would actually rather qualify to compete as an Olympic marathon runner. This option for flourishing may have been open to her as a high schooler, but it is no longer open now that she has spent years training as a powerlifter. The reason for this is obvious. In her years of training she has undergone a dramatic transformation. As a gifted high school athlete she could have chosen several sports; but now, having developed excellence in powerlifting, she cannot choose to flourish by competing as a marathon runner. Her body, with its surplus of fast-twitch muscle fibers, is simply no good for that kind of sport. Aurora's commitment to her sport has made her flourishing as a powerlifter possible, but it has also constrained her future possibilities for flourishing in other sports.

This is one example of a common phenomenon. Initially human agents may have many options open for how they are going to (attempt to) flourish in life. But most of these possibilities for flourishing require commitments which, when carried out, will transform, involve, and enmesh us in ways that close off most other possibilities for flourishing (which may have been open to us initially). Thus, the parameters or

conditions of an agent's flourishing start out quite broad, but they change over time by getting increasingly narrow. At one point in my life I may have been able to do or refrain from doing an action with little to no harm to myself. However, after carrying out a commitment for several years the same action (or refraining from action) may do me great harm. Notice also, that this is the same sort of thing happening in the ping-pong example, only here there is a longer time-scale with more substantial stakes. Committing to an activity involves and enmeshes us such that our future flourishing is constrained in various ways. One could avoid these constraints by avoiding the commitments that foster them. However, as we have seen, such commitments are involved in doing anything at all. Moreover, the stronger and longer (and thereby more constraining) commitments tend to be the one's that secure much of what makes life worth living. This point will be paramount later when we consider commitments to other people and in chapter four when we see how such commitments might be used in addressing an immoralist.

VII. The Importance of Commitment for Eudaimonia

Commitments are central to any decent human life. Here I want to summarize and emphasize three broad reasons why this is the case, and, by way of transition, briefly preview how these reasons come together in a particularly powerful way when one examines commitments involving others.

First, commitments are obviously important because of their sheer pervasiveness; as is clear from the discussion above, human action would be greatly diminished without commitments to form future intentions to deal with unforeseen obstacles. Commitments

are involved in even mundane activities and projects. Someone with no commitments would be unable to follow through on much of her intended actions, because, as secondary intentions, they allow for adaptation to both minor and more onerous unforeseen obstacles.

Second, this crucial role of commitments in carrying out these pervasive intentions means that both mundane and substantial human goods depend upon forming and keeping commitments. Commitments help secure a sandwich for lunch, a completed game of checkers, and a satisfying conclusion to a prolonged conversation. Moreover, commitments help secure a college diploma, a completed city council campaign, and a fortyseven year marriage. It turns out (or so I will argue) the commitments that have the most potential to affect one's flourishing will also be the one's most likely to demand onerous effort.

Third, and finally, there is the point I brought up in section V: we can't get by on a bundle of intentions; humans have to be ***about*** something. And this is not simply to deal with unforeseen obstacles. We also employ various commitments in order to organize and prioritize our intentions. Often these involve values; that is, we are committed to form future intentions (and refrain from forming others) that are consistent with the relevant value. For example, my valuing of sentient life and its humane treatment might lead me to forego factory-farmed meat. This will stifle many inchoate intentions to eat such meat, lead me to form intentions to seek out better sources, and probably encourage the formation of intentions to eat more non-animal forms of protein. This commitment might come into conflict with another commitment I have to please my grandmother.

Perhaps she prepares a Thanksgiving meal involving several factory farmed meats, and me enjoying it is very important to her. In the case of conflicts like these, the stronger commitment, or the one more central to my identity, may win out. Or there might be a higher order commitment that helps adjudicate between the two. What often happens is that such conflicts lead the agent to refine one or both of the commitments involved. The process of prioritizing, adjudicating, and refining conflicting commitments is a process whereby one's agency becomes increasingly unified. This, and the formation of new commitments, is what is involved in the construction of a coherent self and the unifying of a life.

This construction and unification of a self is another application of the words of Kierkegaard that head this chapter: "During the first period of a man's life, the greatest danger is: *not to take the risk*." A person who is willing to perpetually reassess and alter commitments in the face of even minor obstacles lacks a key component of autonomy and falls into anomie.[155] Since commitments are involved in self construction and unification, they are necessary to have a self at all. To pass up on the risks involved in commitment is to, in a very real sense, fall into the greater danger of not developing a self. This self-construction/unification role is why some commitments can become quite risky. Commitments can become so central to one's identity that to abandon them might amount to a destructive self-betrayal, and yet such abandonments will be tempting or even demanded. This is why the dilettante freedom rider in the early 1960's can back out of civil rights efforts without much harm to herself; but for Martin Luther King Jr.,

155 Barclay, "Autonomy and the Social Self", p. 61.

backing out is tantamount to self-destruction. The cause of civil rights was a whim for the dilettante, organizing and unifying little of her life and identity. For King, the commitment to civil rights was the central organizing theme of his life. It unified him in ways that made it impossible to abandon without grave harm to himself.[156]

Commitments to people bring these three themes (pervasiveness, the securing of goods, and self-construction/unification) together in a powerful way. Commitments involving others (and their flourishing) are legion because humans are social animals.[157] Our lives are shot through with sociality such that we cannot simply keep others at arm's length and maintain a decent life. And this is in large part due to the second thematic concern: commitments involving other people make some of the weightiest human goods possible. Finally, there is the role commitments involving others play in constructing a person's identity and unifying a person's agency. In the next chapter we will go into more depth concerning these themes in the context of commitments that involve us in joint activities, groups, and more intimate relations with others.

156 And I don't think this harm simply reduces to the very public nature of King's commitment (although that no doubt contributes). Had King been a much less famous, or completely unknown civil rights champion, but with the same level and pervasiveness of commitment to the cause, the (self) harm of backing out at a late stage would remain great.

157 This view is of course as old as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, but is still very much accepted. That this is the case is evidenced by the title of a contemporary seminal text in (human) social psychology by Elliot Aronson: *The Social Animal*.

Chapter 3

Flourishing Together: Involvement and Enmeshment with Others

"Man becomes an I through a You"

(Martin Buber)[158]

"No one would choose to live without friends even if he had all the other goods."

(Aristotle)[159]

"Those who care for the good of others live in a larger and richer universe of relations. In giving oneself unreservedly to other persons or to larger goods one escapes from isolation. One moves with freedom, and probably with much richer perceptiveness, in a space of values in which one's life can have significance in relation to those persons and goods and not merely in relation to oneself."

(Robert Adams)[160]

I. Introduction: Why Become Involved with Others?

Hobbes' infamous description of the state of nature reaches its nadir when he writes that there are, "[n]o arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death: and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."[161] Part of this brutishness is owing to what Hume pointed out concerning how naturally ill-equipped humans are to achieve their natural desires (e.g., no fur for warmth or claws for predation).[162] In the state of nature we lack many of the protections and conveniences of cooperative life that we use to make up for our being naturally ill-

158 *I and Thou*, p. 80.

159 *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a5-6.

160 *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*, p. 77.

161 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter 13, p. 97.

162 *A Treatise of Human Nature*, III.2.ii, pp. 484-485.

equipped. However, for Hobbes, the greatest object of fear in the state of nature is other humans. In the absence of a coercive sovereign and an implicit contract to cede rights of liberty, the natural desires of humans lead to a war of all against all.[163] For Hobbes, this spectre is what leads humans to submit to a common sovereign and enter into a state of mutual restraint and minimal cooperation. Only then is decent life possible.

Most of us recognize this minimal civility as important for a decent life; however, we also think that it falls well short of sufficiency for it. We do not rest satisfied with a condition in which our neighbors are merely not dangerous; we seek human relationships that are more intimate than 'decent fellow citizen'. We seek out close friends and romantic partners. But why do we do this? After all, aren't intimate relations a source of complication, strife, and suffering? No one can wound like a friend or scar like an intimate partner. It is disconcerting that the majority of murders and rapes are perpetrated by someone the victim knows, and often trusts. More common are the lesser (but still substantial) failures, foibles, and pernicious aspects of close relations. Friends and significant others can lead us astray and disappoint. They can make annoying and harmful demands on our lives, can wound us emotionally, scoff at our hopes for the future, entrap us with guilt and force us to live within the circumscription of their narrow views. Others can lead us to view ourselves through the belittling lens of their objectifying gaze and thus constrain our freedom.[164] Beyond this, people are often just

163 *Leviathan*, Chapter 13.

164 Nowhere is this more starkly illustrated than in the writings of Sartre. In his play *No Exit* Sartre depicts the interaction of three people condemned to Hell. The three damned souls are locked together in a nicely furnished drawing-room. At first there is expectation of some sort of horrific torture. However, as time goes on, it becomes apparent that no torturer is coming; they are in fact each other's torturers. Ironically, their only potential for salvation and comfort is the very source of their greatest suffering: social relations. It is in

plain annoying, fickle, and frail. So why make such a being also *non-fungible* by pursuing a special relationship? Why is it that we don't rest satisfied with a Hobbesian detente, in which our mutual self-restraint avoids a war of all-against-all, and otherwise keep others at a relational arm's length?

In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle recognizes the necessity of friendship for a decent life, "[f]or no one would choose to live without friends even if he had all the other goods."[165] Aristotle goes on to enumerate some ways friends are necessary for a decent life.[166] Moreover Aristotle contends that friendship is also "fine".[167] That is, it is not only necessary to secure all sorts of good things, it is also good in itself. As a virtuous activity friendship is partially constitutive of human flourishing; it is to be valued and enjoyed for its own sake.[168] Aristotle devotes two of ten books in his *Nicomachean Ethics* to friendship and in general (neo)Aristotelians have emphasized the importance of close relationships. In this chapter I build upon these accounts arguing that involvement and enmeshment with others is needed for a decent human life. Though I recognize many potential relational perversions, I will argue that becoming involved and enmeshed with others is worth the risk. In the process I will flesh out in more detail why it is worth the risk. Briefly stated, without taking such a relational risk, much of what makes life worth

the eyes of the other condemned that they reach their greatest despair. They are misunderstood, or understood only too well, and in the objectifying gaze of the other are pigeon-holed as their worst selves. At the end of the play this leads one character to exclaim, "Hell is—other people!". The phrase 'hell is other people' indicates that hell resides right here on earth in our everyday social interactions. *No Exit* is a painfully vibrant illustration and unfolding of Sartre's basic contention that enmity is at the heart of all sociality. When two or more free beings come into close proximity strife is inevitable.

165 Book VIII.1. 1155a5-6.

166 Book VIII.1. 1155a6-29.

167 Book VIII.1. 1155a30.

168 Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 365-366.

living is not possible and a deficient human life results.[169] I began to make this case in the previous chapter. We begin life as fourth trimester fetuses, and we only flourish through involvement with others. In chapter two I only briefly touched on how human involvements enrich one's life. Here I will further enumerate these relational boons and explore their eudaimonistic potential.

There is one point of proleptic clarification I need to make before continuing. I will be arguing that involvement and enmeshment are necessary (or very close to it) for human flourishing; however, it is clear that they are certainly not sufficient for it. As I noted in the previous chapter, there are many involvements which are bad. This can be due to the extent, nature or object of the involvement. This is especially clear in the realm of human involvements. Violence, abuse, and neglect exist alongside more mundane relational perversions. I say this here because I am going to spend much of this chapter highlighting the positive aspects of close human relationships. In doing so I am not viewing the relational world through a naive or overly optimistic lens. The positive relational aspects I highlight are potentialities, all of which might elude any particular person in some (or all) of their involvements. I will be arguing that these potentialities, if achieved, make possible and constitute the most important elements of human flourishing. However, in arguing this, I will keep in full view the dysfunction and harm that can result from human relations. Simply put: I think the potential gains to human flourishing are well worth the risked harms.[170] In order to have even a decent life we will

169 Note: this does not mean the lonely person is deserving of our blame. He might be a more apt object of pity.

170 Moreover, it may be difficult to fully understand the badness of relational perversions unless we gain a good idea of the ideal of which they are a distortion. Thanks to Talbot Brewer for this point.

need to open ourselves up to the messy, inconvenient, transformative, and potentially sublime activity of becoming thoroughly involved with others.

II. Commitment to Another Person

So what is involved in being committed to another person? One important thing this often implies is a commitment to the *good* of another person. Let's say that I commit to the good of my younger brother (or find myself so committed).[171] What might this involve? In the moment of the commitment it will involve intentions to act in certain ways and refrain from acting in others. I will intend to help my brother when he is in need, offer advice when appropriate, and watch over him when he is vulnerable. My commitment will also involve intentions to refrain from violence and excessive teasing. Of course many of these intentions are not consciously thought in the moment of the commitment; but perhaps if I had an indefinitely long period of time I could list thousands of particular intentions based only on my current knowledge of my brother. However, my brother is an autonomous being living in an unpredictable world. He will likely decide to pursue goals and projects that cannot be predicted with any certainty now (not even by him). His needs and desires might change drastically. In brief: it is impossible for me to know now, with certainty and completeness, the conditions for my brother's flourishing over the long term. The longer my commitment (ostensibly it is as long as we both are alive) the less I will know ahead of time what my brother's flourishing will entail. Thus, in addition to the intentions that I can name now, my

[171] I am committed to the view that while many commitments are undertaken voluntarily and at a moment's notice, others are such that one discovers the commitment. For more on this view see Talbot Brewer's, "Two Kinds of Commitment (And Two Kinds of Social Groups)."

commitment will involve an intention to act in unforeseen and unforeseeable ways in the future. My commitment involves an intention to form future intentions once I have the requisite information to give those intentions apt content.

As with any commitment, a commitment to the good of another person is open-ended. That is, in committing to the good of my brother, I form a secondary intention to form future intentions to perform and refrain from certain sorts of actions. As I related in the previous chapter, commitment is open-ended because the future is unpredictable (at least for finite human minds). This unpredictability is present even when making a cup of coffee, but it is greatly compounded when we are dealing with a commitment to the good of humans. Consider a commitment to the good of a complex inanimate object: my car. If I am committed to keeping my car in good functioning order that involves certain intentions statable in the moment: to follow a schedule of maintenance, to drive safely, and to be prepared to make repairs in the future. If I had enough time, and an exhaustive manual, I could perhaps list out every possible repair and form conscious intentions, in the moment, to make these repairs if necessary. However, when it comes to the good of a person, matters are greatly complicated. I might commit to my brother's good when he is thirteen years old. His goals, desires, and needs are likely to change in unpredictable ways. Furthermore, while a great many fairly general things may be assumed about human flourishing, the good of any particular individual will differ greatly from others. Human flourishing can be realized in a great plurality of ways. These ways of flourishing are not innumerable because actually infinite (surely they could not be, at least not in any

non-trivial way); rather, many are simply unknown. Think of how many careers or cultural possibilities exist today that did not twenty years ago.

In addition to unpredictability, in chapter two I noted that commitment is open-ended because it is future-directed and ongoing; commitment involves intentions to realize or carry out the commitment in a process through time. Previously I noted that if the good aimed at is sufficiently complex, and the timeframe sufficiently long, this process will be akin to what Talbot Brewer has termed a "dialectical activity."[172] Consider the virtuous feedback loop involved in commitments to the good of other people or the continued health of a human relationship. I start out by having a vague and fairly general idea of what will constitute the flourishing of my brother over the course of his life. I might have a detailed conception of what would constitute his flourishing now, but I have little idea of what the conditions for his flourishing will be in his middle age. As he changes, if I am to maintain and carry out my commitment to his good, I will have to continue to be in relationship with him. This means we will need to be closely involved with one another. This is because I will need to be able to refine my conception of what constitutes his good going forward based on his evolving desires, needs, and external circumstances. This in turn will refine my practice, which is just my relationship with him. As time goes on, and my brother grows and changes, I will be able to form new and increasingly refined intentions as my conception of his good evolves.

Finally, as I noted in the previous chapter, commitment does not merely involve intentions to do (or refrain from doing) certain things, it also involves intentions to

172 For Brewer's original treatment of this concept see his *Retrieval of Ethics*, Chapter 2.

become certain sorts of people. This becomes increasingly complex and interesting when the object in question is the good of another person. When I commit to the good of my brother, I am not only intending to do things, I am also intending (either explicitly or implicitly) to be (and increasingly become) the sort of person who will care about the good of my brother, as something worthwhile to cherish, nurture, and preserve. Not only do I need to remain in a relationship so as to refine my notion of his good (so as to better inform my practice of pursuing it), I also need to engender an apt attitude of caring and love towards my brother. This is likely to motivate actions that advance my brother's good, and it will likely contribute to my appreciation of my brother's value as a person, whose good is a worthwhile pursuit.[173]

A commitment to the good of another person contains within it an intention (either explicit or implicit) to retain, habituate, or de-habituate a variety of traits. Consider the possibility that my brother might become addicted to drugs. My commitment to his good then involves a secondary intention to form further intentions with content apt to this possibility. A commitment to his good then might involve me forming future intentions to go to great trouble on my brother's behalf in paying bail, performing interventions, getting him into rehab programs, etc. . . My point here is this: not only am I committed to performing repeated onerous actions in the face of painful circumstances, I am also committed to being the sort of person able to do that. What is more, if I actually persist, I am likely to habituate (or further habituate and strengthen) some semblance of the virtue of fortitude. In short, my commitment to my brother's good

173 Of course, it is possible for my relationship with my brother to take a turn for the worse. If he (or I) is particularly difficult, and I (or he) am not tenacious enough to put up with it, or socially gifted enough to repair the relationship, then the involvement might become bad (for one or both of us).

involves an intention to be and become a certain sort of person. Moreover, in performing these actions and becoming this person for the good of my brother, I may also be pursuing my own good. This will especially be the case if I have come to care deeply about my brother, and see his wellbeing as a particularly worthwhile end. Even if no such extreme circumstances arise, the ordinary attentiveness and relationship involved in pursuing my brother's good can engender in me a greater love and care for my brother as a person. At least, this is what I should be aiming at if my commitment really is to my brother's good. Hence, in committing to my brother's good, I am committing to come to increasingly care for and value my brother. Commitments like these (can)[174] involve a sort of virtuous feedback loop of transformation. As the object of the commitment (a person) changes, the demands of carrying out the commitment evolve; hence the relevant agent evolves as well.

III. Involvement with Others, Joint Activities, and Enmeshment with Others

A. The Pervasiveness of Involvement with Others

Think of an average day of a common U.S. citizen. Three or more times a day this person will eat a meal that likely involves him with numerous other people in the chain of food production and distribution from farm to table. There are farmers, food processors,

174 I say 'can' here because of course there is the more negative possibility that no such virtuous feedback loop forms because I become so exasperated with my brother that I give up. How likely this sort of souring of a relationship is, is debatable. For my argument to succeed I do not need relationships to be (quite unrealistically) uniformly positive, or even overwhelmingly positive. I need such good relationships to be possible, and some approximation of good relationships needs to be fairly common. How likely such a possibility is (and such approximations are), is again, up for debate. However, in general I think relationships that approximate the positive aspects I highlight are frequent enough occurrences, and their goods weighty enough eudaimonistic boons, that my overall argument against the immoralist in chapter four will succeed.

truckers, and grocery employees. The flourishing of each of these people contributes to our average citizen's ability to eat, and thus contributes to her flourishing. A similar point can be made about the long and complex chains of how we get our electrical power, clothing, household goods, cars, and entertainment. Of course most of the thousands of people with which one is involved are highly fungible. I do not need my lettuce to come from any particular grower or be picked by any particular person. Even the actors on my favorite television show might be replaced without much detriment to my flourishing. However, determinate people do fill these thousands of roles, and thus my continued flourishing depends in a myriad of ways on the continued flourishing of thousands of other people. Moreover, while my flourishing may not depend (or depend for long) on any particular trucker (for example), it is accurate to say that it depends on truckers in general. The general well-being of the workers in a particular industry can come to impinge upon my flourishing.[175] It would be interesting to consider just how many involvements there might be (however slight), especially because most of these thousands of people are themselves involved with thousands of others in similar ways (and those, in turn, are involved with others, and so on). Of course, as the circle widens the extent to which a person is involved in my flourishing (usually)[176] becomes more tenuous. I will pursue the widening of this circle in chapter four; now let's turn back toward the center.

B. Involvement with Others in Joint Activities

175 It is important to note that an industry need not be a good one, and so the flourishing of its workers might be involved with mine by working against it. Also, some industries are set up such that the flourishing of others appears to some degree to be inversely related to my own. Extremely cheap clothes are available to me in part because of incredibly poor working conditions of some southeast Asian garment factories.

176 Later on I will be arguing that there is a mechanism for strangers, even distant ones, to become not only integrally involved with oneself, but also enmeshed.

Think about the activities you engage in on a daily basis. Many of them, especially the mundane ones, are individual activities (though many still involve oneself with others in the way just outlined). But even these individual activities often involve oneself with an established practice, a way of doing things that was socially learned and requires an ongoing socially constructed context to make it intelligible. For example, one does not merely eat, one eats determinate foods, in a determinate manner. To a large extent what determines these determinables is the socio-cultural context within which one eats. Even elements of the practice apparently determined by the individual himself are borrowed from his culture and family of origin; they are made intelligible within a practice he has long since inculcated. Whether he drinks the excess milk out of the cereal bowl (either in accord with, or in contravention to, the norms of his culture/family), spoons it into his mouth (for decorum's sake), or throws it out (because such waste is only a slight afterthought in his culture of plenty), all of these responses make sense within a particular practice fostered within a particular context.[177] Hence, even seemingly individual activities are already beholden to many others through a socially constructed reality which lends them intelligibility.

Moreover, there are many activities that involve us more directly with others, in a responsive dialectic. Think of the ping-pong example from the previous chapter. Both

177 My own grandfather would often have the grandchildren eat cereal in succession, each successive child using the same bowl and the excess milk from the previous child's meal. While this practice may seem unique, and perhaps unsanitary, it made perfect sense to my grandfather. He had grown up on a depression-era farm where everything was shared (especially between kids), few things were ever completely clean and ***NOTHING*** was wasted. This last point my grandfather liked to illustrate comically by telling a story involving his younger brother, who lost his coat down the pit in the family's outhouse. When his brother asked their father for help retrieving the coat, his father said, "Why Joe? You're not going to ***wear*** that thing now are you?" Little Joe replied, "Well no, but there's a biscuit in the pocket!" Though seemingly unique to little Joe, the desire to retrieve that biscuit made some sense in a poor family that wasted nothing, and in which children did not often have more than the bare minimum to eat.

Nick and myself, in order to enjoy the game and have it become a constitutive element of our flourishing, need the other person to flourish to a certain extent. Nick cannot provide me with a fun challenge if he has a broken hand, or is too depressed to really get into the game.[178] This sort of joint activity, in which we become responsively involved with another person in some common undertaking, is pervasive in human life. It occurs in conversations, games, group projects, and campaigns. It occurs whenever the relative success of an undertaking or common end comes to depend (to some degree) on the flourishing of more than one person.

It is worth repeating that when one orients one's future agency so as to aim at the successful completion of an activity, one projects oneself into the future via this intention and its attendant commitment. When the activity miscarries in the middle, or ends poorly, a portion of one's agency (and in some cases even one's identity), comes into question. This often constitutes a harm. Since joint activities and projects involve the efforts of other people, and their efforts are underwritten to some extent by their continued flourishing, the flourishing of others comes to impinge on one's own. This will be a relatively minor effect when it comes to brief and impromptu undertakings. However, this potential for harm grows as the activities become more long-term or their ends become more central to one's own practical identity.

Imagine again the scenario involving Martin Luther King, Jr. Now however, imagine that King does not betray himself by abandoning the civil rights movement, but

178 If Nick is far better than me at ping-pong then his depression might be just what I need for a fun game (since otherwise it would be uncompetitive). This is just another instance of the ambivalence of enmeshment. Of course, if Nick is my friend, his depression is going to be bad for my flourishing in more substantive ways (notably in that someone I care about is withering). Moreover, there are other ways to achieve a competitive game with a superior player (like certain voluntary handicaps).

his inner circle of co-leaders and collaborators conduct the betrayal instead. Or perhaps they remain involved with the cause, but become increasingly less committed because depressed or exhausted. The civil rights movement might suffer as a result. Under another description we could say that the success of King's most important project suffers, in part, due to the withering of others upon which the movement depends. Of course this is a rather extreme example of how others can detract from one's flourishing by failing to play their part in a joint project. However, this basic phenomenon is quite common. And since we define much of our agency by way of activities and goals that require the (substantial) efforts of others, much of our practical identities will be open to harm and benefit from others. Others can affirm and further one's agency by advancing common goals and contributing to joint activities; and others can also harmfully call oneself into question by rejecting a goal or abandoning a joint activity.

C. Enmeshment with Others: An Elaboration of the Account of Enmeshment

I need to say more about enmeshment, in particular, enmeshment with other persons. The above text might create the impression that the flourishing of others comes to impinge on one's own flourishing only by being instrumental to it in some way. Certainly this is often the case; however, I think it is also often the case that the flourishing of others partially *constitutes* one's own. The main way this occurs is through joint activities. Consider our original definition of enmeshment from chapter two:

> "***Enmeshment*** is a type of involvement such that the flourishing of an entity comes to *partially constitute* one's own flourishing. . . the project of table construction *involves* me with the hammer, and it *enmeshes* me with the activity itself. The activity becomes a constituent part (however minor) of my flourishing. If the activity goes well, this partially constitutes my life going well."

So, in the ping-pong match both myself and Nick become enmeshed (however slightly) with the game of ping-pong. Such an enmeshment involves us with the (well)functioning of entities that are instrumental for the the game itself to go well (e.g., paddles, balls, a table). Now consider, is the flourishing of Nick merely instrumental for my flourishing? Well, it is clear that I could not have the game without him. However, I have just said that both Nick and myself are enmeshed with the game, such that this activity is a constituent element of both my flourishing *and* Nick's. If this is the case, then the joint activity of the ping-pong game acts as a middle term allowing Nick's flourishing to become (a minor) constituent element of my flourishing (and vice-versa). Put another way, the joint activity is both a constituent part of my flourishing and Nick's. Thus, part of Nick's flourishing is also a part of mine, when I engage in a successful game with him (and vice-versa). So in working for the success of this activity both of us strive for something that is constitutively good for ourselves and constitutively good for the other.[179]

This structure of enmeshment with others via-joint activities is pervasive and potent in contributing to (or detracting from) human flourishing. Joint activities can be brief and mundane (like playing a game of ping-pong), but they can also be long-term and momentous (like jointly pursuing the proliferation of civil rights). Hence, the flourishing of many others will come to partially constitute one's own (and one's own flourishing will come to partially constitute many others').

179 At its most basic this is a structural point; however, this does not preclude different sorts of enmeshments being more eudaimonistically potent than others. If I care deeply about the flourishing of another party this might give it a more prominent role in my own flourishing. It also might make possible more eudaimonistically potent enmeshments like intimate friendships.

IV. Enmeshment with Others in Groups and Causes

Besides enmeshment of oneself with others in common activities and goals, becoming a member of a group introduces yet another sort of involvement. That is, one's flourishing can come to be enmeshed with the flourishing of the group itself; hence, one's flourishing can become tied up with the flourishing of the constitutive elements of the group: other individuals. We have already seen how the well-functioning of the group (and its members) can make possible certain activities that serve to constitute one's own flourishing. There are two additional ways that the flourishing of the group (and its members) can plausibly be said to contribute to one's own flourishing: one objective and the other subjective.

Objectively, it seems true that one's flourishing is diminished if a group with which one is involved, falters; I think this is for reasons similar to those that connect the failure of important goals, efforts, and values to one's flourishing. If one dedicates one's life to a cause only for it to fail, the worth of much of your life is called into question. Your life has not gone as well as it could have if the efforts of your career had contributed to a more successful venture. Likewise, there seems to be a distinct objective good or harm to oneself, when the group to which one belongs flourishes or falters. This is a good independent of the activities that a well-functioning group makes possible for oneself.[180]

One might object that this objective good is mysterious. Perhaps I am conflating it with the more instrumental goods associated with belonging to a well-functioning group;

180 Of course these activities will usually be the more prominent and important way in which the flourishing of the group and its members is involved with one's own.

or perhaps I am conflating it with the more subjective goods to be detailed below. There are at least two responses to this objection. First, in becoming part of a group I join an entity with a flourishing that goes beyond, but also impinges upon, the flourishing of constitutive members. Consider the flourishing of a rugby team. A win is a eudaimonistic good for all of the team members, even those who ride the bench. The group that they are a part of has succeeded. The success of the group is a distinct sort of boon; it is a good of achievement of one's group.[181]

At this point one may interject that the success of a team in a win is only an instrumental good, in that it makes other good activities possible. The broad Aristotelian conception of activity includes mental activities. Surely the team's success is good for a team member because he can enjoy it; he can savor the thrill of victory and remember it with fondness. Perhaps more substantively, a win somehow affirms one's ongoing commitment to the team as worthwhile; a win serves to affirm a portion of one's practical identity. I must admit that this is undoubtedly part of the good associated with the win, but I do not think it is the entirety; there is an objective remainder. Consider, for example, a person who commits her entire life to a worthy cause. She goes to her grave justifiably believing that she in particular contributed to the furtherance of this end. Now imagine that one week after she dies the cause falls to pieces and all of the gains she made evaporate. Wouldn't it be accurate to say that this detracts from how well the woman's life has gone? Moreover, consider the reverse situation. A man who dedicated his life to

[181] Moreover, consider that Aristotelians hold the plausible belief that not just any activities will contribute to one's flourishing, but only relatively worthwhile activities will do so. This is the case even if one gains intense subjective enjoyment from the worthless activity in question. This position seems to introduce an objective good that contributes to eudaimonia, but not by way of subjective enjoyment or making other activities possible.

some worthwhile end, only to repeatedly fail, dies justifiably believing that his efforts were for naught. Yet, we can imagine that his death sparks a revival of interest in his work, and as a result, a strong movement in support of the cause ignites shortly after his death. Years hence many of the gains he sought are brought about in large part because of his tireless (and thankless) efforts. Doesn't this post-mortem success make his life more eudaimon?

This of course is just to repeat the puzzle that Aristotle brings up early on in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[182] There is a strong intuitive appeal to the idea that post-mortem events, including the successes or failures of one's groups or causes, can contribute to or detract from one's eudaimonia. If this is the case it seems that the good of such successes cannot be reduced without remainder to the instrumental role they play in activity or the subjective enjoyment one gets in considering them. However, Aristotle himself seems puzzled by this possibility. For instance, he wonders just how long afterwards post-mortem events might be able to affect one's eudaimonia.[183] Perhaps, more generally, the reader does not feel the intuitive pull that the flourishing of one's group or cause represents a good for oneself distinct from the activities (including subjective enjoyment) it makes possible. If that is the case, then the role the flourishing of one's group plays in one's own flourishing will be limited to the considerations above and one's own subjective enjoyment.

Beyond just making certain activities possible, or any supposedly distinctive objective good, there is a subjective good to which the flourishing of one's group

182 See Book I, chapters 10 and 11.
183 Ibid., Book I, chapters 10 and 11.

contributes. Though eudaimonia is an objective reality, about which one can be mistaken, there is a significant subjective component. It is good for oneself if that to which one is deeply committed, or engaged with, or cares about, or loves, or admires, or strongly values in some way, flourishes. It is a crushing blow when what one cares about withers and perishes, and it is a great boon if instead these valued entities flourish. Though it is possible to mistakenly think one is flourishing, it is not similarly easy to think one is miserable (even though one is flourishing). This is because one is not plausibly flourishing if one feels miserable. On the Aristotelian picture activities serve as elements of eudaimonia on the assumption that they are, at least to some degree, valued and/or enjoyed.[184] Subjective feelings of wellbeing contribute to one's flourishing, and would seem to be a necessary element for it. In this way, the subjective states associated with the flourishing and withering of one's group can contribute to, and detract from, one's flourishing. And since groups involve the efforts (and thereby the flourishing) of others, subjective well-being is another way in which others will be enmeshed with oneself.

V. Intimate Relations and Close Friends

Now let's turn our attention to the case of two people who become thoroughly enmeshed with each other. It is this enmeshment, and the transformation it involves, that make it such that the flourishing of a long term intimate partner or close friend becomes a substantial constituent of one's own flourishing. Before proceeding, I need to make three brief qualifications. First, while this section will focus mostly on the enmeshment of two

184 I say valued and/or enjoyed, because one might not enjoy a dentist visit even though one values it.

romantic partners, much of the content will also apply (sometimes with slight modification) to close friendships and some familial ties. This is an important point because I contend that lacking a romantic partner does not bar one from eudaimonia, but lacking any close friends probably does. Second, some of what I will say concerning enmeshment with intimate partners will also apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to other sorts of involvements with people, including groups and more casual friends. I will leave the reader to make these further connections on her own. Third, some of the relational phenomena I highlight are important involvements that fall short of enmeshment. That is, below I will highlight not only ways in which significant others constitute one's flourishing, but also ways in which they are involved such that their flourishing is importantly instrumental in one's own. Close relationships contain both enmeshing and non-enmeshing activities and structures. While it is correct to say that one is enmeshed with an intimate partner, not every relational phenomena and structure is an instance of such enmeshment.

Now, we all have an intuitive idea of what it means to become enmeshed with an intimate partner. It is captured in the common phrases, "What would I do without you?"; "Without him I'd be lost" and "She's my better half." Enmeshment with a long-term intimate partner involves coming to share a life. The further along the process of enmeshment goes, the more the two lives come to resemble a single life.[185] Activities,

185 In the west, this phenomenon is anticipated in various ways. The Hebrew Bible refers to man and woman becoming one flesh and Aristotle wrote about friends becoming second selves. Much more recently communitarians and feminists have stressed the idea that the self, and capacities central to the self, are socially or relationally constituted. Contemporary psychological literature is increasingly making the case that it is difficult (if not impossible) to define the self in a way that does not irreducibly refer to others. Indeed, many psychologists theorize as if significant others are partially constitutive of the self (or identity)

responsibilities, values, goals, and important projects come to be shared and jointly improvised. Partners come to share a similar view on the world as they come to appreciate the perspective of the other. They adopt mannerisms and language from the other. Intimate partners share homes, property, pets, and private jokes. They have uniquely improvised ways of performing various activities through a shared history. Intimate partners also can come to increasingly appreciate and care about the good of the other. Each person increasingly identifies her or himself with the other, such that it makes sense to say, "If my wife is having a bad day, then so am I" and conversely, "If she's happy, then I'm happy." Structures of enmeshment make it the case that the flourishing of one intimate partner comes to partially constitute the flourishing of the other.[186] I will now highlight some of these structures, showing how they allow for this constitutive relationship, as well as some important sub-enmeshment structures of involvement.

A. A Shared History

The commitment involved in a long-term intimate partnership involves living in close proximity with one another and sharing various activities over a long period of time. This involves the development of a shared history. This shared history is unique to the parties that create it, and the longer it develops the less fungible either partner becomes. This is because in creating a shared history two people amass unique shared memories and jointly improvise particular ways of doing ordinary activities.

of the person in question. Below I will be drawing on a portion of this vast literature as part of my development of the concept of enmeshment with others.

186 And this is not only for instrumental reasons (including subjective enjoyment), the good of the intimate other comes to be an objective element in one's own.

Consider, for example, the activity of conversation. In the course of an intimate relationship two people jointly improvise a conversational style and repertoire. A certain rhythm is developed; a stock of themes, tropes, catch-phrases, and inside jokes are amassed. Shortcuts and abbreviations come to be employed. Moreover, each partner comes to better understand the unique abilities, knowledge, proclivities, and sensitivities of the other person. After a while you may come to understand that it is not a good idea to discuss issues X, Y, and Z with your partner, after a certain time of night, or perhaps when his blood sugar is low. If the conversation is stagnating you may be aware of topics that will engage and enliven your partner, or perhaps cheer her up. One comes to know how far to push a heated debate, or what amount of good natured teasing is comical as opposed to hurtful. Shared experiences and previous conversations allow partners to take some background knowledge and shared context for granted. All of this (and more) is jointly amassed and improvised over time, so that a conversational style and repertoire, unique to the couple in question, is achieved. As a result, conversation develops a certain flow and ease, which in turn makes it a fruitful and enjoyable activity--a constituent of a flourishing life for each party.

Conversation is just one of many activities that gain this sort of depth and practiced competence as the result of long-term joint improvisation. Others range from the mundane to the absolutely crucial. One might come to wash and dry dishes a certain way, because it is the way that “we” have come to do it (i.e., a method jointly improvised over time). Or, more substantively, one might come to develop a trustworthy method for making difficult career decisions in concert with your trusted intimate partner. Perhaps

you have developed a process of deliberation on these matters in such a way that you come to uniquely depend on your partner's particular perspective and the issues he tends to recognize. A shared history of joint improvisation is a structure of enmeshment because it makes the other increasingly crucial for how one carries out an increasing number of processes and activities (some quite important). The longer the relationship and the closer one's partner, the more activities come to be jointly improvised. Moreover, one's partner comes to habituate certain traits and competencies over the shared history, such that they transform into the sort of person capable of carrying out these jointly improvised activities. Hence, the shared history enmeshes not merely by the improvisation of an activity, but through the formation of a participant apt to what has been improvised. In this way, as a shared history develops, it becomes the case that one's life is not straightforwardly one's own; it increasingly comes to resemble a shared entity.

B. Shared Values, Goals, and Projects

We have already seen how an individual agent organizes her own agency around goals, projects, and activities by projecting herself into the future. In this way she makes decisions now, and acts now, in light of what she wants to do and the sort of person she wants to be in the future. Values, goals, and projects are often developed and adopted jointly. In coming to know one's partner in increasing detail, one comes to appreciate her unique perspective on the world. Different features of the world 'light up' for different people as important or particularly salient.[187] Due to the growing importance of the relationship, one is more apt to take seriously these insights when they come from a close

[187] Diana T. Meyers makes a similar point concerning the power of groups with which one is affiliated to alert one to a greater spectrum of morally relevant phenomena. See especially *Being Yourself: Essays on Identity, Action, and Social Life*, pp. 152-155.

partner (as opposed to a more casual relation). For example, perhaps I have spent most of my life eating all sorts of meat and enjoying the intense aesthetic pleasure of foods like bacon cheeseburgers. Let's suppose my partner also eats meat, but does not find it to be all that tasty or tempting. Perhaps my partner's lack of appreciation for the aesthetic pleasures of meat allows her to attend to morally relevant details when they arise. On my own I might have ignored the nature of factory farming, and attempted to remain blissfully ignorant. But my partner might be better disposed to see the moral relevance of these practices which, in many cases, look similar to animal torture. As a result of our close relationship, I take my partner seriously, whereas I might have more easily brushed off information coming from a more casual relation. I (re)consider the relevant details and come to adopt values similar to my partner's (though perhaps I struggle more to maintain them). Consequently, I begin to eat less meat and seek non-factory farmed sources.

As partners come to share values, they also come to reinforce those values and keep each other accountable. When at a restaurant on my own I might be greatly tempted by a cheap special on barbeque ribs and order them (perhaps with a pang of conscience). But if my partner is sitting across from me, I will be more vividly reminded of the value that I have recognized and adopted. I might then more easily avoid ordering the ribs, and in that act (based on a particular value) I further habituate my disposition to avoid factory farmed meats. My partner has helped me avoid temptation, and this contributes to a disposition to be able to avoid it in the future. This is just one instance of a more general phenomenon. Values come to be recognized, adopted, and maintained jointly.

Consequently, one's partner will be involved in one's values and how they are manifested in action over time. Similarly, long term partners are important in recognizing the value of adopting and maintaining certain goals and projects. Furthermore, a partner may be so integral to these processes that in their absence one no longer sees the point of, or feels the same pull towards, an important goal or project.

C. Shared Capacities

Intimate partners come to share certain capacities. Capacities that are present in an isolated individual come to be partially constituted by, or made to function at a higher level through, the actions of others. Here I will highlight just a few examples.

Transactive Memory:[188] Memory involves three general stages: encoding, storage, and retrieval.[189] At the individual level, a single brain manages to encode, store, and retrieve information. Transactive memory allows for information to be encoded and stored in (and be retrieved from) other people. "A transactive memory system is a set of individual memory systems in combination with the communication that takes place between individuals."[190] Externalizing memory is a common act. It occurs anytime we list an appointment on a calendar or keep a diary. In recording this information externally, we need only remember much simpler information concerning the location of the data that we will eventually need (in this case who knows (or should know) it).[191] Hence, we remember the location of the information and are able to retrieve it by

188 Note: memory is an activity arguably valuable in itself, not just instrumentally. Hence, if one's capacity for memory becomes shared through a transactive system, one becomes enmeshed with the parties of that system.

189 Wegner, "Transactive Memory: A Contemporary Analysis of the Group Mind", p. 186.

190 Ibid., p. 191.

191 Ibid., pp. 189-190.

speaking to the relevant person in our transactive memory network. Members of a transactive memory network come to know that certain persons in the network are "experts" and thus are the likely (and proper) repositories of certain sorts of information. Such experts more easily pick up on and remember this information. This may be the result of having built up a network of related concepts. Experts come to be known for their expertise; others then begin to funnel more of the relevant information their way and neglect to remember it themselves. This process produces two interesting results.

First, people who begin as experts, or begin by being recognized for their expertise, have that expertise affirmed and further developed. This further develops the expertise of the person in question. Over time, groups of transactive memory improve in their utility. Groups increasingly identify, in ever more fine-grained ways, the areas of expertise of their members. Such groups improve over time in being able to efficiently pass on information to the relevant expert. This allows other members to specialize in originally noting and remembering their own areas of expertise.[192] Second, others who depend on the expert to remember information in a certain domain, become worse themselves at noting and remembering such information. Members of the transactive memory group come to be dependent on the expert to be the repository of information for their particular area of expertise. Members then cease to remember that sort of information as well, and instead, come to simply remember its location: i.e., they come to remember who they need to ask in order to retrieve the desired info. This allows for specialization that results in a system beneficial for each member, but also one that

[192] Wegner, "Transactive Memory: A Contemporary Analysis of the Group Mind", pp. 192-193.

fosters a degree of dependency. The transactive memory system is more efficient and rich than would be the sum of individual efforts of its otherwise isolated members.[193] In such a system, the flourishing of its members come to partially constitute the flourishing of other members because the activity of memory in the relevant domains is shared. An expert remembering well partially constitutes my act of remembering well via externalization, and hence, a constituent element of their flourishing (an activity) comes to partially constitute my own.

Transactive memory has been well studied with respect to intimate partners.[194] At first, intimate partners will know little of each other's expertise and will form a fairly inefficient and redundant system of memory. However, over time, a husband comes to know that it is his wife who best notes, keeps track of, and remembers the details of their finances. Perhaps a wife comes to entrust the details of the children's schedules to her husband, who has always been good with dates and times. In entrusting various domains of information to a particular partner, each person takes advantage of the other's expertise and allows themselves to focus mental energy (which is certainly finite) on other matters of attention and memory.[195] This means that while the partnership lasts transactive memory enhances the flourishing of each partner. However, each partner comes to depend on the expertise of the other. If enough time passes this dependence often results

193 By rich here, I just mean that the system as a whole can hold more retrievable (and thus useful) information as a result of having certain members specialize in remembering (or remembering the location of) various domains of information. See Wegner, "Transactive Memory: A Contemporary Analysis of the Group Mind" 197-198 for its benefits for individuals.

194 See Wegner, "Transactive Memory: A Contemporary Analysis of the Group Mind", pp. 192-193, 199-200.

195 Some data suggests that couples who agree on who knows more about a particular area in their relationship were generally more satisfied than other couples who disagreed (Wegner, Guiliano, & Hertel, 1985).

in an atrophy in a partner's ability to attend to and remember certain domains of information.[196] Furthermore, areas of information and expertise that once may have been important may now be irrelevant in the absence of one’s partner and the unique joint-life that had been developed. Thus, transactive memory is a phenomenon that shows quite dramatically that partners come to constitute each other's flourishing over time (one’s activity of remembering is increasingly carried out by one’s partner), but it is also a phenomenon that results in the harm of a person when their partner is removed.

Externalized Self-Regulation:[197] Self-regulation, more commonly referred to as self-control, has been well studied by experimental psychologists. Self-regulation is the capacity we have to regulate our behavior; we use it to avoid eating that second piece of pie and in order to behave well in the presence of an important, yet annoying client. This notion is not new, and has been discussed in the west at least as far back as Socrates’ arguments concerning the possibility of *akrasia* (weak will). What *is* new, and has been shown in recent psychological research, is that self-regulation is a finite resource; it can be depleted and replenished.[198] Self-regulation is like a muscle. When you use it, it gets tired. Use it enough and it will cease to function at normal levels, or altogether. Allow it

196 Wegner, “Transactive Memory: A Contemporary Analysis of the Group Mind”, p. 199.

197 Unlike memory, self-regulation appears to be merely instrumental, though very important. That is, self-regulation is eudaimonistically valuable because it enables one to do other activities well. Hence, coming to share this capacity substantially involves you with another. Moreover, this involvement may make possible other activities that do enmesh you with a significant other, however, externalized self-regulation does not itself constitute an instance of enmeshment. Although, one could make the case that because the activity itself involves the exercise of self-regulation, self-regulation is part of the activity and hence potentially subject to enmeshement.

198 See especially, Muraven, M., Tice, D.M., & Baumeister, R.F., “Self-control as limited resource: Regulatory depletion patterns.” and Gailliot, Baumeister, et al. “Self-Control Relies on Glucose as a Limited Energy Resource: Willpower is More than a Metaphor.” Also, one surprising thing that depletes self-regulation is having to make decisions, even fairly low-stakes decisions, like what sort of sandwich to order. For more on this phenomenon see Vohs, Baumeister, et. al., “Making Choices Impairs Subsequent Self-Control: A Limited-Resource Account of Decision Making, Self-Regulation, and Active Initiative.”

to rest and it will recover. Also, like a muscle, self-regulation can become stronger or weaker. It can strengthen if it is used regularly in taxing situations and it can weaken if one does not use it, either because one avoids relevant situations or fails to exercise self-control when it is called for. All of this was anticipated by ancient virtue ethicists like Aristotle, who stressed the importance of virtue and vice habituation.

There is one further important point concerning self-regulation: it is highly predictive of successful outcomes in life.[199] In fact, self-regulation has been shown in some studies to be even more important than IQ or intelligence level in such predictions.[200] However, unlike IQ/intelligence, self-regulation is quite malleable. The prospects of increasing one's IQ are slight, but self-regulation is more like a muscle. It can be substantially developed over time. Hence, something that is important for future success (and arguably for flourishing) is also something that one can actively develop. Self-regulation also happens to be something that we often develop and share with others.

Just as we can externalize our memory, we can also externalize our self-regulation. One way we might do this is to throw the pie in the trash (or give it to a neighbor) at a time when we are not hungry. Suppose we wanted to keep from speaking during a movie; we might (partially) externalize our self-regulation by telling those around us to not engage us in conversation. In a 2011 paper, Fitzsimmons and Finkel describe the possibility of externalizing one's self-regulation in a transactive system, not unlike transactive memory; they write:

199 See for example Tangney, J.P., Baumeister, R.F., & Boone, A.L. "High self-control predicts good adjustment, less pathology, better grades, and interpersonal success." This too is anticipated in ancient virtue ethics.

200 See for example, Angela L. Duckworth and Martin E.P. Seligman "Self-Discipline Outdoes IQ in Predicting Academic Performance of Adolescents."

> " . . . we suggest partners may develop shared self-regulatory systems, or transactive-self-control, relying on each other for help with self-control. Individuals who rely on their romantic partner for help with self-control in one area may be able to conserve valuable resources for other goal pursuits. If so, such a shared self-regulatory system . . . could ultimately benefit partners if it allowed them to best make use of their limited self-control resources."[201]

Studies have shown (and no doubt our experience has borne out) that exercising self-regulation is: (a) depleting and (b) important for securing a wide array of good outcomes. It is easy to imagine how we might conserve this finite resource by externalizing it, in particular through a transactive self-regulation network. Such an externalization might be particularly potent for conserving this important resource, without thereby giving up the overall benefits of regulating one's behavior.[202] So it looks as if we have identified another instance of substantial involvement via a shared capacity. This form of involvement is in general beneficial, but in the absence of the relevant partner it will likely become harmful.

Like transactive memory, transactive self-regulation is something that is beneficial as long as the transactive network of relationships is extant. However, once this network is taken away, the individual might easily be worse off than he would have been had he never had the network in the first place. This is a general phenomenon of enmeshment that we will address below. Finally, clearly there are ways that both of these capacities can be externalized without involving other people at all. I can keep a calendar to remember the days and times of important appointments. I can put a timed lock on my refrigerator to avoid midnight snacks. However, a calendar and a lock are blunt instruments and will not spontaneously adapt to my changing needs, desires, and

201 Fitzsimons & Finkel "Outsourcing Self-Regulation", p. 374.

202 The psychological literature on this is young; it will be interesting to see if the transactive self-regulation hypothesis bears fruit in subsequent experiments.

capacities. They have no insight into who I am, and, more importantly, they do not care if I live or die, flourish or wither. Nor do I care about their opinion of me or if I break relationship with them. People in relatively healthy relationships do have a keen insight into who a given person is. People can develop a genuine care for another's good and opinion. This makes people a uniquely potent option for the externalization of important capacities, and hence, a uniquely potent element of one's flourishing.

D. Autonomy Competence and the Relational Self

Feminist philosophers, including Diana T. Meyers, often highlight the importance of the relational self in forming an adequate conception of selfhood. For Meyers the relational self,

> "is the interpersonally bonded self . . . with lasting emotional attachments to others, people share in one another's joys and sorrows, give and receive care, and, generally, profit from the many rewards and cope with the many aggravations . . . These relationships are sources of identity, for people become committed to their intimates and to others whom they care about, and these commitments become integral to their psychic economies."[203]

This conception of the relational self is quite similar to what I have been describing (and will describe) in this chapter concerning how a person becomes involved with others. Here I want to highlight the role of the relational self in the exercise of one's own autonomy.

Elsewhere in the same work Meyers catalogues what she terms "autonomy competencies" associated with the relational self.[204] That is, the self in relation is able to develop, exercise, and maintain various competencies critical for the exercise of autonomous agency. Friends bolster one's resolve and encourage perseverance in the face

203 Meyers, *Being Yourself*, p. 52.
204 Ibid, pp. 59-60.

of setback. Others' "criticism, reassurance and advice" also provides an occasion for the agent in question to exercise discernment and autonomously discriminate the nature of their receptivity to others. Others provide new ways of viewing the world and also an opportunity to exercise one's own judgment in dialogue. In this way others close enough to enter into such a dialogue, provide an invaluable lab in which one forges ahead with autonomous action and self-creation.

E. Transference and The Relational Self[205]

Increasingly researchers in social psychology are producing findings that highlight the interpersonal nature of the self. Associated theories of the self stress the participation of others (especially close relations) in the formation, constitution, and maintenance of the self. This mass of work has led Andersen & Chen in a 2002 article, and Anderson & Thorpe in a follow up 2009 paper, to refer to the self as "inherently interpersonal". I will now briefly summarize Anderson & Chen (and Thorpe), whose work integrates findings in social psychology for the past fifty years. Finally, I will explain the relevance of this work for my account.

Social psychologists have long accepted that humans have a fundamental need for connection and a drive to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This drives individuals to seek out and form multiple significant other relationships (Andersen and Chen, 2002). Above I referred extensively to the power of a common history and its attendant

205 Though I will cite multiple studies and authors in this section, I will be drawing upon two articles that summarize a vast literature in social psychology that emphasizes an interpersonal model of the self. Primarily I will be drawing upon Anderson and Chen, "The Relational Self: An Interpersonal Social Cognitive Theory", (henceforth Andersen and Chen); secondarily I will draw upon a later article that builds upon the first: Anderson and Thorpe "An If-Then theory of Personality: Significant others and the relational self", (henceforth Andersen & Thorpe).

improvisation to cultivate certain ways of being and doing with one's significant other. Andersen, Chen, Thorpe, and others have theorized that these ways of being and doing are stored by individuals as structures of self-knowledge of the form, "in this sort of context I am like this, or behave like this (or adopt this end or etc. . .)"[206] Then, when the relevant context arises the agent in question will draw upon this stored self-knowledge, view themselves accordingly, and act accordingly (at least to some extent). 'Context' here is fairly broad and vague, and only certain contextual cues and triggers have been experimentally tested. The general idea, however, is that through a triggering cue of the immediate situation "the self is constructed anew as a function of the current context."[207] Andersen and Chen refer to this as the "activation of relational selves in transference".[208] Close relationships, through a shared history, develop certain self-conceptions (including ways of doing and being in the world) and these become activated in contexts where the significant other is absent, but which resembles the relevant context. In this way significant others "constitute a kind of interpersonal substrate of personality. This substrate is interpersonal because it reflects the different selves one has in relation to significant others. . . [including] the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral responses that emerge in relations with the relevant significant other"[209] Elsewhere in the paper Andersen and Chen summarize things this way:

> "Our concept of the relational self assumes that each of these significant others is linked to the self, with each linkage capturing relatively unique aspects of the self one is in relation to this significant other. The self is thus entangled, shaped in part by ties with significant others, whether these individuals are present physically or only symbolically (e.g., Baldwin, Carrell, & Lopez,

206 This is my own paraphrase of the sort of thing Andersen & Chen have in mind; see p. 623.
207 Andersen & Chen, p. 623, where they cite (Read, Vanman, & Miller, 1997; E.R. Smith, 1996).
208 Ibid., p. 623.
209 Ibid.,, p. 628.

> 1990). One’s sense of self, including thoughts, feelings, motives, and self-regulatory strategies, may thus vary as a function of relations with significant others. Although we acknowledge that many aspects of the self do not implicate any such relations, we suggest that the relations linked to the self carry great importance for each individual”[210]

My summary of this research has been necessarily brief, but I think I have said enough to show the relevance of this work for the topic of this chapter. First, this research contributes to my general claim that it is increasingly difficult to separate out elements of one’s own personality from that of a significant other and her influence. More to the point, the phenomenon of transference, and the relational selves it implies, represents yet another way in which a significant other (which includes close friends in this literature) can influence one’s functioning (and flourishing), for good or ill, even in a context where she is absent. For example, when disagreeing with someone the context might trigger a self-conception and pattern of argument long since improvised with one’s husband. Though the psychological research has only tested a handful of contexts and related ways of being and doing, it is easy to imagine these sorts of findings generalizing to all sorts of important activities. Andersen & Thorpe themselves point out the possibility of many effects (both negative and positive) of transference and relational selves including the possibility to gain increased empathy (169). Hence, this research points to another way we might think about close relationships: as labs in which we learn to conduct ourselves in the world at large.

Before I move on I should mention two cautions/qualifications. First, this effect is likely pervasive, but Andersen and Chen (and Thorpe) certainly do not mean to imply that this is the only way to understand the self, or that the self is nothing but a loose

210 Ibid., p. 619.

accumulation of relational structures applied out of the original context. Of course other factors will come to bear on the construction and expression of the self in a given context, including (for example) one's important commitments and values. Second, the effects this research highlight are far from automatic and should be thought of as coming in degrees. It is not as if some odd contextual cue transports me to my latest fight with my wife and I reenact every conversational idiosyncrasy we have jointly improvised over the past ten years. Surely, even if I have learned certain ways of being and doing (and conceiving of myself) in relationship with my wife, I still recognize a significant difference between activities and contexts that include my wife and those that do not, and I can adjust accordingly.

F. Caring for the Good of the Other

As is apparent from the preceding, some forms of enmeshment factor into or intensify others. A shared history, for instance, is involved with several forms of enmeshment. Such a history makes the transference of relational selves to new related contexts possible. A relationship of transactive self-regulation may also be a vehicle to jointly adopt and develop certain values, strengthening one's commitment to them by habituating it through repeatedly living by them (a process that is often fraught with self-regulatory challenges). Likewise, caring for the good of one's intimate partner is a form of enmeshment that makes contact with others.

In a previous section I highlighted the possibility of externalizing one's self-regulation. One example of this might involve the encouragement and guidance of an intimate partner (a wife) in relation to her alcoholic husband; he may externalize to her

some of the self-regulating effort involved in staying sober. Beyond particular externalizations, the alcoholic's wife may be a powerful source of self-regulation because he cares for her good. He knows he gets violent when he drinks, and he could not live with himself if he physically abused her. Drinking looks less like a live option because it's likely consequence is so distasteful and this likely consequence is so distasteful because he genuinely cares for the good of his wife. Thus, caring for the good of one's intimate partner can bolster her role in a particular self-regulation externalization. Caring for the good of one's partner also makes contact with the development of goals, values, and projects. I might have little desire to cultivate a garden, but I care for my wife and know that she would greatly enjoy such an activity. As a result I begin gardening with her. But in the process of cultivating a garden I may become keenly aware of the value of gardening. I might come to enjoy being involved with some of my food and contributing to its growth.

In committing to a long-term intimate partner (or a close friendship) one commits to sharing a life with another, and to pursuing one's partner's good. The longer one shares a life the more one is apt to come to recognize just what the good of one's partner entails. In addition, I contend that one is also apt to increasingly come to recognize what is good *about* a partner's flourishing; in relatively healthy relationships, one will come to recognize the value of this flourishing itself. As one recognizes this unique value, one comes to see the pursuit and maintenance of a partner's flourishing as worthwhile and desirable in itself.

Of course, this recognition is made easier because a partner's good is increasingly constitutive of one's own good. Indeed, as the process of enmeshment persists, and a shared history is amassed, it will become increasingly difficult to separate one's own good from the good of one's partner. This is a fairly common idea, captured in phrases like, "If she's happy I'm happy" and "If he's having a bad day, then I'm having a bad day." Coming to care more about the good of one's partner is a strong source of enmeshment; it becomes the case that a necessary component of one's flourishing is the flourishing of one's partner (or at least not his withering). Likewise, it becomes the case that one is unlikely to be completely miserable, if things are going relatively well for one's partner. This is because the flourishing and preservation of that for which one greatly values and cares is a plausible source of one's own flourishing. Conversely, the destruction and degradation of that which one deeply cares for is a plausible source of harm to oneself. How can I be well if that which I value most is being torn down before my eyes? How could I fail to be happy (or at least not miserable) when that about which I care most, and with which I am in intimate contact, is prospering. In brief: coming to care, and care deeply, for the good of one's close friend or intimate partner, is a potent mechanism whereby his flourishing comes to partially constitute one's own.

VI. What About Relational Perversion?

Here I need to add to my earlier proleptic note and admit that most structures of enmeshment can be perverted to promote harm rather than flourishing. A dark conversational history can make it nearly impossible to reconcile or hear a loved one with

fresh ears. A close relation can help inculcate anti-social values of racism and grossly inaccurate ways of viewing the world. Instead of bolstering one's resolve friends can weaken one's fortitude as agents of temptation and apathy. What looks like an efficient division of labor in a transactive memory system might just be a way to pigeon-hole an employee or a spouse in an unwanted and undervalued role. The list of potential relational perversions is long.

This is a challenge distinct from, but related to, the fragility worry I will detail in the next section. The strength of my response here will depend on how I respond to that challenge at the end of this chapter and how I address the challenge of the immoralist in the next. For the moment I will give two brief replies. First, the structures of enmeshment that I have identified are rarely perfectly executed, but they are also rarely perfectly perverted. The majority are probably mixed and I contend that the mix usually approximates some form of benefit to the parties involved. Second, when one seeks the goods involved in the functioning of these structures one usually does so by pursuing a decent relationship. Of course a relationship may fall short of decency, but that seems like a reasonable risk to take. Moreover, one might think that attempting a decent relationship in good faith often rules out some of the more harmful perversions. However, some potential harms do deserve further consideration; in particular, I need to contend with the unique fragility of intimate relationships.

VII. Enmeshment or Entanglement?: Intimate Relationships and Fragility

I think it is an overall good thing to become thoroughly enmeshed with an intimate partner (and/or friend) assuming a decently healthy relationship; above I have begun indicating why this is the case. I also gave some brief indication of potential harms. To become enmeshed means that, to a certain degree, one's prospects for flourishing rise and fall with the flourishing of that with which one is enmeshed. This is a matter of degree. The longer a particular commitment goes on, and the more thoroughly one becomes enmeshed, the more likely it is that more of one's life and identity is organized around a particular entity; hence, it is more harmful to become un-enmeshed.[211] This is especially the case for close friends and intimate partners. When one's partner begins to wither, one's own flourishing will begin to suffer. Perhaps you and your wife have entered into the joint project of raising children or running a business. If your wife undergoes debilitating chemotherapy, then the entirety of the work involved with these projects could fall to you. Important and valued projects, around which you have organized much of your life, may begin to suffer, along with your own well-being.

Consider the two sorts of externalization of capacities mentioned above. Perhaps your longtime partner has always taken care of the finances. If your partner suffers a stroke that leaves her unable to do all but the simplest math, then suddenly it is you that will need to be the financial expert and to deal with an important (yet unfamiliar) domain. You may miss payments, or undergo increased stress in your attempt to keep track of all

211 This of course assumes that the enmeshment is good for oneself in the first place.

of the family's finances.[212] Likewise, perhaps the same partner kept you accountable to exercise regularly by accompanying you to the gym; you had externalized this bit of self-regulation in her. Her encouragement and potential disappointment made skipping the gym less of a live option. However, the stroke dissolves this externalization. In both of these cases (and the cases above) it is not simply that something good in one's life is now absent; one has come to depend on a significant other such that a particular capacity has atrophied or one has entered into a project that is ill-advised in the partner's absence. In short, the objector's claim is that given one's partner's eventual incapacity or absence, you would have been better off if you had not become involved and enmeshed in the first place. This is most evident when considering coming to care for the good of one's partner.

In coming to care for the good of one's partner, one implicitly involves oneself with anything that will detract from or advance that good. It is not simply that you value the role that your partner plays in important joint activities and shared capacities; rather, one comes to value one's partner's good as an end-in-itself. If one values a partner for her role in activity X, then it will only be those harms that interfere with her ability to fill this role that will end up impinging on one's own flourishing. However, if one also values one's partner's good simpliciter, then anything that detracts from that good will detract from one's own flourishing. Hence, coming to value the flourishing of one's partner intrinsically, opens one up to a wide array of harms.

212 One might easily imagine more extreme examples.

It is facts like these that motivate a particular objection to my claim that enmeshments with intimate partners are an overall good for oneself. In light of the potential harm some may prefer to classify close relationships as pernicious entanglements to be avoided rather than enriching enmeshments to be ardently sought. The risk of harm is simply too great, so it is better to remain un-entangled. The case for this can be made stronger by considering some unique characteristics of intimate partners (and close friends) qua potential objects of commitment.

A. Fragility

Intimate partners are fragile; they are humans with bodies subject to disease and death. As such their capacity to fulfill instrumental roles, or simply avoid harms in general, is always open to the vicissitudes of a dangerous world. It is also the case that intimate partners age. As a result they may come to no longer fulfill important roles later in life. A partner's aging brings with it increased vulnerability to harms; if the partner is valued intrinsically, these will almost always translate as a sort of harm to oneself. Finally, all intimate partnerships end, often in death. Even the best sort of relationship, in which intimate partners maintain a warm commitment, will not escape the harm of an abrupt end.[213] Thus, even on the best scenario each member of such a long-term relationship will likely be ripped from their partner one day, left with all the harms of un-enmeshment. The best-case scenario involves a very long relationship, where the surviving partner is harmed substantially by the other's death.

213 There is one (relatively rare) alternative end, in which neither partner will experience the harm of losing the other to death: both partners die instantaneously (or very close together).

B. Non-Fungibility

The longer intimate partnerships continue, the more likely it is that each partner becomes an increasingly non-fungible part of the relational whole. Sharing a life with a long-term partner involves improvising unique ways of doing things and entering into projects (many of them long-term) that are uniquely suited to the values and capacities which the partners had at first and also the ones they jointly developed.[214]

C. ***Autonomy and Subjectivity***

I have not yet mentioned one substantial source of potential harm: the autonomy and subjectivity of one's intimate partner. A human is not a robot, an institution, a dumb animal, a natural landscape, or an abstract idea. One's partner is an individual human being with a unique perspective and difficult-to-predict motivations/intentions. As such, unless one enters into a coercive relationship, one always has to be open to the possibility that one's partner may in freedom decide to leave the partnership. Or perhaps, one's partner changes so significantly he can no longer fulfill important roles. Humans are fickle and subject to poor judgement and malicious motives. Someone may decide to do something hurtful or inadvertently hurt their partner. Being married is not like enjoying the charms of a predictable plant, or a pliable animal.

Furthermore, living a joint life means subjecting oneself, and most of one's life, to the free subjectivity of another. This comes along with a host of desires, needs, expectations, values, and judgments, many of which one may not initially (or ever) share. If I do not get married then I am free to live where I want, eat fast food as often as I like,

214 See the "Shared History" section above.

drink as much as I wish, and keep the house as I see fit, without the constraint of another's projects upon my own. The presence of another opinionated person brings with it the constant possibility of conflict. Just think of some of the petty fights that you have overheard (or have had yourself). These fights occur despite each partner being well-adjusted. A pure solipsist could pretend that his own opinion was all that mattered. Perhaps an extreme hermit could also live this way. But most of us live in community, and so we have to care about what others think. Yet, if we hold people at arm's length, avoiding close relationships (including friendships), we might be able to approximate solipsism. However, most of us do not do this and so our lives are to a certain degree subject to the will and desires of another person; being separate from our own, these desires on occasion prove to be extremely inconvenient, and perhaps even harmful.

Persons in intimate relation, who truly share a life, must constantly come to terms with a distinct subject with a unique set of perspectives on the world. For the isolated subject there are no other projects but his own; there are no other meanings or values but his own. The only resistance to his projects is the resistance of an inanimate (and unfree) nature (which makes no demands and is highly predictable). Such a subject does not have to account for the freedom of others who could potentially thwart his projects, misunderstand his intentions, and become angry or hurt through such misunderstandings. You could characterize him as un-impeded.[215]

All of these factors above have the common theme of highlighting the vulnerability and volatility of a human being. Humans are changeable and easily harmed.

215 Such solitariness of course is relative, not absolute. We are talking about a person who lives alone and is not "entangled" with an intimate partner; we are not talking about a hermit.

We have already seen that all commitments involve some risk. But my objector will say that committing to a human in such a way that one becomes thoroughly involved and enmeshed is to take too big of a risk. If one commits to gardening, one will be able to go on developing a garden; even after a drought plants can merely be replaced, or one can move to a more hospitable climate. Unlike intimate partners, plants are highly fungible; there is nothing irreplaceably special about *this* plot of flowers. Or one could center one's whole life around an institution that has existed for hundreds (or thousands) of years and is not likely to wither away in one's lifetime. This is the core of the worry. In light of how vulnerable and changeable humans are, is it really prudent to allow any one (non-fungible, frail, and highly changeable) human to become a crucial constituent of one's own flourishing? Isn't such an enmeshment really just an all-too-likely-pernicious entanglement? As I will argue in the next section, to avoid enmeshment with others is not really to secure flourishing by avoiding entanglements, so much as it is to avoid the possibility of flourishing altogether. You can live without close friends, but such a life will be deficient.[216]

VIII. The Other as Enrichment: The Fruitful Tension of the Demands of the Other

I have already telegraphed part of my response to the entanglement worry. Even if we limit ourselves to merely prudential concerns, pursuing the sorts of relationships that result in thorough enmeshment is the best strategy for securing one's own flourishing.

[216] The extent of the deficiency (and if it passes over into deformity) will depend on the extent that one keeps friends at arm's-length (or avoids making friends altogether). I mention friends here instead of intimate partners because I do not want to imply that one cannot have a full and flourishing life without a romantic partner. However, I do want to imply this if one lacks both an intimate partner and close friends. Such a life would be lacking a highly characteristic (if not necessary) element of human flourishing.

Despite being fragile and vulnerable to luck, these relationships and the goods that they constitute (and secure) are much of what makes a life go well. You can avoid the risk that comes with enmeshment to other persons but to avoid this risk is to avoid the possibility of flourishing altogether.

A. One Must Be Committed, Why Not to Another?

In the previous chapter I discussed the possibility of a person utterly without commitments, or less extremely, a person with only one commitment: a commitment to carry out her own intentions. I showed how such a person would end up lacking any cohesive agency and would ultimately need to bring on board all sorts of commitments in order to carry out intentions and organize agency over time (planning) and at a time (prioritizing in the moment). Humans need to be about something other than themselves so as to function decently and have a fully human identity. There is a great plurality of possibilities for commitments that could result in a flourishing life. Even if a self cannot choose not to be committed (or to be committed only to oneself), this does not mean that one needs to be committed to other people. There are many less volatile and fragile things with which one can become invested. If we have to *be about* something external, why choose to be about humans? Here I want to strengthen the case that, as objects of commitment, humans are uniquely potent for maintaining and advancing eudaimonia. So if one must be committed to something other than oneself, why not another person?

B. Humans Are Uniquely Enriching Objects of Commitment

Other people are uniquely enriching objects of commitment. Becoming thoroughly enmeshed with an intimate partner or close friend opens a variety of

possibilities in the life of the one committed. For the relatively un-enmeshed subject, in his own home and in most personal projects, he is without entanglement. You could characterize such a solitary subject as (relatively) unimpeded by the projects, values, judgments, and needs of others. He does not have to care much about the freedom of others as long as he keeps his distance. On the other hand, there is an alternate description of our hypothetical un-enmeshed subject. Such an isolated subject can see the world only from his own point of view. He is not confronted (at least not as vividly and pervasively) with the possibility of other ends, instrumentalities, values or meanings. He cannot enter into joint projects started by others, or start projects himself that are more than merely solitary endeavors. His errors must remain uncorrected and his ill-advised projects unimpeded.[217] His projects are without an intimate audience to appreciate them. There is no one to offer advice informed by intimate contact. Such a subject is condemned to be utterly un-impeded and unlimited by the freedom of another. Is such a solitary subject the pinnacle of freedom, or is such a person the pinnacle of un-freedom, hopelessly trapped within himself?

This is a bit of an exaggeration. Even if one avoids becoming enmeshed with an intimate partner or a close friend, one could still perhaps gain some of these benefits, to some degree, while holding people at arm's length. But it is my contention that these benefits gained "at arm's length" are but pale shadows of what could be enjoyed through more thorough enmeshments. Improvised activities developed through a shared history gain a depth and practiced competency that make them both uniquely enjoyable and

217 The world sometimes provides plenty of impediment to ill-advised projects. However, the world often does this in a rather brutal way, when it is far too late to salvage one's efforts and resources. An intimate partner often provides a form of impediment that is much more conducive to one's flourishing.

increasingly effortless. Holding another person at arm's length will not allow such rich improvisation.

Moreover, an intimate partner offers a unique perspective on the world. This is a perspective that one cannot come to fully appreciate while keeping someone at arm's length. One does not gain the full benefit of a unique perspective without inhabiting it to some degree; and this is accomplished via structures of enmeshment. One comes to care about what an intimate partner thinks and appreciate her unique perspective on the world. Of course, it is usually only the case with intimate partners and close friends that one has extensive access to such a perspective. Submitting substantial portions of one's life to another's appraisal, to benefit from their perspective, characteristically occurs within enmeshing relationships. Moreover, one's intimate partner comes to understand the unique life-goals, values, and challenges that one has. This unique background knowledge informs a partner's appraisal. Hence, an intimate partner (or close friend) will usually be in the best position to advise one's conduct.

This other perspective of an intimate partner[218] has the potential to alert one to other values in the world, thereby populating one's world with an increasingly rich myriad of meanings. Recall my example above of my wife alerting me to the value of avoiding factory farmed meat. I would have been less apt to view meat in the relevant ways if this perspective was not my wife's. I have come to care about what my wife thinks, and so I seriously entertain her unpleasant revelations concerning meat. As a result I have changed my meat-eating practices and brought a significant portion of my

218 Note: While I continue to refer to an "intimate partner" most of these points apply also to close friends.

practical life into greater integration with other values (i.e., values concerning animal cruelty, or environmental sustainability). Hence, it is not only that an intimate partner can reveal values, she can also help one to better integrate the values one already has. A partner can help one to continue into the future as a more cohesive and well-integrated agent, bringing ever increasing amounts of one's practical life into this well-integrated whole. Such a benefit could only come from someone who has frequent, long term, and in-depth contact with the majority of one's practical life. Such a benefit comes in the context of enmeshment.

The considerations of the last few paragraphs bring up perhaps the most potent reason why becoming enmeshed with an intimate partner advances one's own flourishing. An intimate partner is someone who (a) comes to increasingly desire and pursue one's own good as an end in itself and (b) comes to know what your good is through continued intimate contact and a jointly improvised shared history. So, as one becomes enmeshed with an intimate partner, a relationship is cultivated with a person who increasingly gains in potential to benefit you (at least in a reasonably decent relationship). An intimate partner comes to share your values and care about your good.[219] He learns the details of what this good involves in ever greater refinement and so becomes evermore capable of realizing these details. This is true in part because an intimate partner is involved in an ever larger portion of one's practical life. Hence, they are in a position to make a substantial impact on almost any area once a sufficient shared history has developed.

219 Again this assumes a reasonably decent relationship.

Beyond these considerations, there are the shared capacities that a significant other makes possible. Externalizing memory or self-regulation allows oneself to focus energy that would be otherwise occupied on other important pursuits. Networks of transactive memory and self-regulation allow an agent to multiply her capacity for both.[220]

Finally, I want to draw attention to a benefit that an intimate partner provides that is both more subtle, and also generalizable well beyond intimate partners (extending even to distant strangers); although, as with other benefits, intimate partners and close friends are in a uniquely good position to provide it. That is, the good of one's intimate partner serves as the object of a worthwhile pursuit. Moreover, this is a pursuit that one is uniquely capable of carrying out. The longer a relationship continues, the more one of the partners is the one person in existence who is best equipped to achieve the substantial good associated with this worthwhile pursuit. As one continues to pursue this end (as is the case with most long-term ends) more and more of one's practical life and identity is organized around it. The worthwhile end is the flourishing of another human being. In particular, I am focusing on the good of the flourishing of one's partner. The flourishing of other humans is a highly plausible candidate for a worthwhile pursuit. I have already argued that as practical agents humans must be about something; we must be committed to something external to ourselves. If this is the case then we might as well be committed to something worthwhile, as opposed to more superficial ends. Moreover, the commitments that are the most central to our practical identities, ostensibly, should be

220 Most of this can easily be gleaned from material above and would be repetitive here if repeated. Hence, I will avoid elaborating further on the benefits of these shared capacities.

worthwhile activities that secure substantial goods. I contend that the flourishing of other human beings is one of the most (if not *the* most) plausible candidate for such a pursuit.

Humans represent a worthwhile pursuit; but the worthwhileness becomes especially vivid in the case of one's intimate partner. The process of developing a shared life involves coming to increasingly desire the good of that intimate partner. And part of what leads to this increased desire and care, is that through a shared history, one comes to increasingly appreciate just what is uniquely good about the flourishing of an intimate partner. This comes about due to the mechanisms discussed above and those involving dialectical activities. As an enmeshed partner, one also becomes increasingly capable of advancing this particularly vivid worthwhile good (through transformation in the carrying out of one's commitments). The foregoing description highlights the constituent elements of eudaimonia. Aristotle identified excellent activities, in which one's traits were actualized, as the components of a flourishing human life. It is pleasurable and substantially fulfilling when we are in the unique position to do some substantial good by putting our excellences into action. Alternatively described, humans want to express their practical identity in the world through the pursuit of worthwhile ends.

There is perhaps no pursuit that brings these elements into better integration than the pursuit of the good of humans in close relation to oneself. In pursuing the good of one's partner one is exercising traits and capacities uniquely habituated and improvised over a shared history. The longer the shared history, the more of oneself that will be involved in this pursuit. At the height of such efforts one (a) exercises one's unique capacities and knowledge as an intimate partner, involving and expressing much of

oneself in the effort, (b) pursues that which one cares about greatly or most, (c) pursues a good (besides one's own), which is closest to one's own good and (d) if successful, one achieves a substantial good that is the end of a worthwhile pursuit, which organizes much of one's life and constitutes much of one's own good.

Chapter 4

The Ethics of Flourishing Together and the Challenge of Immoralism

"The reason why it seems to some people so impossibly difficult to show that justice is more profitable than injustice is that they consider in isolation particular just acts. It is perfectly true that if a man is just it follows that he will be prepared, in the event of very evil circumstances, even to face death rather than to act unjustly--for instance, in getting an innocent man convicted of a crime of which he has been accused. For him it turns out that his justice brings disaster upon him, and yet like anyone else he has good reason to be a just and not unjust man. He could not have it both ways and while possessing the virtue of justice hold himself ready to be unjust should any great advantage accrue. The man who has the virtue of justice is not ready to do certain things, and if he is too easily tempted we shall say that he was ready after all."

(Philippa Foot)[221]

"Our self-interest then as rational, social animals is fundamentally both independent and interdependent, both a matter of our independent interactions with the world, and a matter of our shared life with others."

(Neera Badhwar)[222]

I. Introduction: The Challenge of the Immoralist

In his *Republic* Plato is concerned (among other things) with showing that justice is a human excellence. Being a human excellence implies that justice is admirable or fine, but it also indicates advantage for the just person. That is, justice is good, not only for those who find themselves in relation to the just (or the *polis* more generally), but also for the just person himself. In book I, this view is opposed by the sophist Thrasymachus, who recognizes the benefits of justice for others, but denies that it is to the advantage of the just person himself. Thrasymachus agrees that possession of an excellence is to one's

221 "Moral beliefs" in *Virtues and Vices*, p. 129.
222 "Self-Interest and Virtue," p. 230.

advantage; however, he identifies the life of injustice (not justice) as advantageous, and praises this life as excellent.[223] For Thrasymachus, the just life is one of artificial constraint on the pursuit of one's interests; if one can appear just while executing injustice for personal gain, then this is the best sort of life. Thus, for Thrasymachus, human excellence, or the good life, comes apart (in dramatic fashion) from a life that benefits others, or the ethical life more generally. This contention is an early and prominent instance of the more general challenge posed by the immoralist. The immoralist is someone who rejects the moral life because it is unattractive or somehow lesser than some other life not so constrained; often this other life is couched in terms of self-interest.

In the history of philosophical ethics there have been two general responses to the challenge of immoralism. Plato (and Socrates) stands at the head of a tradition of eudaimonists who answer the immoralist by arguing that the ethical life is not only admirable, but is also to one's advantage. The *eudaimon* life is a life of ethical virtue; admirability, ethical behavior, and flourishing come together naturally (not merely as an occasional happy coincidence).[224] A second tradition of response, that I shall term 'moralism', views the approach of eudaimonism as profoundly wrongheaded, poisoning morality (or confusing it) with concerns of self-interest.[225] This alternate approach

223 344c-d, 348d-e.

224 The extent to which they come together is of course a point of debate, even if one stays within ancient Greek views. Whereas the Stoics thought no harm could come to a virtuous man, and Plato has Socrates say similar things, Aristotle allows a much larger role for luck in the life of the virtuous. For an excellent treatment of this continuum among the Greeks see Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*.

225 An example of this criticism can be found in Pritchard's classic paper "Does Moral philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" To paraphrase Pritchard: enticing the immoralist with reference to his own benefit does not

separates the moral good from the human good; it maintains that the moral life often does not pay, and when it does, this state of affairs is fairly contingent.[226] Thus, one must do one's duty even if it is to one's ultimate detriment. If the immoralist is to be convinced at all, one will have to somehow convince him of the rational inconsistency of his position, or that morality is somehow its own reward. Moralism is often viewed as more purely moral (In Kantian terms, non-heteronomous), but it relinquishes much in the way of motivational potency by unhitching the moral life from the good life.

The eudaimonist response to the immoralist has clear strengths over its rival. In particular, the eudaimonist can appeal to a pervasive and powerful motive in order to bring the immoralist around: self-interest. Moreover, the moralist response has a clear weakness; in enjoining moral behavior, it may often enjoin that which contradicts rational self-interest, or prudential concern for one's own good. Moralists appeal to reasons unconnected with self-interest; one's own good is simply beside the point. Thus moralism leaves open the possibility of frequent and serious conflict within practical reason. Even if the immoralist admits that moralist reasons have some force, he is free to nonetheless appeal to another realm of reasons left untouched by the moralist: the realm of self-

convince him that he "ought" to do anything; rather, it convinces him only that it turns out, upon reflection, that he really *wants* to do what he *ought* to do. In other words, we normally think that the moral person, or the person who executes a genuinely moral act, does it not for some personal advantage, but rather because it is somehow morally right (or perhaps that the end sought is morally good, or the character evinced in such an action is excellent in some way). On Pritchard's view, to adopt the eudaimonist approach to morality is to secure commitment to moral theory by replacing it with something that is no longer distinctively moral.

226 Kant is a prime representative here. Having identified the highly contingent nature of the *summum bonum* (happiness in proportion to virtue) in this world, Kant posits God and an immortal soul as necessary for the achievement of it in an afterlife. Though such concepts are beyond theoretical knowledge, it is hope in the possibility of an afterlife where virtue finally pays, that keeps one from practical despair in this one.

interest. The real genius of eudaimonism is to (in a variety of ways) bring these two realms of reasons into close accord.

It is my object in this chapter to bolster the eudaimonist tradition of response to the immoralist by utilizing my account of human involvement/enmeshment and other features of an Ethics of Flourishing Together. In sections III and IV, I will highlight key features of this form of eudaimonism and their ethical implications. First, we need to get clear on what sort of immoralist is (and is not) the object of our focus.

II. With What Sort of Immoralist are we Concerned?

Above I described the immoralist as someone who rejects the moral life because such a life is found to be lacking in some way. Such people often view virtues, not as excellences, but as artificial constraints, keeping them from doing and achieving what will satisfy their self-interested desires and fulfill them personally. Here I want to expand on this description and to make clear just what sort of challenge such a figure presents to the champions of morality. First, I will identify some postures of ethical rejection and practical pathology[227] with which I will not be concerned.

Consider for example those persons whom I will term the ‘pathologically immoral’. These are figures who do not wish to pursue a life that approximates ethical virtue, but they seem to lack even a basic grasp of agential concepts, like the worthwhile or the good. Their projects tempt one to pity them as brain-damaged, rather than condemn

227 Some of the sorts of people with which I will not be concerned are those with a certain pathology of practical reasoning which may or may not result in the rejection of morality. Either way, the pathology will make the sort of strategy I will eventually employ against the immoralist ineffective.

them as evil. Perhaps such a person might dedicate his life to counting blades of grass.[228] Day after day this person perfects his activity and develops skills appropriate to such a task. But it is unclear what the point of such a life could be. Absent some explanatory story, blade counting appears to be decidedly not worthwhile. There is no good in it, or to be achieved by it. Moreover, as the end dominating a life, it prevents one from engaging in activities and developing those capacities that nearly all agree are requisite for a decent human life. We will not be concerned with convincing this sort of person, in large part because they appear to lack the basic machinery that would allow them to be convinced of any practical conclusion. Like the beastly figure in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, there can be no ethical discussion with such a pathological figure.

There is another possible form such "pathological immoralism" could take, but considering it requires the introduction of a further concept: hypothetical imperatives. Hypothetical imperatives are commonplace to everyday practical reasoning. If what I most desire is end X, and it is necessary to do action(s) Y in order to secure X, then I should do Y. If at some point I cease to want X (or have some contrary overriding desire that outweighs my desire for X), then the imperatival force of the 'should' evaporates. The 'hypothetical' in the term 'hypothetical imperative' indicates its contingent nature. This sort of imperative is contingent upon a desire for some particular end and easily defeated in its absence (or in its being overridden by a stronger desire).[229] If I have the end of eating eggs for breakfast and none are currently in my refrigerator, then I should go to the store to get some eggs. If upon further consideration, I decide going to the store

228 The example of the blade counter is original to Rawls. See *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 379-380.

229 It may be more natural simply to talk of having an end here. I am mentioning desires also because this is what I take it many think is behind having an end.

is too much trouble (and consequently decide that I will eat toast instead), then it no longer makes sense to say that I 'should' go to the store. The hypothetical imperative (henceforth, HI) no longer applies to me; this is because I no longer have the end of eating eggs (that is, eating eggs is no longer what I most desire to do). Another way of putting this is that, while I still may have some desire for eggs, my overriding desire is to avoid a trip to the store (and eat toast instead). So, it makes sense to say that I should take the means to my end, but if it turns out that I do not possess the end in question, then it is also the case that I no longer should take those means.

Now consider a man (call him Sam) who says to you, "I really want a drink". Seeing a glass of water in front of him you ask why he does not drink *that*. Sam responds that he has "no desire" to pick up the water glass in front of him in order to quench his thirst. On the face of it, this is puzzling, but potentially intelligible. You might be curious about this comment and ask if Sam meant that he wanted an alcoholic drink, or if the glass was dirty, or if the water was unappetizingly warm. All of these questions have the potential to reveal that another desire is at work, keeping Sam from taking the apparently easy means to his apparently strongly desired end of quenching his thirst (i.e., he really *desires* alcohol and not water, he *desires* to avoid drinking from dirty glasses or he *desires* ice cold water exclusively). If one were to get through this list of questions (and perhaps a few others) and no conflicting desire came to light, the case would be baffling indeed. This is because, a strong desire for an end, with an easy available means to that end, barring any other strong contrary desires, should lead to an action. In other words, it appears that if one desires an end then one automatically desires to take the means to that

end (assuming the means are within one's reach and there are not strong prevailing contrary desires or countermanding reasons). If Sam persists in his insistence that he desires a drink of water but does not desire to pick up the perfectly good glass of water in front of him, you might suspect that he is executing some odd joke, or, more gravely, that he is losing his sanity. Or perhaps you may suspect that he does not have the relevant desire after all. This is just another way of recognizing that desires seem to provide strong reasons for action and to deny the bindingness of HI's is an extreme move.[230] If a person claims to desire an end, but does not at all desire to take a rather easy means to that end, then it seems that that person is extremely irrational. I will not be concerned with such a person. It will be important for how I address the immoralist that he at least accepts the basic logic of an HI as practically binding.

There is one final immoralist with whom I will not be concerned: the radically evil immoralist. This sort, if she is possible (for some think this sort of immoralism to be psychologically impossible), desires evil for evil's own sake. Such a radically evil immoralist correctly distinguishes right from wrong (good from bad), and chooses the latter option, for its own sake (i.e., not for the sake of some further (apparent) good). Such a person has ceased to act under the guise of the good.[231] I do not think it a mark

230 Note: I assume that in order to provide a reason for action, what is desired must at least seem good in some way. I will not wade into the externalism/internalism debate here (though I am myself an externalist of sorts) since it is not necessary for my purposes. For more on this issue see Warren Quinn "Putting Rationality in Its Place" and Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, p. 223-234.

231 Acting under the "guise of the good" is to act so as to pursue some (at least apparent) good. One might do something bad, but you usually do not do it *because* it is bad, rather you do the bad thing to secure something that you see as good. You don't eat the third piece of pie because it will give you indigestion later, rather you eat it because you know it will taste good and make you pleasantly full (for a time). That everyone always acts under the guise of the good is a common (but not uniformly accepted) thesis. It is behind Aquinas' explanation of a disordered, evil will, as preferring a lesser good to a greater one *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 78, a.1.

against eudaimonism, or any moral theory, that it cannot convince such a person to turn from their immoral ways. Hence, I will say no more concerning this person here.

The sort of immoralist that I will focus on for the remainder of the chapter is one who eschews morality because he desires some perceived goods: namely those that contribute to his own good. I will be concerned with the immoralist who pursues vicious actions and rejects a virtuous life because he thinks this is what will conduce to his own good. This is the egoistic immoralist; but henceforth I will simply refer to such a person as an immoralist. This sort of immoralist would perform moral actions and pursue virtue if he thought it would conduce to his own good, but he thinks that it will not. Hence, such an immoralist clearly operates within the guise of the good. The primary good he pursues is his own, and all other goods are pursued within the general framework of what will conduce to his own good. Moreover, such an immoralist clearly accepts the logic of HIs as practically binding. He pursues those actions (and traits) that he thinks will contribute to his strongly desired end: his own good. And his main project of ‘pursuing his own good’, when stated in that general way, seems worthwhile enough. It certainly appears to be perfectly intelligible and sane, even if not completely admirable.

Such an immoralist, if she is at all savvy, will most likely not be coarsely egoistic, but rather will pursue her own good with some subtlety. A coarse egoist that pursues nothing but her own pleasure in the moment, completely disregarding what others think of her methods for doing so, is surely a straw(wo)man not worth considering. Such a person would soon ruin herself either by destroying her own health, or by losing all but the most minimal cooperation with others. The immoralist I have in mind has learned that

she needs to have at least some appearance of decency in order to get along in the world. She perhaps won't care for the good of others, but she will care to gain their cooperation in achieving her own good. So, we are primarily concerned with a somewhat refined egoism. Before we go on to address such egoistic immoralism directly, it will be helpful to highlight a few key features of an Ethics of Flourishing Together.

III. Commitments as the Schoolhouses of Virtue [232]

It is easy to see how the desire for something good for ourselves drives us to attempt to do things well (i.e., in order to obtain the good). It is this general pattern that often drives initial efforts of virtue acquisition. Of course, eventually the virtuous person must be motivated in ways apt to the virtue in question. However, this is often not how the process begins. It is common for a child to begin to learn the virtues, not through the appreciation of goods internal to virtuous practice, but through the appreciation of goods external to it. Here I am drawing on MacIntyre's concepts of internal and external goods.[233] For MacIntyre a good internal to an activity is intrinsic to the activity itself, such that it is not separable from the activity; one cannot pursue it without engaging in the activity itself. Moreover internal goods can only be fully appreciated from within the activity itself, through participating in it. These are distinguished from external goods which are genuine goods, but are separable from the activity, and hence, can be pursued

232 Those that have read MacIntyre's *After Virtue* will recognize my clear debt here and elsewhere, to his thought on practices, the goods internal to them, and virtues as traits apt to realize these goods. See especially chapter 14. And of course the claim that commitments, especially those involving close relationships, are the schoolhouses of virtue echoes what is implicit in Aristotle's own account of character friendship (see *Nicomachean Ethics* books 8 and 9). This idea in Aristotle is made more explicit and expanded upon in chapter 7 of Talbot Brewer's *The Retrieval of Ethics*.

233 Again, for MacIntyre's original treatment of these concepts see *After Virtue*, especially chapter 14.

in other ways. The value of these goods is also fully recognizable to those outside the activities that produce them as a by-product. Prime examples of external goods are money and fame. You can get them playing professional sports, but also by acting in blockbuster movies or by playing (and winning) the lottery. And you can recognize the value of these goods without engaging in any of these activities.

In attempting to get a child to engage in certain virtuous activities we often use phrases that highlight external goods. We say things like, “Ask politely and then you can have some cake” or “If you don’t share your toys, then you can’t go to the park with Daddy”. There are goods internal to politeness and sharing, but they are often not what initially motivates the child to act in these ways. After continually enacting such behaviors the child may come to see what is good about being polite and sharing, or (what is common to them both) what is good about giving others consideration. Commitments present a related structure of virtue acquisition. In chapters two and three, I made the case for the sheer pervasiveness of commitment in any life that approximates decency or even coherence. In chapter two I made the case that commitments are involved in agency itself. Not only are they necessary to carry out intentions in an unpredictable world, they also organize our lives and, in a substantial way, help us construct our very selves. Here I want to highlight one crucial part of this self-construction: virtue habituation.

Commitments are the schoolhouses of virtue. On my stipulative definition of commitment, a commitment is involved in the carrying out of even mundane intentions. In committing to follow through with an occurent intention, one commits to do what is

required in the future when the time comes. In other words, one commits to forming future intentions necessary to carrying out one's original intention (assuming these do not end up conflicting with more important commitments and intentions). But of course, it is natural to think that one does not merely commit to forming *just any* intentions necessary to carrying out the original intention, but intentions *well suited* to carrying it out. Say I commit to making coffee, but find no filters when I open the filter drawer. On the counter I see some paper towels and some coffee filters. I have at least three potential alternative intentions (actually I have many more) for carrying out my original intention of making coffee. Instead of getting the filters from the filter drawer I can: (a) get them from the counter and proceed, (b) improvise a filter from some paper towels and proceed or (c) drive to the store, buy some filters, come home, and proceed. All three options will accomplish my original intention, but it is clear that option (a) is the easiest, and in this case, best way to accomplish it. So my commitment does not drive me to *just any* alternative intention when I find the filter drawer empty, it drives me to the alternative perceived as most apt to the task, or most excellent for this arena of action. Even in mundane matters, a commitment drives one to approximate a virtue in action. Commitments are involved in much weightier matters, with much greater impact on one's flourishing. As a result, they are also involved in the habituation of much weightier virtues, including those of the ethical variety.

At the same time carrying out one's commitments leads to various involvements and enmeshments (as related in chapters two and three). This in turn shapes one's practical identity, such that it can become increasingly difficult to abandon one's

commitment/enmeshment without calling one's own identity into question, perhaps destroying it altogether. Moreover if the activity one is committed to is complex enough (like a relationship or some form of communal life), one's commitment involves a dialectical activity (wherein one gains an increasingly better idea of the goods internal to an activity by participating in it).[234] In producing a refined conception of the good, a dialectical activity also leads to a further refinement of one's practice. A refinement of one's action in a particular practice just is the increasing in excellence in the relevant action; the process involved in a dialectical activity is a process whereby one increasingly approximates virtue. A general outline of the process is as follows:

(1) Desire for Some (perceived) Good
(2) Commitment & Enmeshment
(3) Approximation of Virtue(s)
(4) (if complex and enduring) Dialectical Activity
(5) Increasing Clarity of Internal Good, Refinement of Virtue(s), Increasing Enmeshment
(6) Entity Committed to, and/or Enmeshed with, Becomes Increasingly Less Fungible [235]

So desire for good things drives us into commitments, which, in order to produce decent results, demand an approximation of virtues. In sufficiently complex and enduring activities a dialectical process of increasing refinement and enmeshment ensues, which makes the commitment/enmeshment increasingly less fungible. This process has the potential to not only habituate virtues, but also to substantially change a person's identity.

234 On the nature of dialectical activities see Talbot Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, (especially chapter 2). Brewer himself draws on the work of MacIntyre concerning practices and internal goods.

235 Note that the "Less Fungible" here refers to how the entity has come to perform an increasingly irreplaceable role in one's life. However, this point should not be viewed as ruling out the irreplaceability each unique human being has intrinsically. It is likely that there is some sort of internal connection between this intrinsic non-fungibility and the non-fungibility a human comes to have in one's life over a shared history.

IV. Enmeshment with Others Demands, Perpetuates, and Facilitates Ethical Life

In chapter 3 I identified enmeshments with other people (or the activities/products involving such enmeshments) as some of the most significant contributors to one's own flourishing. Hence the commitments that initiate and maintain such activities will be some of the most eudaimonistically important. These same commitments are the ones that characteristically demand the development and exercise of the ethical virtues. In chapter 3 I also highlighted many ways in which enmeshments with others are uniquely potent for enriching one's life with values, meanings, worthwhile activities, etc. . . At the same time I recognized the real possibility (and actuality) of enmeshments with others that fall well below the line of decency, such that they detract from, rather than contribute to, one's flourishing. Enmeshments with others, including close relationships with friends and romantic partners, are at once great sources of enjoyment and suffering, enrichment and impoverishment. At the time I claimed that the goods of close relations with others were weighty enough, and obtained often enough, that the risk was worth the likely eudaimonistic gain. Moreover, I argued that in the absence of any close (enmeshing) relationships, eudaimonia is not a likely prospect. Hence, one's best bet for human flourishing is to go in for relationships and activities that enmesh one with others. These close relationships, group memberships, and joint activities, typically will only contribute to one's flourishing if they reach a certain threshold of decency. And in general, such relationships of enmeshment only reach this threshold when they are conducted according to an approximation of the ethical virtues. Hence, one's "best bet" for flourishing is to pursue enriching enmeshments with others in accord with virtue. It is

ethical virtue, when enacted, that gives one the best chance at reaping the rewards of such enmeshments; and it is vice that characteristically puts such eudaimonistic boons beyond reach.

To be clear, I am not claiming that virtues guarantee the goods internal to close relationships and other sorts of interpersonal enmeshments. This cannot be the case, if for no other reason than the role that other people must play in making a relationship work. Nor am I claiming that vice will inevitably make the goods internal to such enmeshments impossible.[236] Rather, I am claiming that approximating ethical virtue is one's best bet for making one's enmeshments with others thrive, and thereby advancing one's own eudaimonia. The general reason for this is simple: ethical virtues tend to work for the good of those with whom one is involved. However, in relations of enmeshment, this good is partially constitutive of one's own good. So in conducting an enmeshment virtuously one is simultaneously working for the good of oneself and the good of others. It is perhaps more accurate to the virtuous person's outlook to say that one works for one's own good by working for the good of others involved in the enmeshment. Or that one works for the good of the enmeshment in question which is simultaneously a constituent element in one's own flourishing and the flourishing of others. The idea here is that enmeshments make it such that it is increasingly difficult to distinguish one's own good from the good of others. Enmeshed people come to share parts of each other's eudaimonia; the flourishing of the other partially constitutes one's own. Hence, one must come to care for the good of another if one is to care for one's own good. Likewise, one

236 Though it seems plausible that a vicious attitude towards others might make some goods not only unlikely, but impossible. Can one experience the good of appreciating the unique and irreplaceable value of a of a partner if one viciously views her like a tool, merely good for securing some further end?

must care for one's own good if one is to care for the good of another. Moreover, enmeshments are such that the longer they persist, the more thorough they become and the more difficult it is to be un-enmeshed. One's own good increasingly coalesces with and demands the good of others. The ethical virtues are those traits that dispose humans to organize their social lives so as to result in mutual benefit. They are the traits apt to an excellent member of social groups, who flourishes *because* others flourish, and vice-versa.

V. Addressing the Immoralist: The Eudaimonistic Hypothetical Imperative Strategy

The best way for the eudaimonist to address immoralists is by employing a eudaimonistic hypothetical imperative (henceforth, EHI) strategy that appeals to the practical logic of the immoralists' self-interest (that is, this approach is "best" in terms of direct and powerful appeal to powerful motives the immoralist already possesses). This is the logic that will initially draw the immoralist (or potential immoralist) into the life of virtue, but it is not what will ultimately keep him there. The sort of eudaimonistic HI I have in mind can be expressed in the following general fashion: ***If you desire to flourish as a human being, then you must do, be, or cultivate X, Y, and Z, and avoid A, B, and C.*** In this HI the variables X, Y, and Z represent either moral actions to be done, activities to engage in, sorts of people to be, or sorts of character traits to cultivate. A, B, and C represent immoral actions, activities, people, and traits to be avoided. If moral actions, activities, or traits are plausibly linked to human flourishing (and immoral ones to its opposite), then such an HI would be motivationally potent. This is because most every

human being (including our immoralist) desires to flourish.[237] But perhaps some despair of flourishing to the full extent, or think such a project sounds overly intense and perfectionistic. In light of these considerations the HI could be softened so as to appeal even more broadly, while still securing much of the moral behavior and virtue with which an Ethics of Flourishing Together is concerned. Consider the following softer formulation, henceforth referred to as the eudaimonistic hypothetical imperative, or (EHI): ***If you desire to flourish as a human being to (at least) a decent degree then you should do, be, or cultivate X, Y, and Z, and avoid A, B, and C.***

There are two ways an immoralist might defeat the imperatival force of the EHI. First, she could maintain that flourishing, to (at least) a decent or moderate amount, is not something she desires. With respect to this sort of response it looks as if EHI approaches a level of generality sufficient to compel almost anyone. The second way an immoralist could defeat the 'should' of the EHI, is to admit that she has some desire to flourish, but point to another stronger conflicting desire. Perhaps the immoralist might have a self-sacrificial or altruistic desire that eschews her own flourishing. Perhaps one desires one's own flourishing, but has a stronger desire for the flourishing of one's community, friend, spouse, or child. In this case it may look rational to sacrifice one's own flourishing for the sake of this other strongly desired end (the flourishing of a cherished other). However, if one has a strong desire to sacrifice one's life for another, then this might just be what it means for your own life to flourish, to end it with a good death for the sake of those one

[237] Of course the immoralist is likely to lack a decent upbringing; hence, his vision of flourishing could be distorted. For my argument to have some purchase with the immoralist, I only need him to possess a fairly general notion of flourishing that includes within it the importance of joint activities and meaningful relationships.

most loves and values.[238] In this case, a continued good life may have been made impossible by the person's circumstances.[239]

Now, in order to gain the benefits of the virtues, one will need to go in for the habituation of virtue. Initially the immoralist, following the logic of EHI, will habituate the virtues in order to gain eudaimonia; this habituation is the means to their strongly desired self-interested end. But this habituation will not leave the immoralist unchanged. As she engages in the dialectical activity of living a virtuous life across various practical realms, the immoralist will begin to see what is (non-instrumentally) good about virtuous activity itself. In this way, gradually, the agent's view of the world changes. This is especially clear within the interrelational structures that we have already highlighted: commitment and enmeshment.

In section III above I identified commitments as the schoolhouses of virtue. This is not because one commits to virtuous practice itself; rather, the more common occurrence is to commit to obtaining some other good. However, the habituation of ethical virtues is requisite so as to obtain and sustain the enjoyment of some of the most eudaimonistically potent goods. Thus the "desire for good things drives us into commitments, which, in order to produce decent results, demand an approximation of

238 But perhaps we should not be so quick to dismiss the self-sacrificial option. We could imagine someone who desires the flourishing of another more than their own, but desires it in such a way that they are willing to do something truly (morally) horrific to obtain it. The EHI theorist might respond that such people will be rare. What I say concerning the objection of insularity below will be relevant to this issue.

239 It is not particularly troubling for my account if someone wishes to sacrifice their own flourishing for someone else's (assuming the means are not morally problematic), even when they could continue on in a good life without doing so. This is probably a case of supererogation. For a Neo-Aristotelian account of supererogation see Stangl, "Neo-Aristotelian Supererogation."

virtues."[240] This is precisely the sort of practical dynamic apt to change the immoralist once he has been drawn into pursuing the life of virtue. And the potency of this phenomenon is most clear in the dynamics of close relationships, group projects, and joint activities. Interpersonal enmeshment is the key content to EHI; this is because these enmeshments characteristically require an approximation of virtue in order to function decently and deliver up their eudaimonistic boons (as I outlined in section III above). Through the persistence of commitments and the strengthening of enmeshments, the agent will come to perceive goods internal to the virtuous practice that obtains (and sustains) the associated goods, and value this activity for its own sake. In this way the logic of an EHI brings an immoralist into a life of approximating virtue, but such a life will not leave the immoralist unchanged. The logic of EHI gets him there, but it will be genuine goods (the demands of the world, in Swanton's language) that keep him there. Thus, the immoralist begins by pursuing some general conception of eudaimonia for his own benefit, but in the process of this pursuit, his conception becomes ***moralized***.[241] Through interpersonal enmeshments the immoralist begins to see what is good about virtuous practice in the first place. At this point the immoralist ceases to be an immoralist. He has developed a moralized second nature.[242]

240 Section III above.

241 This strategy will work with someone considering the immoralist life and someone who has already embarked on it to some degree. Though less clearly dependent on the self-interest of the immoralist himself, a strategy similar to this EHI can be employed to address parents who are deciding how to raise their children. Hursthouse makes a related point concerning the sorts of traits parents try to habituate into their children, for their own good. See her *On Virtue Ethics*, pp. 175-177.

242 This idea is akin to what McDowell refers to as entering "duty's army" in his essay "Two Sorts of Naturalism", p. 179. One might question my choice of terms here (i.e., "moralized") since activities that contribute to one's flourishing go well beyond those governed by the moral virtues (even on my wider reading of the term). While I accept this as true I will use the term 'moralized' for two reasons. First, and more superficially, the main alternative of "ethicalized" is quite clumsy and foreign to the literature.

VI. The Key Premises and Empirical Adequacy

The argumentative strategy that employs the EHI against the immoralist has two key premises that one might question.

The first key premise is that decent functioning relationships and relational dynamics are crucial to eudaimonia. Studies consistently show that people in happy long-term relationships live longer and healthier lives.[243] And intuitively, many accept this first premise to a certain degree. I have done much in chapters 2 and (especially) 3 (as well as a bit at the beginning of this chapter) to bolster this premise, showing just how eudaimonistically potent and pervasive decent relations with others are. In chapter 2 I outlined the sheer pervasiveness of commitment, the necessity of it for a decent life, and how these commitments involve us with others. The key way commitments involve us with others is through joint activities, the relative success of which will contribute to the flourishing of all involved. The integral role others play in these joint activities means that our relations with them will often have to (at least) approach decency for the activity to go well and thereby contribute to our flourishing. Think of all of the group projects and causes that require close cooperation with a variety of people, over a lengthy period of time. Moreover, many activities require much more than decency to reach their full potential for enriching a life. Just consider the activity of conversation which pervades

Second, for my purposes here the term ‘moralized’ captures the phenomenon upon which I wish to focus. On my wider reading of the term moral, the moral virtues are included. The ethical virtues that are not recognizably moral (like wit) are not of concern here. Here I wish to focus on those virtues the egoistic immoralist is most likely to call into question at first, or the ways of viewing the value of others an egoist is least likely to recognize. It is the value internal to the practicing of these virtues that the immoralist comes to perceive by having her perception of the world moralized. If one still thinks the term is inappropriate, the reader may insert here a more accurate substitute (like ‘ethicalized’).

243 See for example this article that reviews a sampling of the relevant study results http://www.webmd.com/ sex-relationships/guide/relationships-marriage-and-health. Accessed January 28, 2017.

human life. Certainly it goes better in relationships that are functioning well, rather than ones that are fractured and fractious. Moreover, if a relationship has endured for a long time in this well-functioning state, a shared history has no doubt enriched conversational possibilities.

The decent functioning of a relationship allows it to endure long enough for a shared history to emerge; this shared history makes possible or enriches many other shared activities and capacities.[244] This includes the eudaimonistically important phenomena of transactive memory and externalized self-regulation, in which others come to actually enhance (and partially constitute) one’s own memory system and one’s capacity to control oneself. Moreover, decent relational functioning doesn’t just allow for the execution/development of these shared capacities and activities, it also allows and encourages the development of care for the other’s good. Being in some sort of ongoing relationship with someone who cares for one’s good has particular eudaimonistic importance because the other comes to (a) increasingly want your good, (b) increasingly know what your good involves, and (c) be increasingly attentive to contexts when your good is at issue.

Beyond these shared capacities and activities, the decent functioning relationships that allow one to become close to others opens up other eudaimonistically important vistas. Becoming close to another allows one to better appreciate their unique perspective on the world. An intimate other enriches one’s world by populating it with new and interesting perspectives and values that one would have been ignorant of otherwise.

244 See chapter 3, section V, subsection C.

None of these benefits, of decently functioning relationships, requires a moralized outlook to recognize. Moreover, one can hold out the possibility of other benefits to the immoralist, ones that he will be able to fully appreciate once he develops the moralized outlook associated with the approximation of virtue. Chief among these is the fact that advancing the good of other humans is among the most worthwhile activities in which one can be engaged. Indeed, many of the activities that most recognize as worthwhile are somehow connected to advancing the good of others. The egoist immoralist might not be able to recognize this from within his non-moralized perspective on the world, but perhaps a promissory note of sorts can be a part of an argument aimed at him. That is, though it is an external good that initially attracts the immoralist to virtue habituation efforts, if these efforts are maintained, eventually other internal goods will come into view and increasingly come to be appreciated.

In general the justification of the first key premise involves the process I outlined in section III of this chapter. The immoralist can recognize some eudaimonistically potent goods that are only possible, or likely to accrue, if one carries out commitments and enmeshments in such a way that relationships with others function decently. Since humans are social animals, one will not be able to approximate eudaimonia without these relational goods (which include incredibly pervasive and diverse joint activities). This brings us to the second key premise.

The second key premise (call it the need for virtue premise or (NV)) is that an approximation of ethical virtue (and avoidance of vice) is characteristically needed to achieve the decent functioning of these eudaimonistically important relationships and

relational dynamics. Although I have touched on why this is the case in previous chapters, it has thus far received comparatively little attention. Part of the reason for this lack of attention is the assumed intuitive appeal of the claim that an approximation of ethical virtues (and avoidance of vice) is generally needed for the well-functioning of relationships. But, some may be more skeptical about the importance of ethical virtue in relationships. Hence some may question the empirical adequacy of NV, even after considering the material of chapters 2 and 3 (and how these dynamics are likely to involve the virtues). This skepticism presents a difficult problem. On the one hand I am confident that NV pans out in numerous concrete examples involving a variety of virtues (or lack thereof). On the other hand, I do not have the space here to rehearse these examples, or to cover large swaths of the empirical literature in social psychology.

To address this skepticism within the space constraints here I will do three things. First, I will briefly present several considerations (some only hinted at, or completely absent, in previous chapters) for why one might accept NV as plausible and likely true. Second, I will address the empirical adequacy of NV more directly by focusing on one sort of person (particularly relevant for our purposes) lacking some ethical virtues: the narcissist. Third, I will say a few words concerning what is involved in the approximation of virtue and address a vicious sort of virtue approximation in which one only seems virtuous, but harbors secret vice. After all this I will add to my case by addressing four additional challenges to my argumentative strategy, some of which are related to the empirical adequacy of NV. But first, why is it that we should think that the virtues are important for relational functioning?

There are several reasons why you would expect ethical virtues (and the avoidance of vice) to be important in securing decent relational dynamics and relationships. Consider that the ethical virtues are dispositions to choose, act, and feel excellently. Part of how Aristotle (and Neo-Aristotelians) identify the ethical virtues is by identifying the dispositions that govern choosing (acting and feeling) well in contexts of choice that are pervasive within social life, (i.e., for humans in general, not just for those that occupy a specific role).[245] For a social animal choosing well plausibly involves choosing in such a way that one's practical life falls into harmony with others; the ethical virtues dispose humans to be in harmony with one another. The choices, actions, and desires/feelings of the virtuous come into less conflict with, and even mutually reinforce, others' choices, actions, and desires. Your courage leads you to desire and choose to save someone from drowning who of course very much wants to be saved. Your desire and choice to be honest leads you to tell the truth to someone who wishes to be in possession of the relevant facts. Your desire and choice to help a suddenly unemployed community member feed her children harmonizes well with her desire to feed them (and the children's desire to be fed). A person who grows in virtue plausibly comes to have interests and desires that are in less conflict and more concord with others' desires and interests. Lacking these virtues (or possessing certain vices) means that one is more likely to face opposition. One will need to more frequently worry about the conflicting desires, interests, and choices of others. This, in itself, can be exhausting and anxiety producing,

[245] This is what Aristotle is up to in identifying the spheres of the virtues in *Nicomachean Ethics*. Nussbaum highlights and clearly elucidates this method in her essay "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," 247-251.

as well as inconvenient. The virtues allow one to take certain things for granted (i.e., that many of one's desires will be generally congenial with most in the community).

Part of the reason why the ethical virtues result in such social harmony is that they tend to help those around the virtuous agent to flourish. One is apt to be closely involved and even enmeshed with these people. Thus, those that one is most likely to help flourish are the same people whose flourishing is most apt to affect, and even be a constituent part of, one's own flourishing. It is hard to have a decent functioning relationship, or joint activity, if one (or more) parties to it are not flourishing. Conversely, it seems generally beneficial to the relationship if one helps the other parties to it to flourish. This is the case not just because their flourishing helps certain joint activities and projects go well (because they can play their parts in them better), but also because the virtuous person comes to desire the flourishing of others as an end-in-itself. As such the wellbeing of those in relations with the virtuous agent comes to be an end, the success of which, contributes to the success of the virtuous agent's activities.

VII. Case Study: The Narcissist

In the ancient Greek myth, a youth of exceeding beauty is unfortunate enough to encounter his own reflection in a river. Entranced by his own loveliness, Narcissus is unable to tear himself away from this vision of himself. He loses the will to live, and in some versions, is still staring at his own reflection in the river Styx in the afterlife. This myth can be read as a cautionary tale against thinking too much (and too often) of oneself. This unhealthy self-focus can prevent the more virtuous (and healthy) other-

focus required for decent relational functioning and a decent human life. For our purposes, narcissism is a particularly useful phenomenon to consider because: (a) narcissists lack several central virtues (and possess several vices), (b) there is a large extant literature in empirical psychology concerning narcissism and its relational effects, and (c) while narcissistic personality disorder is relatively rare, the phenomenon of narcissism comes in degrees and most everyone falls somewhere on the continuum.[246] Hence, the empirical results concerning the effects of narcissism on relational (dys)functioning will be relevant to the vast majority of people. It is the lack of certain virtues and the presence of certain vices that plausibly leads to relational dysfunction. Hence narcissism is a good test case for the empirical adequacy of NV.

Narcissism: Characteristics

In the empirical psychological literature (including clinical, personality, and social) a standard measure of narcissism is the NPI (Narcissistic Personality Inventory),[247] but narcissism as it is described and operationalized in this literature is a complex personality trait (characterized by several traits and tendencies). As such it can be difficult to offer a tidy definition. To complicate matters psychologists do not always cleanly separate what narcissism *is* as a personality trait, from what it leads the narcissist *to do*. At times the trait is (partially) defined as simply that which leads someone to do X. We can start by referencing three subscales that focus on three clusters of traits/tendencies: leadership/self-esteem, grandiose exhibitionism, and

246 Miller & Campbell, 2008.
247 Raskin & Terry, 1988.

entitlement/exploitativeness.[248] Someone high on the NPI scale is generally high on these subscales.[249] The DSM-5 describes narcissistic personality disorder as "A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy. . ."[250] Narcissism not rising to the level of pathology, but high enough on the NPI, involves similar traits. A narcissist will have high self-esteem and seek to lead. But this esteem of self will be unrealistically grandiose, which will tend towards an exhibitionism of one's qualities and abilities. This grand opinion of himself naturally leads the narcissist to feel entitled and to engage in exploitation of others (apparently less grand and less important). This exploitation is undoubtedly made all the easier because of a lack of empathy. Besides a lack of "general empathy", the entitlement/exploitativeness subscale is also associated with lower levels of "trust, forgiveness, and gratitude."[251]

I will now fill this general description out with more specific traits and tendencies; in particular I will focus on those phenomena associated in the psychological literature (and common sense) with relational dysfunction.[252] What follows can be read mostly as what flows from the general traits mentioned above associated with an inflated view of self and importance that characterizes the narcissist. It will become clear that narcissism leads to significant relational dysfunction. Hence, if relational functioning is

248 Ackerman et al., 2011.

249 I will use the term 'narcissist' and 'narcissism' to refer to someone at the higher end of the spectrum on the NPI relative to others (but not necessarily someone with the rare full blown narcissistic personality disorder).

250 DSM-5, p. 669.

251 Lavner, et al. "Narcissism and Newlywed Marriage: Partner Characteristics and Marital Trajectories," 2015, p. 171.

252 The following descriptions of narcissism are taken from the excellent literature review of a recent psychology article that focuses specifically on narcissism as it contributes to relational dysfunction. See Keller, Blincoe, Gilbert, et al., "Narcissism in Romantic Relationships: A Dyadic Perspective," 2014, pp. 26-28.

needed for human flourishing, the narcissistic traits will be particularly deleterious for one's own flourishing. After presenting these relational dysfunctions, I will step back and try to identify some familiar vices operative (or virtues lacking) in the narcissist.

Narcissism: Relational Dysfunction

Narcissism "is characterized by feelings of superiority and entitlement, expectations for special treatment, exaggerations of abilities and personal qualities, demands for attention and admiration, exploitation of others, contempt, and lack of empathy."[253] Over time narcissists develop feelings of contempt for romantic partners' imperfections.[254] Narcissists come "to believe they have greater alternatives for romantic partners than non-narcissists, and this leads them to be less committed to their relationships."[255] Narcissists report greater vindictiveness, domineering, and controlling approaches to others, and intrusiveness in their relationships."[256]

"Narcissism is also associated with aggression and hostility."[257] Because the narcissist has developed an inflated and consequently highly unrealistic self-view, their sense of self will be constantly threatened by the more realistic appraisals of others. Their beliefs concerning themselves will be fragile in the context of social relations, and in an effort to maintain this unrealistic view of themselves, narcissists will become adversarial, responding "to threats of their inflated self-view with hostility, rage, or physical

253 Ibid., p. 26.
254 Ibid., p. 26.
255 Ibid., p. 26.
256 Ibid., p. 26.
257 Ibid., p. 26.

aggression."[258] In addition narcissists are "angrier than non-narcissists after social rejection" both at those who rejected them and innocent parties.[259] Moreover, there are even stronger links between narcissism and *pro*active aggression; this includes greater instances of marital violence and sexual coercion.[260]

These actions by narcissists are not without effect on how others react to and treat them. Narcissists "report more negative interpersonal reactions."[261] For instance, narcissists report a greater incidence of being victimized by others. Also, "the more times someone interacts with a narcissist, the less they like the narcissist."[262] One study "found that the spouses of overt narcissists described them as aggressive, outspoken, egotistical, self-centered, intolerant, arrogant, demanding, and argumentative."[263] This increasing dislike that the partner has for the narcissist, combined with the narcissist's increasing contempt for the partner's imperfections, makes satisfying long-term relationships particularly difficult and rare for the narcissist.

Narcissism: Vices and (lack of) Virtues

Narcissists approximate certain vices and lack certain virtues, and this detracts from their own flourishing by contributing to the relational dysfunction surveyed above. First, it is clear that narcissists lack the virtue of honesty, in the Aristotelian sense. Aristotle's presentation of the virtue of honesty or truthfulness in his *Ethics* focuses

258 Ibid., p. 26.
259 Ibid., p. 26.
260 Ibid., p. 27.
261 Ibid., p. 27.
262 Ibid., p. 27.
263 Ibid., p. 27.

particularly on honesty concerning one's own greatness (qualities, abilities, etc. . .).[264] The narcissist has and exercises the Aristotelian vice of boastfulness, thinking and speaking too much and too highly of themselves. This inflated self-view (and self-expression) reveals another traditional Aristotelian vice associated with anger. The narcissist lacks what Aristotle terms "mildness" and instead has excessive anger (is both excessively prone to it, and has it to an excessive degree on particular occasions). This is often due to the narcissists' unrealistic self-view being called into question.

It is easy to see how an inflated view of self and the importance of one's own desires and goals may lead to the exploitation of others seen as inferior (with seemingly less important goals than one's own). This is made easier by the approximation of the relational vices of callousness and a lack of the relational virtue of empathy. Though these traits do not explicitly appear on Aristotle's traditional list, they may be involved in what he calls the virtue of "friendliness"[265] Either way, virtue ethicists today (both Neo-Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian) recognize the centrality of empathy for the virtues (and callousness as central to vice).[266]

So it looks as if narcissism can be naturally linked to the lack of key virtues and the presence of key vices, and that this plausibly leads to relational dysfunction. And this is not an isolated instance in the empirical psychological literature. The empirical

264 See Book IV, chapter 7. Commentators often find this restriction of focus odd; why limit honesty to the sphere of self-appraisal? Perhaps in the effects of such dishonesty on the narcissist we get a glimpse of why Aristotle restricts the virtue in this way. Dishonesty in this restricted field is particularly hard on relationships and hence particularly deleterious for one's flourishing.

265 See Book IV, chapter 6.

266Michael Slote has done much to highlight the importance of empathic care among the virtues. See especially his 2007 book *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*. For an Aristotelian application of the virtue and vice pair of empathic care/callousness see Adam Blincoe's essay, "Rescue, Beneficence, and Contempt for Humanity".

adequacy of NV can be illustrated with respect to other vicious personality types (like psychopathy) that admit of continuums and are closely linked to relational dysfunction. Hence, if decent relational functioning is important for human flourishing, then an approximation of the virtues (and an absence of the vices) will also be important for such flourishing.

VIII. Approximating the Virtues

Before moving on to other challenges to the EHI strategy (as employed against the immoralist) I should say a few words about two sorts of virtue approximation and their relation to eudaimonia. First, there is the sort of virtue approximation that I have been referring to thus far in this chapter and in previous ones. This conception of approximation is based on the intuitive notion that virtues fall on a continuum and come in degrees. Stated this way the concept of approximation is simple enough, but in practice it is as complex as virtue itself. Ethical virtues are dispositions not only to choose and act a certain way, but also dispositions to perceive and feel in certain ways. So, approximating a virtue may involve choosing and executing the characteristically virtuous action more often. It may also involve recognizing more often, in a greater range of ethical contexts, when certain virtuous actions are called for. An agent approximating the virtues will become increasingly alive to more of the ethical landscape, perceiving more of the ethically relevant features of the world; and such a person will come to have a clearer vision of the goods internal to virtuous practice. Moreover, the person approximating virtue will develop more virtuous affective responses to the world,

including coming to struggle less with desires contrary to virtuous action. Hence virtuous action becomes easier and its results are more pleasing to the person approximating virtue. This is roughly what occurs during the process of virtue habituation.

It is plausible that eudaimonia also falls on a continuum. So it is natural enough to think that if one increasingly approximates the virtues, by habituating them, then one will also likely increasingly approximate human flourishing. Perhaps one is not virtuous, but only decent. Though less eudaimonistically potent than full blown virtue, this decency in the realm of virtue is likely to secure some measure of flourishing, moving the agent further along on the eudaimonistic continuum.

The second sort of virtue approximation I want to touch on is less commonsense, and not at all virtuous. This is the sort of virtue approximation that Adeimantus and Glaucon bring up to challenge Socrates' contention in the *Republic* (that the virtue of justice benefits the just person himself). That is, one may approximate a virtue by only *seeming* to have it in public, but in actuality one completely lacks it; one does not even approximate the virtue (in the first, commonsense meaning of approximation). In this sort of vicious approximation one gains the benefits of both public seeming virtue (a going through the outward virtuous motions) and private (actual) vice. What can we say about this sort of vicious approximation of virtue?

Unfortunately there is not an established literature in empirical psychology dealing with such persons. Although people report that they initially like the narcissist, this quickly wanes as his viciousness becomes apparent. His vice is, for the most part, public, and any semblance of virtue (or even likability) is usually fleeting. Despite this

dearth of empirical literature, there are a few things to be said in response to the more insidious sort of virtue approximation (what I will call vicious virtue approximation).

The person who merely appears virtuous but is in fact vicious will often have to act contrary to what he finds really valuable or worthwhile. His seemingly virtuous actions are purely instrumental, serving the purpose of keeping up ethical appearances in public. Thus, he must constantly engage in activities which he finds intrinsically worthless. Moreover, since he will often be going through the motions of virtue, he will be in constant danger of gaining a glimpse of the goods internal to virtuous practice. It is not clear, and indeed it seems implausible, that genuine vice can be sustained while regularly going through the motions of virtue. Vice in this sort of life will be quite fragile (whereas in an unambiguous life of vice, it would be much more durable). The material in chapter 3, regarding the phenomena of the relational self and transference, is relevant here. In going through the motions of virtue in public, the vicious person is developing ways of being and doing that will easily transfer to other areas of his life, such that he will be inclined to express a similar self in a variety of contexts.[267] Certain practical cues will call up these ways of being and doing and one will be inclined to fall into similar patterns, even in private.

The publicly (apparently) virtuous actions are necessary in part because the true desires of the vicious person are not in harmony with those around her. As I noted above, the virtuous person can largely take for granted that her desires are consonant with the desires of those with whom she interacts. But the vicious person not only lacks such

267 For more on the relational self and transference see Chapter 3, section V, subsection E.

consonant desires, he possesses desires that are at odds with the desires of others, often in dramatic fashion. The vicious person does not desire to be honest or generous. He desires to lie for gain (when he can get away with it) and avoid giving to those in need (if it won't look too bad to others). Hence, to gain the benefits of being viewed as virtuous, the vicious person must create a whole different persona, and maintain it in public by doing things that are, to him, quite unnatural (because contrary to his vicious second-nature). How exhausting it must be to create and maintain such a persona.

Finally, the (merely) apparently virtuous and genuinely vicious agent will likely be prone to anxiety of being found out. After all, he is only virtuous in public, seeking private contexts in which he can express his true vicious self in order to benefit. But (especially in today's world) how many contexts are so thoroughly private that one can completely discount the chance of being found out? Such a vicious person would have to constantly be on guard, working to cover his vicious tracks, keeping an eye out for any threat of exposure and any further opportunity for private vice. In this sort of scenario many actually innocuous persons and contexts have to be treated with great care, just in case the person or situation harbors potential for exposure. Rather than a life of suffering seeming virtue and enjoying private vice, this sounds more like an anxiety filled and exhausting existence. It is an existence in which one props up a false reality through complex, near-constant, and unnatural effort; this effort demands that one regularly acts against one's (second)nature and executes what would otherwise seem to be worthless activities. It is not surprising then that Plato thought such a secretly vicious but publicly "virtuous" person would not approach flourishing. In Socrates' idiom, his soul would be

pulled in all sorts of directions; the life of such a person is not cohesive and not straightforwardly one's own.

The remainder of what I have to say in response to this vicious sort of virtue approximation will also apply to the ethically mercurial immoralist, which I address below in section IX, *challenge 2*.

IX. Further Challenges to the EHI Strategy

Challenge 1: When virtue does not pay

One frequent challenge to the general eudaimonistic claim that "virtue pays" is that sometimes it does not. Even for the supremely virtuous, there always remains a possibility that a particular situation will arise in which their own flourishing seems to be best served by committing a vicious act. Or, what is perhaps more troubling, there will be situations where a continued flourishing life has been made impossible, precisely because of certain past virtuous actions and present virtuous traits. And we don't need to imagine mere possibilities, or look to literary examples like Homer's King Priam. There are plenty of actual examples scattered throughout history and memorialized in tragic headlines. This challenge is actually an amalgam of two related challenges. The first seizes on the reality that virtue does not always pay and that tragedy within virtuous lives is not only possible, but actual. The second challenge regards the ability of a person to leave the life of virtue at will, staying within it when prudent and promptly exiting it in order to avoid foreseeable tragedy. I will address each challenge in turn.

I have already begun to address this first challenge in the previous chapters and mostly by admitting its truth. In chapter 1 (section III) I claimed that virtue does not guarantee a good outcome in every instance, nor even a eudaimon life over the long term. That is, even a uniformly virtuous life can have a eudaimonia marring tragic end. This claim rejects the extreme Stoic position that virtue *always* pays. I maintain (along with Hursthouse) that virtue is one's "best bet" to secure a good human life. Even over the long haul, the habituation and exercise of the ethical virtues does not guarantee a flourishing life, it only makes such a life likely. Going in for the virtuous life means going in for risk.[268] Along with Aristotle and Nussbaum I accept that the human good is a fragile one; the eudaimon life involves risk.[269] Since a life that is eudaimon is merely overall good, not perfect in every single moment, this means it is compatible with a certain amount of tragedy. This sort of eudaimonism allows for instances in which one's virtue (past or present traits and actions) detracts from one's flourishing. It is important to note that I am not claiming that one would be better off to avoid tragedy by resorting to vice. I think such instances of tragedy are best characterized as contexts in which eudaimonia has been made impossible.

That virtue does not guarantee eudaimonia seems to me to be obviously true. The only way one might avoid this implication would be to adopt the implausibly extreme Stoic view, which claims that the mere possession of virtuous traits is enough for eudaimonia; on this view even brutal torture does not detract from one's flourishing. My

268 Of course, it is a risk one needs to take if one is going to have a chance at approximating eudaimonia at all. Also, the life of vice is not without its own characteristic risks (distinct from, but arguably more pervasive than, the risks of the virtuous life).

269 See Nussbaum's *Fragility of Goodness*, especially chapters 11 and 12.

account (and most Aristotelian accounts) maintains that brutal torture, and less extreme events, detract from one's flourishing, even if these events are precipitated by one's own virtue. So, I readily admit that "virtue does not *always* pay". My claim is the more modest (but still quite substantive), "virtue *characteristically* pays" or "virtue is one's best bet for a eudaimonistic payoff". Moreover, often in the instances where virtue does not pay, it is difficult to predict such a tragic outcome ahead of time.[270]

Challenge 2: The immoralist who enters and leaves virtue at will, as it is convenient[271]

This "best bet" is supposed to hold for the long term and also for most isolated instances. However, the problem remains that this view seems to admit not only that virtue will not pay for some lives, or that it won't pay in some instances, but also that there will be instances in which it is foreseeable that the virtuous act will detract from one's eudaimonia. Is it not possible for the immoralist to enter and leave the life of virtue at will, when such tragedy can be foreseen? Could someone pursue the life of virtue for the most part, departing from it only in such circumstances?

The answer to both of these questions is 'no' because the life of virtue is not something that one can enter and leave at will. This is due to the dynamics of habituation, commitment, and enmeshment. These work like a sort of trap, which can be initially avoided, but once engaged, is increasingly difficult to escape. Virtuous action is easy to omit initially, perhaps largely without immediate ramifications.[272] In this way, virtue, on its own, is a poor snare. However, commitments are not so easily avoided. Indeed, as we

[270] Foot makes this point in her article "Moral beliefs", on p. 124, in *Virtues and Vices.*
[271] My response to this challenge is especially indebted to Philippa Foot's thinking in her essay "Moral beliefs" and her monograph *Natural Goodness*.
[272] Besides missing out on the eudaimonistic boons such habituation makes possible.

have seen, avoiding them *completely* results in a life that may not be recognizably human. Moreover, commitments to worthwhile activities and relationships allow for substantial eudaimonistic boons. But as a commitment is maintained it is discovered that actions approximating virtues are needed to secure and maintain these eudaimonistic goods. Repeated virtuous actions will be needed to maintain the commitment itself, because these commitments involve other people and (ethically) virtuous actions are those that help people flourish together (and avoid eudaimonistically negative social dynamics). But 'repeating virtuous action' just is the process of virtue habituation. And the further along this process goes, the harder it will be to extricate oneself from it. What once seemed like the thing to do to get along in the group, will come to be seen as the thing to do *simpliciter*. And the goods and goals sought by the group, once rather external to one's self-concept, will increasingly become integral to one's identity.

I use the image of a 'trap' here, and no doubt this is how the immoralist would antecedently conceive of this dynamic. However, from the perspective of the person caught up in the process of virtue habituation, the dynamic is more aptly characterized as coming to perceive or discover some part of reality that was hithertofore hidden. One is indeed captured but only in the sense of being captivated in some way, coming to perceive some good or value. This is the basis of an ethical demand that the world makes, but it is a demand one is increasingly willing and even happy to meet. If one retained the immoralist's outlook, this would appear to be a trap. However, from the increasingly moralized outlook it is more apt to say one is becoming motivated by previously

unrecognized ethical realities in a way that inspires new virtuous conduct and commitments.

Recall our previous comparison of the first-time freedom rider and Martin Luther King, Jr. For the first-timer, there is not much at stake in participating in a particular (or any) freedom ride. Not much of her identity has been oriented towards and organized around the civil rights movement. To avoid a courageous action of civil disobedience in some far away southern state, is to avoid something that is still quite foreign to her self-concept; to abandon this effort is not a deep self-betrayal. But if King (or some other less famous, but equally committed civil rights figure) were to abandon the cause, the personal ramifications would be dire. It would be a betrayal of self so complete that King might not survive it. For King, to avoid a particular courageous action is to commit a harmful self-betrayal. At the beginning of his career King could have abandoned the cause without much harm to himself, but once he is thoroughly enmeshed with the cause, this abandonment is no longer so innocuous.

These dynamics are not only operative in dramatic moments of choice, they are also at work in more mundane contexts.[273] The structures of commitment, habituation, and enmeshment operate in our everyday relations with friends, lovers, and (less intimately) co-workers and fellow community members. If I am part of an academic department in a decent manner, I will increasingly come to identify with its goals and ends; they will become my own. Hence, I will not be able to simply step in and out of my commitment to the department at will. At some point, to step out of my commitment will

273 See especially chapter 2 for the dynamics of how maintained commitments interact with one's practical identity, and the potential for harm (and action constraints involved therein).

be to step out of an important part of who I am; it is a commitment around which I have organized much of my life and future agency. I won't be able to treat the department's ends and well-being (including the well-being of its members) with complete indifference, to be dropped from consideration when it is foreseeable that such considerations will be inconvenient. If I am capable of doing this, then I probably have not approximated a decent well-functioning departmental relationship in the first place. I have not begun to enjoy the eudaimonistic boons after all, or I am enjoying them in only a partial and extremely fragile manner.

This last point about the department is a general one that holds for many sorts of interpersonal relationships. Consider friendship. To fully enjoy friendship one needs to be a friend oneself; this involves (among other things) pursuing the good of one's friend for its own sake. Of course, in forming and maintaining a friendship it becomes ever more difficult to cleanly separate one's own good from that of the friend.[274] To try to enjoy the benefits of friendship in a way that continually views the needs and well-being of the friend as mere hurdles (that must be overcome) to gain benefits for oneself, is precisely not to approach the friendship as a friend. A genuine friend[275] comes to be so identified with the other that "what is done in friendship is done gladly, *con amore* . . ."[276] On the other hand, one might view the potential needs of a friend as either a necessary nuisance, or (when more onerous) as a burden that justifies the suspension of the friendship. Again, such a person is not really a friend and hence, is not likely enjoying the eudaimonistic

274 See especially the material from chapter 3 concerning this point.

275 And here I obviously have something in mind that is closer to Aristotle's character friend and different from his friendships of utility and pleasure (see *Nicomachean Ethics* Books VIII and IX.).

276 Foot, *Natural Goodness*, p. 102.

boons of genuine friendship. Such a person is pretending to be a friend, executing a pretend friendship. When it comes to eudaimonia, this pretend friendship will be a hollow parody of the real thing. Many of the eudaimonistic boons will be greatly attenuated or non-existent. Furthermore, due to the realities of social relations and trait habituation, this pretend friendship will be extremely fragile. It will likely either fail via relational tension (due to lack of virtuous action) or one will find oneself, in carrying out the requisite virtues, habituating a way of viewing the friendship that makes the immoralist's instrumental thinking, nearly unthinkable. Foot extends this sort of logic to the relationship between parent and child.[277] It seems likely that it extends over all sorts of relationships. Due to the realities of commitment, habituation, and enmeshment, this extension is quite plausible and more than sufficient to answer the immoralist seeking to enter and leave the life of virtue at will.

Moreover, this sort of practical logic can hold even in extreme scenarios, where a large sacrifice is required to avoid vicious action, or to meet the demands of virtue. In such scenarios, it is too late to back out of the life of virtue and secure flourishing some other way; a life of continued flourishing has been made impossible, the only choice is between a harmful self-betrayal or a noble sacrifice.[278] A person who has approximated the relevant virtue cannot simply betray a friend[279] and then continue on to pursue eudaimonia unmarred by this betrayal. This would be akin to a lifelong powerlifter, realizing that she will not be able to medal in the upcoming Olympics, deciding to

277 Ibid. 102.

278 At the extreme end of the sacrifice continuum is the result of a good death.

279 Or murder a political opponent, or neglect to aide a brother in need, or cheat on a spouse, or destroy a department for monetary gain, or omit embarrassing but salvific testimony on behalf of the falsely accused, or. . . Many relevant virtuous and vicious actions could be plugged in here.

compete as a marathoner instead.[280] The choice here is not between failure in one sport and success in another; it is a choice between two failures. Likewise, the genuine friend does not have a choice between a sacrifice or a continued happy life. To avoid the sacrifice would be a shameful betrayal of self.[281] If self-betrayal is always a live option, to be taken when things get onerous enough, then I suggest one does not have the relevant 'self' after all. Hence, the eudaimonistic boons are not likely attendant, or are greatly attenuated.

Challenge 3: The thoroughly hardened or exceptionally old immoralist

So far we have been talking as if addressing a person not yet an immoralist, or an incipient immoralist only in the beginning stages of such a life. However, there seems to be a special challenge associated with the thoroughly hardened or old immoralist (these categories might naturally overlap). There are at least two reasons for this. First, there is the question of the possibility of reform. Even if it is advisable or desirable to reform, is it possible that some are too far gone to be brought back into a life of virtue or any decent approximation of it? Second, will such a reform be worth it eudaimonistically? Virtue habituation is usually a long and potentially difficult process. If one has lived a long time in indifference or opposition to the virtues, then it seems it would be especially hard to unlearn all of those bad habits and inhumane ways of viewing the world. And even if successful, will the old immoralist live long enough to enjoy the eudaimonistic payoff?

In response I think it is useful to consider a concrete case. Think of the old immoralist, long solidified in his pursuit of self-interest, paying little heed to moral

280 See chapter 2 for the development of this example.

281 For more on this topic see Neera Badhwar's essays "Altruism vs Self-Interest: Sometimes a False Dichotomy" and "Self-Interest and Virtue."

concerns that go beyond some basic rules of fairness and justice, which allow him to get along in civil society without being arrested. Let's consider then Charles Dickens' character Ebenezer Scrooge.[282] Scrooge provides an interesting case for the additional reason that he does not coolly consider the immoralist life ahead of time and then deliberately embark upon it. Scrooge gradually slips into immoralism, passing over opportunities for love and sacrificing them to the pursuit of money (and increasingly pursuing money for its own sake). This process continues until Scrooge is an old cantankerous miser, practicing the coldest form of justice with even his most valued employees, spurning what little possibility he has left for intimate human relations, and taking advantage of poor debtors unable to pay their mortgages, kicking them out on the street. The difficulty of reform is well illustrated in Ebenezer, who has plenty of chances (if he only looked with fresh eyes) to learn from ethically decent people (like the humble employee and loving father Bob Cratchit). He also has ample opportunity to take steps towards a more ethically decent life (like heeding Cratchit's pleading on behalf of the poor debtors' at Christmastime, or the two men that come to Scrooge's door asking for modest alms out of Ebenezer's prodigious wealth). Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is of course a story, not just of moral reform, but of moral conversion. And we see from this short initial description why a dramatic conversion is necessary if Scrooge is to reform. The question remains, is such a conversion possible, and if so, is it desirable (for Scrooge himself)?

[282] See Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

If one subscribes to a religious tradition like Christianity, moral (and religious) conversions are not only possible; they are actual. Dickens himself employs the supernatural means of quasi-omniscient ghosts to convert Scrooge to a new life of compassion and generosity. However, one need not go in for religion or the supernatural to accept the possibility of radical conversion.[283] Although the medium of Scrooge's conversion is ghostly, note that the occasion and content of the conversion are both fairly mundane. His "friend" Jacob Marley, a man very like Scrooge himself, has died seven years hence, and Scrooge is reminded of this on the anniversary of his death (Christmas Eve). This might provide anyone with an occasion to reconsider life, past, present, and future. The hardened immoralist might be reminded of his mortality and feel compelled to consider his life more deliberately. We could imagine a more recent death that spurs this process as well. Moreover, the death of the closest thing Scrooge has to a friend has perhaps made it even clearer, these past seven years, just how friendless and alone he is. This might naturally lead someone to consider how they pushed people away, squandering numerous opportunities for intimacy, because one could not, or would not, commit to various more virtuous behaviors and values. This is what Scrooge does in considering his past. He considers the young woman (Belle) he pushed away, and the jovial, generous boss he betrayed (Old Fezziwig). When he compares this with his present, the difference is stark. Particularly poignant is the comparison of his own business practices to those of Fezziwig. Young Ebenezer admired this man. What does that mean for how he regards his own (very different) practices? All this may also

283 Interestingly enough, Kant does think one needs to go in for religion on this score, at least in the form of hoping that there is a God who provides "grace" with which one can complete a conversion, even a radical one. For Kant's account of grace see his *Religion*, pp. 40, 70 and 108-109.

naturally lead one to think of the future. After all, Marley was roughly the same age as Scrooge; death will come someday, perhaps soon.

Now one could claim that, at this point in the story, both the ability to bring off a moral conversion and the desirability (for Scrooge) of such a task, depend on some sort of fear of a supernatural hell that needs to be avoided; but I do not think this is the case. We can realistically characterize his fear (or the fear of a hardened immoralist like Scrooge) as a fear of a life wasted. He fears that, death not being far off, his life will ultimately end up being about shameful worthless pursuits. It has increasingly become about the making of money for money's sake, to the detriment of the poor, his employees, and his own (potential, but not actual) intimate relations. This sort of realization, that one's life has increasingly become committed to meaningless activities which are not at all admirable, is both available to the immoralist, and can be plausibly motivating. The question is, can a moral conversion near the end of life really redeem, in even a partial way, a long life of increasingly immoralist bent?

I think so.[284] The example of Scrooge is instructive. He seeks to dramatically change his behavior and others are happy to accept this change. Scrooge is contrite, expressing remorse. Habituating new ways of being is likely to be quite difficult, but if a

284 This raises the question: why is this sort of deviation from a vicious practical identity not a harmful self-betrayal, whereas the abandonment of a more virtuous practical identity is? What distinguishes the self-betrayal of the virtuous from the reformation of self of the vicious? The difference, I imagine, is that the virtuous are betraying the genuine goods they have recognized and internalized in their values and commitments. The vicious, in reforming, are recognizing they have been mistaken about what is really valuable (or oblivious to some substantial realm of genuine value). Thus, the change of the virtuous is a betrayal of the goods they have come to recognize, the change of the vicious is a progression based on a new revelation of value. The reformation of the vicious is based on a more accurate vision of the world, while the self-betrayal of the virtuous is pulled off, in part, through the effacing of the accurate vision they already possessed. Thanks to Talbot Brewer for bringing this asymmetry to my attention and suggesting an avenue to address it.

genuine conversion has taken place, this process seems to be possible (it certainly seems to be actual, though rare, in the real world). Moreover, the meaning of the narrative of one's life is particularly susceptible to dramatic change at the end; the quality of one's life-narrative depends more heavily on how it finishes. This is why Aristotle thinks even a long life of virtue (like Priam's) can be significantly marred at the end. And it is why, intuitively, we think Ebenezer's life as a whole has been made much better by his conversion, even if he lives only a few months (or even days) afterwards. So if we find the example of Scrooge's conversion to be at all plausible or realistic, and think that its plausibility does not depend on the supernatural or the religious, then we have an example that should have some force with even the hardened immoralist. This late moral conversion is both possible and desirable; the logic of EHI encourages its pursuit.

Challenge 4: Domain Specific Virtues (or something like them)

Another challenge involves the possibility of domain specific virtues. Someone might think that it is possible to excel in certain virtues, and on the strength of these flourish, despite being positively vicious in other areas of one's life. Consider for example the talented artist, or the committed scientist, who through a combination of genius and hard work achieves excellence in some area of worthwhile human endeavor. However, this same figure lacks even an approximation of some key ethical virtues, and may even possess some particularly troubling vices. Perhaps they treat horribly those around them, including their family and other close relations. This may be tolerated because of their great achievements; and these achievements are perhaps so great that any detraction from eudaimonia owing to vice is more than made up for. Hence, some might

claim that such people can flourish despite their lack of (some) virtues and possession of (some) vices. How might we respond to such a possibility?

One initial response might involve calling into question those admirable traits that these figures seem to have because one maintains either a 'unity of the virtues' thesis, or that particular virtues are global. Although the unity of the virtues is today often dismissed out of hand there are those who offer a compelling case for it (and of course Aristotle himself is thought to have maintained this thesis).[285] If the virtues form some sort of unity, then this would mean that to lack any virtue is to lack them all (at least in some fashion). Also, one might maintain that if one exercises a particular virtue in one domain, then they will do so in all other relevant domains of practical life. Given these two theses the "domain specific virtue" challenge to the EHI strategy would not get off the ground. While the debate surrounding the supposed unity, and/or globality, of the virtues is interesting, it is also complex, involving subtle distinctions that would take us far afield. Fortunately for our purposes here we need not enter into this literature. This is because the strength of this challenge does not depend on the good traits in question being genuine virtues. They might in fact be something akin to Aristotle's natural virtues (mere habits unguided by practical wisdom) or some other sub-virtue trait which, nevertheless, still facilitates human flourishing for the person possessing it. Consider the accomplished scientist, or the gifted artist. Whether we consider it a virtue or not, we can recognize a trait to tenaciously persist in their field or craft and advance via a willingness to work hard. Whether you accept the unity and/or globality theses or not, you might

[285]See Neera Badhwar's "The Limited Unity of Virtue" and Christopher Toner's "The Full Unity of the Virtues." Aristotle comes closest to a unity of the virtues thesis at the end of book VI (in chapter 13) where he claims that all virtues require practical wisdom.

accept that these traits lead to a good life and can do so even if certain vices are present in other areas (like social relations). Given this, I think there are at least three sorts of responses available in order to defend the EHI argumentative strategy.

First, one could simply maintain that such figures do not actually achieve human flourishing, but only something much more partial and much less satisfying. The fact is (sad to say) that great and even admirable human achievement is compatible with a miserable life that falls well short of eudaimonia. Indeed, this phenomenon is so common in some spheres that it has given birth to the all-too-true cliché of the tortured artist who produces great work (in painting, music, literature, or poetry) but lives a miserable life of great suffering and meaninglessness. Just think of all the gifted artists who devoted themselves to their craft, and ended their own lives in suicide.[286] Aristotle (and Aristotelians) maintain that eudaimonia is a largely objective phenomena, and one can mistakenly believe oneself to be eudaimon. However, it is commonly thought that one cannot be so mistaken about *not* having it. Eudaimonia is compatible with a variety of subjective moods, but it is plausibly incompatible with absolute misery (and it is difficult to be mistaken about this subjective state). So, we might admire the achievements of a tortured genius, but most of us would not aspire to the sort of life they live.

But the possibility, and actuality, of the tortured genius, does not rule out the un-tortured type. One can imagine someone who achieves scientific greatness through their dedicated hard work and dogged pursuit of truth (perhaps even winning a Nobel prize)

286 A very partial non-systematic list includes: Ernest Hemingway, Kurt Cobain, Janis Joplin, David Foster Wallace, Virginia Woolf, Vincent Van Goh, Mark Rothko, and Sylvia Plath.

but who is notoriously vicious in social contexts.[287] Perhaps this viciousness leads to a lack of decent social interaction, which only drives the scientist further into her worthwhile and excellent work, leading to greater achievement. Would we want to say that such a scientist flourishes, despite possessing several ethical vices (say callousness stemming from a lack of empathy, a miserliness with money and time, and an attitude of condescension to anyone of merely average (or below average) intelligence)? I think not. I think we can still claim that while such achievement is admirable, the life of the one doing the achieving is not. A life fraught with ethical vices is simply not plausibly eudaimon. It is certainly not admirable and if we could have a close look at the internal psychological life of such a person, I think it likely that we would find a degree of tortured misery driving the person further into their work (perhaps the only thing in their lives that makes sense). Unfortunately I cannot engage in such an intimate internal look, and even if I could, I certainly could not carry out such a psychological analysis for anything like a representative sampling of ethically suspect high-achievers. Hence, if one does not share my judgment of this figure, this first sort of response might seem like little more than table banging. To these objectors I offer a second and third sort of response to this challenge.

Second, even if we grant the possibility (and actuality) of such a vicious high achiever that flourishes, it is plausible that such a figure is fairly rare. The achievement would have to be great indeed to outweigh the detraction from eudaimonia apt to flow

[287]Apparently James Watson (of Watson and Crick DNA fame) lacked some basic decency and has persisted in blatantly racist views to this day. This did not keep him from achieving scientific greatness and winning a Nobel Prize. Although, late in life he has been shunned by the scientific community for his racism and has claimed the consequent lack of funds as a reason for selling his Nobel Prize medal. Thanks to Rebecca Stangl for bringing this example to my attention.

from the relational dysfunction (resulting from the vice). Or, there would need to be some rather abnormal context or circumstance that kept this high-achiever's vice from resulting in relational dysfunction. But if this is the case, and such a figure is sufficiently rare, then she does not really represent a challenge to my argumentative strategy against the immoralist. The EHI strategy depends on the claim that: an approximation of virtue (and an avoidance of vice) is one's "best bet" to achieve eudaimonia. Virtue does not guarantee flourishing, and although I have my doubts, my ethical account is not committed to vice guaranteeing a lack of flourishing. It is committed to vice detracting from flourishing, making it so unlikely that to pursue vice would be a bad strategy for the self-interested immoralist. If the immoralist is really interested in his own flourishing, he will not pursue such an unreliable path that depends so heavily on a rare level of achievement and/or rather abnormal circumstances of accommodation.

Third, if the possibility (and actuality) of the flourishing vicious high-achiever is granted, it is still open for one to argue that such a figure would likely flourish to an even greater extent if they pursued decency instead of vice in their social lives. Eudaimonia plausibly comes in degrees and even if the vicious high-achiever strategy is successful in achieving some modicum of it, it is likely that more flourishing is available to the high achiever who avoids vice and pursues decency instead. After all, people often put up with a high achiever despite her vice; she would likely enter into more pleasant relations in its absence. High achievers are often accorded even greater admiration for their decency or virtue, since it is thought that their achievements might easily lead to a lack of humility or ethical regard for others. But perhaps this challenge could take a slightly different form.

Perhaps we can imagine a person who is virtuous in one broad domain (their in-group) and vicious with respect to another broad domain (everyone else). This points to a larger objection that may be leveled against an Ethics of Flourishing Together, to which we will now turn.

X. Final Objection: An Ethics of Flourishing Together Reduces to an Insularity

An Ethics of Flourishing Together, in particular, and eudaimonism in general, invites the charge of objectionable insularity. An objector might claim that such an ethics enjoins great concern for those with whom one is enmeshed, but allows one to ignore outgroups; or what is worse, it allows one to be positively hostile to outgroups. Part of my flourishing involves the flourishing of my department, including its constituent members. But it does not plausibly involve the flourishing of other departments. The wellbeing of my wife will be crucial for my own, but perhaps I need not be concerned in the slightest with the wellbeing of others' wives. My own good is linked in some way to the goods of those in my community; perhaps in some more tenuous way to the goods of those in my country. But surely (so the objector says) it is not linked to the good of people in other countries, far from my own. Hence the goods of distant strangers can be completely ignored (since indifferent to my own good) and the good of outgroup members in close proximity is of no concern.

XI. Widening the Circle: An Ethics of Flourishing Together is Not Insular

My account of an Ethics of Flourishing Together is an instance of Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism. As such it claims that a good human life is both good for others and good for the one who is living it. In light of this, the objection above suggests two related questions. First, what does an Ethics of Flourishing Together identify as (ethically) virtuous with respect to one's engagement with others? Second, how much flourishing (if any) is possible for someone operating within a strongly demarcated in-group/out-group structure, treating some people well and others with indifference or hostility? While both questions are interesting, and my comments will address both in part, I will place more emphasis on the first question. This is for two reasons. First, as I will indicate presently, the structure of an Ethics of Flourishing Together, including especially MV, requires only that I address the first. Second, though I seriously doubt extreme cases of ingroup/outgroup worldviews (like the Nazis, or white supremacists) characteristically result in flourishing agents, making a full case for this would involve an in-depth engagement with the psychologies of such people. Hence, in the context of my limited space here, I will make only some brief comments regarding the flourishing of various insular groups.

The particular Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonist framework, from within which I have advanced an Ethics of Flourishing Together, includes the mixed view (MV) of justifying the virtues. In brief, according to MV a virtue is rationally justified via two necessary and jointly sufficient conditions. The first condition is that the trait disposes one to respond virtuously to the ethical demands of the world. The second condition is

that when enacted the trait characteristically contributes to the flourishing of the agent.[288] Now consider the question: ***What does an Ethics of Flourishing Together identify as (ethically) virtuous with respect to one's engagement with others?*** Given MV, it is not enough to be ethically virtuous for a trait (or an action flowing from that trait) to characteristically advance the agent's own flourishing. To be virtuous a trait must also be a disposition to respond excellently to the ethical demands of the world in modes of action, appreciation, acknowledgement, etc. . . .[289] Each of the two elements of MV are necessary for a trait (or action) to be ethically virtuous, and jointly they are sufficient. So when asking if a particular insular strategy is consistent with an Ethics of Flourishing Together, one must consider more than just the flourishing of the in-group (or a member of the in-group); one must also consider the ethical demands that out-group members present. To do this one would employ an ethical methodology appropriate to the sort of eudaimonism advanced in chapter 1 (see section IV); this involves the Neurathian procedure of an Aristotelian reflective equilibrium.[290]

It is my contention that such a procedure should yield at least two prohibitory results: (1) one cannot be completely indifferent to the suffering of any human and (2) one cannot actively work for or execute the undeserved harm of innocent humans.[291] In this way I agree with Christopher Gowans who claims that any plausible moral theory will need to be able to accommodate moral universalism. Gowans defines this term

288 See chapter 1, section III, question 2.

289 Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, p. 19-20. See also my summary of Swanton's view in Chapter 1, section III, Question 2.

290 See chapter 1, section IV, sub-sections B and C.

291 I think such a procedure should be able to secure much more, but these are the minimal results I will need to press against the challenge of an ingroup/outgroup strategy.

thusly: "*Moral Universalism*. Each human being has moral worth or standing, and hence deserves serious moral consideration."[292] Universalism should not be confused with a total impartialism, which most Aristotelians (including myself) will reject. An ethics of flourishing together allows for partial concern, but it need not be hopelessly insular, such that anyone outside the in-group can be utterly ignored or wantonly harmed. Partial concern will have limits or constraints, which include extending some moral standing and consideration to any and all humans. I maintain that virtuous concern for others' good can and should have different levels for different people; partiality is apt to a good human life.[293] It is plausible that our concern and care should be apportioned relative to several factors including how enmeshed we are with a person, how efficacious we might be in helping him, if promises are involved, etc. . . . Despite this allowed partiality, I maintain that merely being human is enough to keep someone from being put completely beyond the pale of our (appropriate) care and concern.

Beyond this I contend that a Neurathian procedure of Aristotelian reflective equilibrium, carried out thoroughly enough and in good faith, will yield an approximation of what most today consider a plausible list of virtues, including courage, compassion, benevolence, temperance, generosity, justice, etc. . . . Though I cannot produce the entirety of such a procedure here, I can give some normative considerations one can advance against groups employing a strong in-group/out-group approach to practical life. Let us now consider two sorts of groups at opposite ends of a continuum of size and

292 Gowans, "Virtue and Nature," p. 40.

293 One of the more obvious instances of this is the partial concern proper to a decent parent/child relationship.

cultural distance: a small insular group of friends and a large alternate culture (or sub-culture).

A. Addressing the Viciously Insular Group of Friends

We can imagine a pair of friends, or a small group, that is viciously insular. They are loyal to their fellow group members, giving them ample consideration, care, and concern. However, no such consideration is extended beyond the boundaries of the group. Others are treated as mere obstacles, tools, or means to the group's ends (or the individual's). The humanity of outsiders is either ignored or denied to some degree (perhaps completely). An individual ingroup member might be willing to go to great self-sacrificial lengths for one of their friends, and might treat the needs of outgroup members with indifference, or worse, with active hostility. What can an Ethics of Flourishing Together, within an ASN framework, have to say to such a viciously insular group of friends? There are the initial comments (above) denying that such an ethics would condone any extreme partiality (which is absent of universal human concern); in addition there are some considerations that might appeal to such a group.

First, it will be useful to recall a point I raised in chapter 2 concerning commitment and human agency.[294] In order to have a decent practical identity and agency, one needs to be committed to something other than oneself. Humans need to be committed to values and projects in a way that organizes agency and other commitments. Without these (other-than-self) commitments, there is no robust content of the self and

[294] See especially section V.

thus nothing to be committed to.[295] Being committed to oneself, without being committed to anything other than oneself, would leave the self-commitment without any interesting content. Selves need to be *about* something. Likewise I contend that small groups of friends, if they are to be at all decent, and contribute to one's flourishing, will need to be about something beyond the mere maintenance of the friendship itself, or the members therein. As C.S. Lewis puts it, "The very condition of having friends is that we should want something else besides friends," for "[t]hose who have nothing can share nothing."[296] Now if a commitment to something outside the group is required for the group to have any interesting content to share, this still leaves the possibility of morally abhorrent content. Perhaps the group of friends could commit to causing harm to outsiders for fun, or, more realistically, they might commit to some goal of mutual benefit to the ultimate detriment of outsiders (like violent crime). What might we say then?

First, there is the matter I raised at the end of chapter 3, that the good of other humans is a uniquely worthwhile object of commitment. The component parts of eudaimonia are not simply activities done well, but *worthwhile* activities done well. I contend that there are few potential objects of pursuit or commitment that are more worthwhile than the good of other humans.[297] Now, one could be committed solely to the good of those in one's in-group, however, the dynamics of enmeshment with intimate others (like friends) is an important epistemological link to the worthwhileness of the

295 See chapter 2, section V.

296 Lewis, *The Four Loves*, p. 67. Lewis also puts the same point alternatively, "those who are going nowhere can have no fellow travelers."

297 In fact most plausibly worthwhile activities have this status because of some link to human flourishing.

good of out-group members. We come to see the unique value of individual human beings by entering into intimate relationships with them. Once this occurs, our rejection of the good of out-group members as a worthwhile end becomes increasingly fragile. An in-group member is in constant danger of recognizing the common humanity of the out-group, and thus succumbing to emotional recognitions like empathy, pity, and compassion.[298] This is why those committed to a strong in-group ethos usually have to perpetuate, sometimes with great vehemence, the (relative) inhumanity of those in the out-group. If they are to enjoy any approximation of eudaimonistic boons from the relationships they share within the group, they are apt to see the unique value of humanity in their friends; this will make it increasingly difficult to deny similar value in pursuing the good (or avoiding contributing to the harm) of out-group members.[299] Moreover, as I pointed out at the end of chapter 3, in accepting the good of all humans as a worthwhile end, one enters into a world of practically limitless possibilities for engaging in worthwhile activity. In helping others to flourish (an activity practically inexhaustible in its availability) one engages in a worthwhile pursuit, which is a constituent part of a eudaimon life.

Opening oneself and one's group to intercourse with, and consideration of, out-groups, has other potential eudaimonistic benefits. One can enter into more cooperative

298 It has been noted that even Nazi executioners had to often drink copious amounts of alcohol in order to carry out their horrific duties. In general Nazi death squads, in charge of performing large numbers of executions, commonly suffered from an array of psychological difficulties, including complete breakdowns and PTSD. See for example MacNair, "Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress: The Psychological consequences of killing", pp. 46-48.

299 This is similar to a point Neera Badhwar makes concerning the combating of an objectionable selfishness to the exclusion of all concern for others. In her article "Self-Interest and Virtue" she writes, ". . . in recognizing our own human capacities and needs, we recognize our commonalities with others and, thus, the capacities and needs of others." p. 253.

relations with a larger swath of humanity. A member of an insular group can count on the loyalty of a few close friends. A member of a group that has good relations with other groups can count on cooperation and non-aggression from a much larger network. A more open attitude towards out-group members also allows for one to take fuller advantage of unique ways of viewing the world and navigating its practical challenges. An insular group is in a poor position to gain information on best practices; a more cosmopolitan (or at least less hostile and dismissive) group can take fuller advantage of the collective wisdom of a larger network. Engagement with out-groups can alert one to a richer world of potential meanings, perspectives, and values, the absence of which represents a relative impoverishment of a life.[300]

B. What about Larger Insular Groups?

When we traverse the continuum of size and cultural distance to the opposite end, much of what I have said thus far can still be applied with some force. Larger groups of insularity, including whole (sub)cultures, can operate with a similarly stark in-group/out-group demarcation. And similar to the smaller group one can ask what this culture is about. Is it committed to anything beyond its own perpetuation, and if so, why not the worthwhile end of helping other groups and cultures to flourish? Moreover, a decently flourishing (sub)culture will recognize the uniquely potent value of human life in their fellow group members. This recognition will make their view of out-group members as less human, increasingly fragile. This will be especially true as globalization continues to take hold and cultures once separate have more intercourse with one another. And of

300 See the very end of chapter 3 for an elaboration of this point.

course, as above, when a culture opens itself up to more decent intercourse with a wider range of cultures, it can count on the cooperation and non-aggression of a larger swath of humanity. This undoubtedly helps all cultures involved. And, again, this increased openness and cosmopolitanism, allows the culture to benefit from a variety of perspectives on the world, ways of valuing, and solutions to common practical problems.

However, when we move from small to (very) large insular groups, it may be thought that some of my comments lose some of their impact. A fully developed alternative (sub)culture might be more effective in maintaining the fiction of outgroup inhumanity and be more eudaimonistically self-sufficient. The latter may reinforce the former, since it would enable less (and less extensive) cultural interaction which perhaps helps guard the fragile lie of the relative inhumanity of outsiders. Again, one should note that an ethics of flourishing together does not condone insularity, on any scale, because MV requires that virtues be conducive to flourishing ***and*** to apt response to the (ethical) demands of the world (including those presented by outgroups). With that in mind there are a few more things we can say by way of response.

First, while a larger group may be able to more effectively legitimate the idea of out-group inhumanity, this will remain an objectively fragile point. That is, such a belief will contribute to the reflective equilibrium of the relevant culture being more fragile (more easily unsettled) than the equilibrium of a culture lacking such an insular outlook.[301] This objective fragility will mean that the culture in question will have to engage in greater mental gymnastics, repression, and avoid a certain degree of globalism

301 All other factors remaining equal.

(and its benefits) if it is to maintain its insular outlook. This suggests a related question: does anyone outside such an insular outlook seriously envy or admire it? If there is any such admiration it is usually for elements completely separable and accidental to the insularity. We may romanticize the Vikings, but their life of brutal conquest is, upon reflection, not at all admirable, or desirable. The list of contemporary cultures that are high on insularity is also a list of cultures (mostly) low on standard of living. North Korea is just the most extreme example of the (much) less than desirable consequences of such insularity. And even if we admitted a substantial degree of flourishing to the members of a particular insular culture, one might plausibly claim that such flourishing could be greater if the culture were less insular, or that such flourishing is more fragile because it is much more apt to be opposed by out-groups (who often suffer as a result). Slave revolts and revolutions do not occur in cultures without slaves and repressive regimes in which the humanity of one group is treated with disdain (or worse) by another.

If one grants all of this but still has a remaining concern about the possibility of a (large) ingroup strategy facilitating a flourishing life, I suspect the real substance of the worry, lurking beneath the surface, concerns relativism and/or pervasive moral disagreement. I think there is plenty to say on this front, but these concerns are beyond the scope of this chapter and this project as a whole. For now, what we have said, especially in light of the requirements of MV, should be enough to answer the charge of objectionable insularity. An Ethics of Flourishing Together is one that does allow for healthy partial concern, but also demands moral universalism and thus prohibits insularity.

XII. Conclusion: Has this Eudaimonism Devolved into (an objectionable) Egoism?

An Ethics of Flourishing Together, like all eudaimonistic approaches, attempts to show that the ethically virtuous life is a life that is good for the virtuous agent herself. This can form the basis of an argumentative strategy that addresses the challenge of immoralism by appealing to the self-interest of the immoralist. This is what I have done above with the EHI. An Ethics of Flourishing Together, and the sort of life it prescribes, is attractive to many people because of its connection to the wellbeing of the agent herself. This allows for the avoidance of a tension between ethical and self-interested reasons. Eudaimonism in general and an Ethics of Flourishing Together in particular, seeks (to some degree) to collapse these two realms of practical reasons into one. However, these features that commend eudaimonism, and make it particularly apt for addressing immoralism, are the same ones that invite the charge of (objectionable) egoism. Perhaps we have only managed to develop a refined form of egoism. Or, as Prichard might put it, we started out attempting to show people what they should do, but only succeeded in showing them what they really wanted to do. We started out doing moral philosophy and then changed the subject to merely prudential practical reason.[302]

This conclusion is both misguided and false. In the next and final chapter I will address the charge that eudaimonistic approaches to ethics are objectionably egoistic. Since the historically recent resurgence of virtue ethics this charge has been leveled with more frequency, and occasionally with some systematic subtlety and care.[303] There has

302 See Pritchard, "Does Moral philosophy Rest on a Mistake?"

303 Thomas Hurka is the main critic advancing this charge against eudaimonism. In particular see chapter 8 of his 2001 book *Virtue, Vice, and Value* and his more recent article "Aristotle on Virtue: Wrong, Wrong, and Wrong."

also been some good recent work responding to this challenge on behalf of eudaimonists, but more can be done.[304] This is especially true in light of my own foregoing account of enmeshment and an Ethics of Flourishing Together. I will now employ this account to provide a uniquely convincing answer to the charge of egoism.

[304] In the recent past Julia Annas ("Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism") and Christine Swanton (*Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, pp. 77-80) have written on this topic. More recently Christopher Toner has addressed this charge in "Virtue Ethics and the Nature and Forms of Egoism".

Chapter 5

The Ethics of Flourishing Together and the Charge of Egoism

"This definition restricts what can count as an object of self-interest or altruism. Any object of self-interest must be a state of oneself, and any object of altruism a state of some other person."

(Thomas Hurka)[305]

". . . he who loves another looks upon his friend as another self, he counts his friend's hurt as his own, so that he grieves for his friend's hurt as though he were hurt himself. Hence the Philosopher (Ethic. ix, 4) reckons "grieving with one's friend" as being one of the signs of friendship, and the Apostle says (Romans 12:15): "Rejoice with them that rejoice, weep with them that weep."

(Thomas Aquinas)[306]

I. Introduction: A Brief History of a Mischaracterization

I would like to begin this chapter by quoting Aristotle at length as he distinguishes between two types of self-lovers. He writes,

> "Those who make self-love a matter of reproach ascribe it to those who award the biggest share in money, honours and bodily pleasures to themselves . . . Those who overreach for these goods gratify their appetites and in general their feelings and the nonrational part of the soul; and this is the character of the many. That is why the application of the term ['self-love'] is derived from the most frequent [kind of self-love], which is base. This type of self-lover, then, is justifiably reproached.
>
> And plainly it is the person who awards himself these goods whom the many habitually call a self-lover. For if someone is always eager above all to do just or temperate actions or any other actions in accord with the virtues, and in general always gains for himself what is fine, no one will call him a self-lover or blame him for it. This sort of person, however, more than the other sort, seems to be a self-lover. At any rate he awards himself what is finest and best of all, and gratifies the most controlling part of himself, obeying it in everything."[307]

In this passage Aristotle distinguishes between two sorts of self-love. One is base, and represents the more common usage of the term. The other is fine, and corresponds to the

[305] "Self-Interest, Altruism, and Virtue," p. 288.
[306] *Summa Theologica*, Question 30, Article 2.
[307] Nicomachean Ethics, 1168b16-33.

virtuous person's character and actions. It would be unfortunate if we failed to distinguish these two sorts of self-love. Such a move, for example, would lump together (under the same heading), a vicious self-serving greed and an other-oriented generosity. If something like this occurs either in common usage, or in ethical theorizing, then surely it should give us pause. Something like this confusion has proliferated in contemporary philosophical ethics; the label of egoist is applied to both the vicious self-seeker and the other oriented virtuous agent. But why is this the case?

With the advent of the modern period philosophers began to question more intensely the ancient thesis that the good of the agent is largely compatible with the good of others. This sort of thinking is not particularly new. One encounters it in the words of Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*, when he argues that the good life is one that pursues injustice for one's own gain, while appearing just, thus gaining the benefits of *appearing* just without incurring the costs to self-interest of actually *being* just.[308] This sort of thought clearly assumes what is (apparently) good for oneself (in this case injustice) is easily divided from (and perhaps often inversely related to) what is good for others (in this case justice). What is relatively new, then, is that the standard view among philosophers involves calling the ancient eudaimonistic optimism into question. It was standard for ancient (and medieval) ethicists to link the good of the agent to the good of others; though conceptually distinct, they were closely tied.[309] But in modern and contemporary (especially analytic) philosophy these two goods are often thought to be

308 See *Republic* Book I
309 Though some question the presence of the conceptual distinction among the ancients. See Talbot Brewer's *The Retrieval of Ethics*, chapter 6. By "closely tied" here I am referring to causal and constitutive links.

less closely related, sometimes even antithetical.[310] This sort of thought is behind the critique of ancient ethics leveled in the 19th and early 20th centuries by both Henry Sidgwick and H.A. Prichard.

In his 1912 essay, "Does moral philosophy Rest on a Mistake", Pritchard criticizes the eudaimonist answer to the question, "Why be moral?" He characterizes eudaimonists like Plato as answering this question by pointing out that moral action works to our advantage or somehow realizes our own happiness. This sort of response he thinks fails to answer the question asked; it does not identify what one ought to do, but only that one already desires to do (at least deep down) what has traditionally been labeled with this moral ought.[311] Writing in the 19th century, Henry Sidgwick criticized the ancients for failing to separate the agent's own good from an impersonal notion of the good.[312] For moderns like Sidgwick there is a clear and easy distinction to be made between the good of the agent, and the moral good (which is often associated with what is good for those other than the agent herself).

Continuing this line of thought many 20th century ethicists have rejected eudaimonistic ethics out of hand as objectionably egoistic, focusing on the good of the agent when it is the good of others, or a more impersonal good, that should be at stake. However, with the resurgence of Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, it has become clear that such an unreflective "out-of-hand" sort of rejection will no longer suffice. Hence, relatively recently there have been some more careful systematic efforts to advance the

310 Brewer, *Retrieval of Ethics*, chapter 6.
311 See p. 23.
312 Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, pp. 195-197. For the original citation from Sidgwick see his *Methods of Ethics*, p. 92.

charge of an objectionable egoism against eudaimonistic ethics. The most prominent of these efforts has been carried out by Thomas Hurka. In this chapter I will address the charge of an objectionable egoism as outlined in Hurka's writings. It is my hope that in answering Hurka's challenge, I can show more generally why eudaimonism is not aptly labeled egoistic, and is certainly not worthy of the label in any morally objectionable way. My answer to Hurka will involve the particular account of eudaimonism I have advanced in the previous four chapters: an Ethics of Flourishing Together.

II. Hurka's Charge of Egoism in Outline

Thomas Hurka is an able and staunch opponent of Aristotelian eudaimonism.[313] In his 2001 book *Virtue, Vice, and Value* Hurka argues that Aristotelian eudaimonism is objectionably egoistic in two ways. First, he claims that eudaimonist virtue ethics encourages motives that are either selfish or non-virtuous in some way.[314] One might think that eudaimonism must encourage one to act for the sake of one's own flourishing, or act because it is what is virtuous (or what the virtuous person would do). It has been noted (correctly to my mind) that these motivations (as stated) are not virtuous, but rather, are self-indulgent. When running into a burning building to save a child it would seem that the courageous person is not motivated by the desire to advance her own flourishing, or even that such an act is the courageous thing to do; rather, she is motivated by the thought: "despite the danger, there is a good chance that I can save that child from dying a premature and painful death", full stop.

313 Hurka is a virtue ethicist himself, but of a decidedly un-Aristotelian sort.
314 Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, pp. 246-247.

Second, Hurka claims that the ultimate justification, or “philosophical grounding” of virtuous action, according to eudaimonism, is that it contributes to the flourishing of the agent.[315] If this is the ultimate objective rationale, then (so the objection goes) eudaimonism is ultimately self-centered and/or self-focused in an objectionable way. A hybrid of the first and second general forms of objection attacks the notion that a virtuous agent only consults this ultimate justification in cool moments of reflection.[316] That is, the objective justification is still objectionable and it still motivates at some meta-level, in a ‘cool hour’.

Accompanying these two general forms of the charge is the additional difficulty of self-effacingness. The term “self-effacing”[317] refers to a charge leveled at some normative ethical theories. A theory is self-effacing if, according to the theory, in order for the agent to achieve the morally right or best action, the agent must not be motivated by what ultimately justifies her action or makes it good.[318] The modern genesis of this charge is Stocker’s 1976 article “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories”. In this essay Stocker argues that modern moral theories, especially forms of consequentialism and deontology, fall prey to this charge of self-effacingness (though he does not use that term). His primary example concerns a person visiting a friend in the hospital.[319] When the sick friend expresses gratitude, we might imagine the visiting friend saying, “Don’t worry about it. I was only doing my duty” or “Of course I came; ultimately I discerned it

315 Ibid., pp. 248-249.

316 This is the response that Julia Annas advances in order to answer the charge of egoism. See her essay “Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism,” pp. 210-214.

317 This term is owed to Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 24.

318 This is a paraphrase of how Simon Keller defines the self-effacing in his 2007 essay, “Virtue Ethics is Self-Effacing,” p. 221.

319 p. 462.

would produce the best consequences in terms of pleasure (and absence of pain) in the world." Stocker's point is that by acting on, or being motivated by, the justification of the action, the agent nullified the good that it was meant to achieve (to cheer up his friend). The sick friend would be disappointed in both cases. Stocker also claims that being motivated by the objective justification provided by these theories is incompatible with certain goods like intimate relationships or genuine friendships.[320] Thus, in order to achieve this good the deontologist or consequentialist has to counsel the agent to be motivated by reasons other than those that justify the action according to the relevant normative theory.

At the time Stocker thought that the then emerging forms of virtue ethics fared much better in avoiding this problem. More recently Hurka (2001, 2013) and Simon Keller (2007) have argued that eudaimonist Virtue Ethics is just as guilty of self-effacingness. A common move for the eudaimonist in addressing the first motivational form of the egoism charge is to say that the virtuous agent just has virtuous motives (and is not motivated by the contribution of his actions to his own flourishing). Ironically, on this account, the virtuous agent will need to limit her ethical knowledge in order to be fully virtuous. Or, if she has full ethical knowledge, she will need to somehow avoid being motivated by what ultimately (and objectively) justifies her actions. This appears to be self-effacing, which is contrary to the spirit of Aristotelian ethics. It is only a strawman version of Aristotelian virtue that describes it as a disposition to perform an unthinking habitual response. Genuine Aristotelian virtues involve practical wisdom.

[320] Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," p. 458-464. Bernard Williams echoes this charge in "Persons, Character, and Morality," in *Moral Luck*, pp. 16-19.

Aristotle thought the virtuous agent had some sort of practical knowledge and executed excellent actions in a knowing way (perhaps perceiving the salient moral features of a particular situation).[321] A virtuous agent, in the Aristotelian sense, need not efface any ethically informative reality from his mind. Finally, the charge of self-effacingness is especially troubling since it has often been argued that virtue ethics is uniquely equipped to *avoid* this charge to which consequentialists and deontologists fall prey.

So, it seems that in the process of addressing the first (motivational) form of the egoism charge one confronts the spectre of self-effacement. In addressing self-effacement, one will be driven to address the second (justificatory) form of the egoism charge. That is, in addressing self-effacement one might want the virtuous agent to be able to be aware of, and perhaps motivated by, what ultimately justifies her actions. Hence, the main (and more difficult problem) may center on the ultimate objective rationale of virtuous action. So the eudaimonist answering the charge of egoism seeks to:

> (1) Avoid a theory that is objectionably egoistic or self-centered, either (a) motivationally or (b) with respect to the objective justification of virtuous action.
> (2) Avoid a theory which is self-effacing.

My task in the rest of this chapter will be to show that these goals are compatible; indeed, they are concretely satisfied in my own account of Aristotelian eudaimonism: an Ethics of Flourishing Together. Let's now turn to a more recent Hurka essay to see in more detail, just what the genesis of Hurka's charge is, how he goes wrong, and how an Ethics of Flourishing Together provides an answer.

321 *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II. 4.

III. Hurka on Aristotelian Eudaimonism: Wrong, Wrong, Wrong, and Wrong

In his 2013 essay "Aristotle on Virtue: Wrong, Wrong, and Wrong" Hurka goes into greater detail concerning the charge of egoism as applied to Aristotle. Although his main target is Aristotle, it is clear that he thinks that eudaimonist *Neo*-Aristotelians also fall within the purview of his criticism.[322] While I am not concerned with defending every detail of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* I am interested in defending the general structure of his eudaimonism (or at least a plausibly Aristotelian construal of it).[323] As we have seen in the previous four chapters, there is an Aristotelian eudaimonist option that is so other-focused it brings the flourishing of others right into the heart of one's own eudaimonia, as a partial constituent. So how did Hurka go so wrong as to see eudaimonism as objectionably egoistic?

a. Eudaimonia: Good for me, good for others, or simply good?

In his writings Hurka reveals himself to be subject to the mischaracterization highlighted in the introduction to this chapter. In his 2013 essay he writes,

> "The general structure of Aristotle's ethics is set out in *NE* I. In every act we aim at some good, and therefore, he argues, aim at a single chief good. This chief good is *eudaimonia*, and though he doesn't say so explicitly, it seems clear that for each person the relevant good is just her own *eudaimonia*"[324]

Hurka goes on to describe this as an "egoistic structure".[325] Now, we may ask, why is such a structure properly labeled "egoistic"? Here Hurka seems to indicate that this structure is egoistic simply because it traces ultimate justification for action back to the

322 Moreover, I think he misreads Aristotle himself.

323 As I stated in chapter 1, I am not engaged in an historical project. I want my general framework to be plausibly Aristotelian in the sense that Aristotle himself might have adopted it. Moreover, my account of an Ethics of Flourishing Together, should be, by and large, compatible with Aristotle's own ethics, merely extending, augmenting and trimming it, not engaging in a wholesale overhaul.

324 Aristotle on Virtue: Wrong, Wrong and Wrong, p. 14.

325 Ibid., p. 14.

eudaimonia of the agent herself. Hurka has labeled this structure as egoistic prior to any further or more detailed analysis, as if his short initial description shows that Aristotelian eudaimonism obviously and uncontroversially merits this label. But this is far from obvious or uncontroversial; on the contrary, after a quick gloss of what the concept of eudaimonia involves, such a label appears rather inapt.

Part of the problem, and a potential source of confusion, is that Hurka (and others) may be thinking of eudaimonia as something that pertains only to the life of the agent in question, in a straightforward and uncomplicated manner. Eudaimonia is something that is clearly and unambiguously *mine* or *yours*, and not both. But, as I have shown in the previous chapters, eudaimonia is not such a tidy phenomenon. There are at least two reasons for this. First, a eudaimon life is supposed to be an excellent life both good for oneself and good for others. Secondly, there are deep structural reasons involving enmeshment with others (that I will reference in the next section) for why my eudaimonia quite literally involves the good of others in its own constitution (and vice versa).

If eudaimonia is a phenomenon not properly thought of merely in terms of the agent's own good, but should at the same time reference the good of others, then Hurka's charge of egoism begins to look suspect. Rather than thinking of eudaimonia as a life primarily good for the one living it (or primarily good for others), we should instead think of it as an *excellent* human life. Aristotelian eudaimonists are those philosophers who happen to believe that an excellent human life is both good for its possessor and those who are in relation to its possessor; it is good for the eudaimon person and for others. In eudaimonism it is not easy or desirable to separate my good from the good of others.

Indeed, when we investigate the structures of agency and social life, it is clear that such a task is both artificial and misleading. In eudaimonism we learn that my good integrally involves the good of others, and vice-versa.

b. The Charge of Egoism: Objectionable Justification?

The justification form of Hurka's egoism charge rests on two (of Hurka's) errors concerning what Aristotelian eudaimonism is (or can be). Both of these errors are directly addressed in my own Ethics of Flourishing Together.

Error 1: Aristotelian eudaimonism does not admit of a justification of action that countenances goods external to the self. Hurka writes, "[Aristotle] can't say courage is . . . virtuous because it cares proportionally about goods outside the self . . . whereas cowardice and selfishness are vices because they care too little about others' goods. He can't value proportionality among goods that he can't recognize in the first place."[326] In his conclusion to the 2013 essay Hurka summarizes this erroneous characterization of Aristotle even more explicitly. He writes,

> "We can distinguish two general approaches to the concept of virtue, which can be called the outside-in and the inside-out. The outside-in approach takes there to be values or, more generally, normative factors outside a person's motives and attitudes and holds that virtues involve appropriate responses to those factors. What makes an attitude virtuous is its relation to something outside itself and often outside the agent, as when its object is another person's pleasure or freedom from pain. This externally-based explanation of what makes the virtues virtues goes with a picture of virtuous motivation as likewise externally focused, so a virtuous person cares most about the virtues' objects, such as another's pleasure or pain . . . the inside-out approach, by contrast, doesn't relate the virtues to external values since it doesn't recognize any. It just says the virtues are good states of the person, or intrinsic constituents of an overall good or *eudaimon* life for him."[327]

Error 2: An agent's life is only eudaimon in virtue of something unambiguously true of the agent herself (and no one else), not in virtue of the good of

326 Hurka, "Aristotle on Virtue: Wrong, Wrong, and Wrong," p. 15.
327 Ibid., p. 24.

others. This second error is perhaps just a particular form of the first. Hurka believes that because ultimate justification traces back to one's eudaimonia, and eudaimonia is a reality exclusively *for the agent*, the good of others cannot factor into one's ultimate justification of action. Ostensibly for such a justification to work the good of another would have to be a constituent part of the agent's own eudaimonia; Hurka does not even countenance this possibility. He writes,

> " . . . Aristotle's ethics . . . doesn't allow the claim that states of other people such as their pleasure or knowledge are good in a way that by itself gives me sufficient reason to promote them. **Any good playing that role must either be or contribute to a chief good that's my own *eudaimonia*, and states of other people can't do that: my life can't be better or more *eudaimon* because of something true of you.**"[328]

Further down on the page Hurka claims, ". . . my *eudaimonia* is necessarily a state of me and located in my life; it's my *eudaimonia* rather than someone else's." As we will see, this characterization is incorrect because oversimple. Eudaimonia is not a state (it is an activity or composed of activities) and it is not straightforwardly something an agent possesses alone, to the exclusion of others.

Response to error 1: The Mixed View of Justification. What is it that makes a virtue a virtue? In chapter 1 I advanced the mixed view of virtue justification (MV). In brief MV justifies virtuous action (or traits as virtues that dispose agents to such action) via two elements: the ethical demands of the world and the flourishing of the agent in question. A trait is a virtue if and only if it is conducive to virtuous response as defined by the demands of the world in various ethical contexts ***and*** when manifest it characteristically results in the flourishing of the agent.[329] Both elements are necessary,

328 Ibid., p. 15 (**bold mine**).

329 See chapter 1, section III, question 2 of this dissertation.

and jointly they are sufficient for ethical virtue. This account is compelling on independent grounds, but it also allows for a strong response to the charge of egoism.

First, one should note that in Aristotelian eudaimonism, it is not virtues that are constituents of eudaimonia, but excellent activities. Eudaimonia is not a state or composed of states, it is an activity (or composed of activities). Moreover, not just any activities will do; the activities that contribute to eudaimonia must be plausibly worthwhile. Virtues have eudaimonistic value because they dispose one to execute these worthwhile activities well. Hence, their eudaimonistic value is derivative from the worthwhile activities themselves, including the worthwhile ends the activities achieve. This is why a person in a coma, despite having all of the virtues, does not flourish.[330] Juxtaposed to this feature of eudaimonism, Hurka's claim (that Aristotelian ethics does not allow the value of things external to the agent to figure into the justification of virtue) seems bizarre. Far from not allowing such values a justificatory role, Aristotelian eudaimonism requires external values in order to remain intelligible. Activities need to be worthwhile in themselves and/or have intrinsically worthwhile ends; they do not gain the status of worthwhileness because they are components of eudaimonia. The order of explanation is to be read the other way round. A person's life is enriched and made more eudaimon because he engages in valuable activities in an excellent manner. If these activities and their ends did not have value apart from the flourishing of the agent, they could not contribute to the agent's flourishing. So, on MV, at least part of what justifies virtuous activities or traits as excellent, is that they are excellent responses to the ethical

330 This is similar to Aristotle's point concerning the virtuous person who is asleep. See *Nicomachean Ethics* I.8.

demands of the world. The sorts of ethical considerations that Hurka thinks are proper to the justification of ethical action (like the suffering or benefit of others) are included as part of the justification on the MV account. This means Aristotelian ethics is "outside-in" in its approach after all.

Here it is important to note that despite this outside-in status, Aristotelian approaches to justifying the virtues will remain significantly different from Hurka's.[331] Hurka's recursive account of virtue justification starts with intrinsic values like pleasure, knowledge, and achievement and justifies actions or mental states as virtuous if they are proportional responses to such values.[332] Is the response proportional to the objective base value in the world? If so, then it qualifies as virtuous, if not then it is less than virtuous. An Aristotelian will reject this feature of Hurka's account not because Aristotelianism cannot account for this proportionality concern (as an outside-in approach it can) and not because proportionality never matters (it often does). Rather, an Aristotelian will maintain that proportionality is not ***all*** that matters when it comes to justifying the virtues. Indeed, with respect to some virtues and some ethical contexts, the virtuous response is one that is out of proportion with the intrinsic base value.[333] This is most clear when we examine the virtues associated with close relationships. It is virtuous for one to care more for one's own child, one's own friends, and one's own spouse. This

331 Prominent non-Aristotelian virtue ethicists also differ from Hurka on this proportionality point, the most prominent being Robert Adams. See pp. 26-31 in his book *A Theory of Virtue* for a rejection of this feature of Hurka's account.

332 For an abbreviated presentation of Hurka's recursive account see "Aristotle on Virtue: Wrong, wrong, and wrong," pp. 9-11. A longer treatment of his account can be found in his 2001 book *Virtue, Vice, and Value*. It is also important to note that unlike Aristotle, Hurka does not focus on traits, but occurent mental states and actions instead.

333 The following is just an abbreviated presentation of some key points made by Adams in *A Theory of Virtue*, pp. 26-31.

is true even if these people are less objectively excellent than the children, friends, and spouses of others. It is not because your child is objectively more valuable than others that you care (proportionately) more for her, rather it is because she is *your* child.

In reducing virtue justification to intrinsically valuable base goods, and proportional response to them, Hurka's account has some difficulty with virtues proper to relations of partial concern.[334] Aristotelian (and other)[335] accounts of virtue justification do not have a similar problem. This is because for these accounts it is not simply proportionality of response that matters, rather the wider category of 'excellence' is what ultimately matters. In some cases care proportional to objective, intrinsic value will be excellent (and therefore virtuous) and in some cases it will not be. This is why Christine Swanton characterizes her own view of virtuous action as excellent response to the demands of the world.[336] External values are of course still integral to this sort of account; it remains an outside-in approach. The key difference then is that it is not tyrannized by a concern for proportionality and the impartialist tendencies that come along with such a concern. Excellence of response to the demands of the world is more diverse and so resists Hurka's reduction.

It is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for virtuous action that it respond well (not necessarily proportionally) to the demands of the world and these involve values external to the agent. But of course, this is not the entirety of the

334 Hurka makes an effort to work around this difficulty. However, I agree with Adams that it is not completely satisfying. It seems simpler and better to not attempt to reduce virtue justification to this single feature of proportional response. See Adams, *A Theory of Virtue,* p. 26-31.

335 Virtue ethicists like Adams' (*A Theory of Virtue*) and Christine Swanton (*Virtue Ethics: A Pluralist View*), are non-Aristotelian, despite much of their own accounts being consonant with an Aristotelian approach.

336 Swanton, V*irtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, p. 19, 20, and 29.

justification of the excellence of virtue and its acts. Hurka seems allergic to any mention of the agent's own good as (even a partial) justification of a virtuous trait or action.

Response to error 2: Enmeshment. Why exactly is Hurka so opposed to the good of oneself factoring at all into the ultimate justification of one's virtuous actions? The problem seems to be an oversimple characterization of eudaimonia that doesn't allow for the good of others to play a central role. Hurka characterizes the eudaimonia of an agent as a reality strictly to do with that agent, and no one else; it is seen as easily and naturally separable and separated from the flourishing of others. However, for an Aristotelian, this separation is neither easy nor natural. The key components of eudaimonia are activities. Some of the most eudaimonistically important activities require the participation of others. As such, the flourishing of others will be crucial for an activity to go well and contribute to one's flourishing.

Hurka himself may (at least hypothetically) grant this line of reasoning, but maintain that there remains an objectionably egoistic element in such eudaimonistic justification. He may claim that the flourishing of others is only instrumentally important for the completion of eudaimonistically important activities. But this is not the full extent of the role that the flourishing of others plays in one's own eudaimonia. As I have shown in previous chapters, the flourishing of others does not merely coincide or overlap with one's own flourishing, it partially constitutes it. This is because, oftentimes, the same activities that constitute one's own flourishing also constitute the flourishing of other parties to the activity. Think of a conversation between two friends: Derek and Teddy. If the conversational activity goes reasonably well it will contribute to the flourishing of

both Derek and Teddy. The same activity will be a constituent part of the eudaimonia of two different people. Thus, a part of Derek's eudaimonia will partially constitute Teddy's and a part of Teddy's eudaimonia will partially constitute Derek's. In pursuing a good conversation both friends cannot help but pursue that which will both contribute to their own flourishing and the other's. Activities then are a key structure in which the flourishing of others comes to partially constitute one's own (and vice-versa). Activities are the main mechanism of enmeshment, like a middle term linking the flourishing of two or more people.

[Derek's Flourishing (Common Activity] Teddy's Flourishing)

Now consider a more extreme case in which Teddy, after swimming too many laps, falters and begins to drown. Derek notices this and jumps in to save Teddy, dragging him to the edge of the pool. Now consider the rescue activity that just took place. Two things are clear. First, it would have been much less excellent (and thereby much less eudaimonistically beneficial) if Derek had failed and Teddy had drowned. Second, drowning would be a big hit to Teddy's flourishing, and not drowning is a big help. Hence, the flourishing of Teddy is an essential component in the rescue activity. As such, it is a partial constituent of Derek's flourishing (via the rescue activity). This structure is repeated in much less dramatic instances, like those characterized by generous benevolence. Either way, the activity in question is aimed at the good of another

and unquestionably goes better or worse based largely on the flourishing of the intended recipient (at least relative to the activity in question).

So Hurka's charge of egoistic justification is based largely on error. Aristotelian eudaimonism recognizes the values of activities and their ends apart from the agent's own eudaimonia; indeed such a countenancing is required for Aristotelian eudaimonism to even remain intelligible. Hence, eudaimonism is appropriately labeled with Hurka's term "outside-in" (but not subject to his proportionality requirement). Moreover, where one's own flourishing does come into the justification of virtuous actions or traits, it does so in a way that includes the flourishing of others as partially constitutive. If Hurka wishes to retain the label of egoism for eudaimonistic justification, it will have lost much of its original meaning and all of its objectionableness. Even the consideration of one's own eudaimonia, which appears to allow in an element of self-centeredness, is itself decentered in the flourishing of others. It is in pursuing the flourishing of others that one pursues one's own. This is not an instrumental phenomenon, but a constitutive one. This is why the question, "whose flourishing justifies the virtuous action?" is at best strained and artificial. In taking a turn at bat one might be asked if one is batting or playing baseball. The only correct answer is "both". In the same way, in pursuing an excellent activity the agent is often contributing to his own flourishing and the flourishing of others. So it is only in a rather odd sense that Hurka can continue to use the term "egoism" to describe the justification employed by such a eudaimonism. To continue in this usage would be to label the ethical demands of the world and the flourishing of others as an egoistic justification.

c. The Charge of Egoism: Objectionable Motivation?

Imagine Jane on a jog in an isolated area of a large park. As she passes by a pond she sees a child 20 meters in, clearly struggling to stay above the water. Jane at once recognizes that he is drowning. Jane also quickly recognizes that she is alone, and that without her help the child will surely die. At this point Jane could think and do several different things. Some of these actions and thoughts would be characteristic of virtue, or at least decency, and some characteristic of vice. The characteristically virtuous (or at least decent) action obviously involves diving into the pond and dragging the boy to safety. Now consider the sorts of thoughts that Jane could have in the moment. Jane could think to herself, "It would be nice to save the child. Children are such playful creatures, and he is apt to be so cute once I dry him off." It seems clear that this sort of thought process is not attuned to the morally salient features of the situation. The playfulness and cuteness of the child, while likely real, are not relevant in this situation. A rescue is no time to indulge in thinking of the features that make this child charming. This is an example of a virtuous action that is not done as a virtuous person would do it; Jane does not act on virtuous motives. But notice, the motive is not deficient in being self-focused. Jane possesses a motive that focuses on the child himself, but it does so in the wrong way, appreciating the wrong sorts of features. The situation demands another sort of appreciation with another level of urgency. However, one should also note that these features of the child are real and *are* relevant to *other* potential ethical contexts. If one is the child's caretaker, perhaps it is a virtuous orientation to cultivate a spontaneous love of the child by focusing on what makes him charming rather than troublesome or

inconvenient (it is interesting how often phenomena involving children can plausibly be described using adjectives from each of these categories: charming and troublesome/inconvenient).

Now consider that before Jane saves the drowning child she has another thought, "Saving this child is a worthwhile activity and such activities (if done well) are the constituents of human flourishing. Therefore, if I want to flourish as a human being I should save this child." Hurka implies that this is the sort of motivation that is involved in an Aristotelian account of the virtuous person. He writes, ". . . Aristotle's account seems to imply a similarly egoistic picture of the virtuous person's motivation. If my ultimate goal is my own *eudaimonia*, shouldn't I, while relieving your pain, have the desire for my *eudaimonia* as my main motive?"[337] He goes on to ask, "But isn't helping you from concern for my good precisely not virtuous?"[338] In brief, no, it is apparently not virtuous (at least not stated like this). But besides appearing less than virtuous, the motivation cited above is bizarre. Few would be so deliberate in the moment of rescue to go through that thought process, connecting the rescue activity to eudaimonia as a constituent element, by recognizing it as both worthwhile and capable of being done excellently. There are other less than virtuous thought processes that seem at least more apt than this. For instance one could think, "Well, this is inconvenient, but I can't just let the kid die" or "I'm likely to get a lot of hero-type mileage out of this once this kid tells his parents" or "I don't wanna bother, but what if someone sees me, or notices that my run came right by here?" So the thought process and motive explicitly involving eudaimonia is both less

337 Hurka, "Aristotle on Virtue: Wrong, Wrong, and Wrong," p. 16.
338 Ibid., p. 16.

than virtuous and bizarre. Also (perhaps less) problematic is the thought process, "Rescuing a child from certain death is what the virtuous (or at least decent) person would do in this context." Again, such a thought process seems both to fall short of virtue and be bizarrely deliberative in the urgent circumstances.

Before we move on to what sort of thinking would be characteristically virtuous, let's consider another circumstance in which such thinking remains less than virtuous, but no longer seems bizarre. You can get this result by considering a non-urgent ethical context. Consider Galen at home watching a sitcom. His phone rings and the caller ID alerts him to the fact that it is his grandmother. Immediately he thinks to himself, "ugh, not her again. If I pick up that phone I can kiss 40 minutes of my life goodbye to her bitter droning." So Galen lets the phone ring and continues watching his show. But later, he thinks again about his grandmother. He notes that his grandmother is probably still getting used to being alone after the death of his grandfather, and that though cantankerous, she is likely very lonely. In light of this Galen asks himself, "What would a good grandson do?" Note that this is just a surrogate for the question "What would a virtuous person do in a similar context?", and while it remains a less than virtuous thought to have, it certainly is not bizarre in this non-urgent context. Moreover, Galen, having just taught a unit on eudaimonism at the local college, might even think explicitly about eudaimonia. He recognizes that easing the loneliness of his grandmother is a worthwhile activity, and likely to contribute to his eudaimonia both directly (as a constituent) and indirectly (by helping to habituate empathy, patience, and compassionate

attention). In the right cool context (assuming the agent has experience with the requisite concepts) this also is not bizarre, but it is perhaps less than virtuous.

One important point, which is lost in Hurka's advancement of the charge of motivational egoism, is that such thoughts and motivations, while improper to virtuous people, are entirely proper to others: namely, those seeking to become virtuous. It is open to the Aristotelian eudaimonist, and entirely natural for her position, to encourage this sort of thought for those who are less than virtuous. Moreover these thoughts are not vicious; instead they are aimed at the habituation and exercise of virtue, or at becoming an excellent person engaged in excellent activities. These thoughts then are proper as the propaedeutic to virtue and eudaimonia, and only improper for the virtuous person herself. The main reason for this difference is best characterized by McDowell's conception of virtue as involving a sort of perception.[339] The person of virtue correctly perceives what is ethically salient in various contexts. They see what is good about the virtuous activity itself, including its ends. Therefore they need not ask, "What would the virtuous person do?" or "What activity will contribute to my eudaimonia because it is worthwhile and executed excellently?" And they need not be motivated by such thoughts either. These thoughts are only proper to those without a sufficiently virtuous perception of the ethical context and its morally salient details. Of course it remains true that the virtuous person will call the grandmother, but these thoughts are epistemologically and motivationally superfluous for them. So it seems that Hurka's charge of motivational egoism focuses on motivations and thought processes that are indeed improper to the virtuous person, and

[339] For this account see McDowell's essay "Virtue and Reason".

are instead proper to those lacking sufficient virtue (and the moral perception that comes with it). This is perfectly consistent with Aristotelian eudaimonism, as I will show.

So then, what are motives and thoughts proper to the virtuous person? Let's return to our two examples. In the case of the child rescue, it would be apt for the person of virtue to think, "That child will surely die if I don't jump in and get him, so I better do so." All that is required to motivate the virtuous person is a perception of the weighty value at stake: the loss of a unique human life. When we turn to Galen encountering a phone call from his grandmother the thought process might look something like this: "It's grandma. She's having a tough time right now. I better turn off the television and get ready to listen for awhile." If Galen is virtuous then it is natural that the first thought that comes to his mind is the suffering of his grandmother and her immediate need. As a result he picks up the phone before the third ring. These sorts of reasons are akin to what Hursthouse has termed "X reasons."[340]

Hursthouse employs the concept of X reasons, or those reasons proper for virtuous action, as a way to understand the Aristotelian claim that the virtuous person chooses an action for its own sake.[341] She writes, "'The virtuous agent chooses virtuous actions "for their own sake"' means 'the virtuous agent chooses virtuous actions for at least one of a certain type or range of reasons, X', where 'the type or range X' is typical

340 See Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chapter 6 (especially pp. 126-131).

341 The concept of "X reasons" is originally owed to Bernard Williams; he introduces them in his 1995 essay "Acting as a Virtuous Person Acts". I engage with Hursthouse here because she incorporates this concept into an explicitly eudaimonistic account of ethics.

of, and differs according to, whichever virtue is in question."[342] Hursthouse gives a helpful elaboration on what she means, writing:

> "What are reasons 'typical of' virtue? They will be the sorts of reasons for which someone with a particular virtue, V, will do a V act. So, thinking of the sorts of reasons a courageous agent might have for performing a courageous act, we can come up with such things as 'I could probably save him if I climbed up there', 'Someone had to volunteer', 'One can't give in to tyrants', 'It's worth the risk'. Thinking of the range of reasons a temperate agent might have for a temperate act, we can come up with 'This is an adequate sufficiency', 'I'm driving', 'I'd like you to have some', 'You need it more than I do', 'She said "No"'. With respect to the liberal or generous, 'He needed help', 'He asked me for it', 'It was his twenty-first birthday', 'She'll be so pleased'. For honesty we get such things as 'It was the truth', 'He asked me', 'It's best to get such things out into the open straight away'. And for justice we get such things as 'It's his', 'I owe it to her', 'She has the right to decide', 'I promised'. And so on and so forth."

So, in choosing an act for its own sake, the virtuous person merely acts on one or more of a range of reasons apt for the relevant virtue.

There are two things to note about such reasons. First, they cohere well with the objective justification of virtues and virtuous actions according to MV. Swanton justifies the virtues by characterizing them as excellent responses to the demands of the world.[343] This is a necessary element for the justification of a virtue on my MV account.[344] And the ethical demands of the world are just the sort of things that the virtuous person recognizes in citing the X reasons Hursthouse lists above. Second, just as the 'demands of the world' help account for the justification Hurka thinks proper to virtue, so do X reasons. These are precisely the sort of reasons that Hurka (or most anyone) would identify as proper to the virtuous agent performing virtuous actions.[345]

342 Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, pp. 127-128.

343 V*irtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, p. 19, 20, and 29

344 And when combined with the explicitly eudaimonistic element of the justification, jointly sufficient.

345 Again, one should note here that Swanton, Hursthouse, and myself would all reject Hurka's reduction of the justification of virtue to proportionality of response. Since an excellent response to the world is not always proportional to intrinsic objective value, and is sometimes excellent precisely because it is out of proportion with such value.

So, it looks like we have a cohesive Aristotelian account adequate (even by Hurka's lights) to both virtuous justification and virtuous motivation. But in navigating these two challenges have we now fallen prey to Hurka's final challenge of self-effacingness?

No, we have not.

d. Remaining Problem: Self-Effacingness?

A theory is self-effacing if there is some sort of conflict between how it justifies ethical action, and what motives it encourages (or discourages) in agents. One standard way to frame the charge is to say that a theory is self-effacing if "as a result of being convinced of [the normative theory], one recognizes that one should act from some motivation other than the considerations that make an action right."[346] Both Hurka (2001, 2013) and Simon Keller (2007) have argued that Aristotelian eudaimonism faces the same charge of self-effacingness as advanced against forms of deontology and consequentialism. If this is the case then one major advantage of Aristotelian ethics over its main normative rivals is neutralized. Hurka thinks (neo)Aristotelians can fall into this problem if they insist on something like X reasons as motivation proper to virtuous agents (they must efface from their motivations the justification that the virtuous act advances their own flourishing). Keller thinks that "this is what the virtuous person would do" is the justification proper to virtuous acts (according to Aristotelian virtue ethics) and this thought must be effaced from the virtuous person's motivation in favor of something like X reasons. Below I will describe the different forms that self-effacement

[346] Martinez, "Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing?", p. 279.

might take and show how an Ethics of Flourishing Together avoids any that are at all problematic. If anything like self-effacement remains in the theory it will be of a wholly unobjectionable sort. Thus, Aristotelian eudaimonism is able to maintain its advantage over its main normative rivals with respect to the charge of self-effacement.

In his 2011 essay "Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing?" Joel Martinez makes a few helpful distinctions concerning different sorts of problematic self-effacing to which a normative theory could be subject.[347] An Ethics of Flourishing Together is able to avoid all of them. First, a normative theory could be what Martinez terms "immodestly self-effacing".[348] This is a strong form of self-effacement in which the normative theory "recommends its own rejection". Martinez notes that some act consequentialist theories are thought to be like this since they maintain that the majority of (or all) people should not adopt act consequentialist motivations, in the majority of (or all) ethical contexts. Instead they should act on some other motivations (a deontology perhaps) which would achieve act-consequentialist results. An Ethics of Flourishing Together clearly is not self-effacing in this way. It does not recommend the outright rejection of its own objective justification. A more moderate form of self-effacement is if a theory entails that "in a large number of cases one should be motivated by considerations other than the ones that, according to the theory, make the act right."[349] For example, a deontological theory might require you to visit your friend in the hospital as your duty, and yet the right motive might be in conflict with this (I visited because I care about my friend as a unique

[347] The distinctions that I take over from Martinez are found in section II of his essay.
[348] Ibid., pp. 279-280.
[349] Martinez, "Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing?", p. 279.

individual).[350] Martinez calls such theories "modestly self-effacing".[351] It is clear from sub-sections ***b*** and ***c*** above that an Ethics of Flourishing Together is also not even modestly self-effacing. This is because the virtuous person is motivated by X reasons, which correspond to the demands of the world, which themselves (partially)[352] justify virtuous actions (and traits) as excellent (i.e., they are excellent responses, or dispositions to respond excellently, to the world's demands). At no time need a virtuous agent be motivated by anything that does not justify the virtuous action (or trait).

Beyond Martinez's two forms of self-effacement there is the possibility of another sort; let's call it thoughtlessly self-effacing. A theory is thoughtlessly self-effacing if for some reason a virtuous agent must put out of his mind and/or avoid thinking about any part of what justifies a virtuous action (in the moment of action and/or in a cool moment of reflection). This may be because this part of the justification is in tension with the proper motivation for the act. It also might be the case that this part of the justification of the action is both improper as a virtuous motivation ***and*** if recognized the virtuous agent cannot help but be motivated by it. An Ethics of Flourishing Together is also not self-effacing in this way. MV identifies two necessary and jointly sufficient elements justifying virtuous action. One element is the demands of the world, the other is that such actions characteristically advance the flourishing of the agent. The ethical demands of the world serve as motivation for the virtuous agent as expressed in X reasons (outlined above). The thought that these same actions also advance the flourishing of the virtuous

350 Martinez uses this example, originally found in Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," p. 462.

351 Martinez, "Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing?", p. 280.

352 I say "partially" here because on the MV account the other part of virtue justification has to do with if the action/trait characteristically contributes to the flourishing of the agent.

agent is not in tension with these X reasons. Recognizing that visiting your friend in the hospital also contributes to your own flourishing does not conflict with the virtuous motivation of care for your friend's well-being as an individual. Nor is it necessary for the virtuous person to be motivated by the thought, "this action contributes to my own flourishing" if they happen to have it. Chances are the virtuous person will not have such a thought, but such a thought need not be effaced from their thinking in any way.[353]

So, an Ethics of Flourishing Together is not immodestly, modestly, or thoughtlessly self-effacing. It does not recommend its own rejection when it comes to motivation, it does not recommend any motivation of action other than what justifies it, and it does not require one to forget or avoid thinking about any part of what justifies action. There is no conflict between the reasons that justify an action and the motives proper to that action.

There is one final sort of restriction that some might identify as self-effacing; it may appear to some that the element of MV that features one's own eudaimonia is not properly motivating for the virtuous agent. The virtuous agent need not be thoughtless concerning this element, but one might think that the motivations proper to her are restricted to the X reason type as discussed above. So one could advance an account of eudaimonism that restricts this portion of what justifies the virtues from the motivation of the virtuous agent. Note that on this account what justifies virtuous action is also what properly motivates it, it is only that not *all* of the justification is proper to virtuous motivation. Since the eudaimonistic element of MV is not in any tension with the so-

353 Martinez makes a similar point with the thought "this is what the virtuous person would do". He notes that this thought is not in tension with properly virtuous motivation. See "Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing?", p. 287.

called properly motivating element (the demands of the world), and since the virtuous agent need not put it out of her mind, it seems clear that this results in a theory that is not self-effacing, or at least not self-effacing in any problematic manner. However, even if one thinks that the eudaimonistic element of MV is not properly motivating for the virtuous agent, this does not mean that it is not properly motivating at all.[354]

That a virtuous action or trait characteristically advances the flourishing of the agent is clearly properly motivating for the immoralist not yet entered into the life of virtue. It is also a motivation uncontroversially apt to the person at the beginning of the virtue habituation process. The hope is that such a person will become less motivated by the eudaimonistic element of MV and increasingly motivated by the 'demands of the world' element. In this way an ethics of flourishing together, with its mixed view of justification, has a key advantage over other normative theories that lack such a justificatory account. That is, MV is able to account well for moral education and development. The same justification can operate throughout the process of moral development from child or immoralist, through the beginning stages of habituation, on into varying degrees of virtue. At first one's motives might be heavily or solely oriented towards the eudaimonistic element of MV, then as moral development continues the motives become properly mixed. As one advances towards virtue one's motives will properly become less mixed until they are heavily, and then solely (if one reaches a certain degree of virtue) oriented toward the 'demands of the world' element of MV. Aristotelian virtue ethics has characteristically shown more of a concern for, and

354 See Pettigrove, "Is Virtue Ethics Self-Effacing?", pp. 197-198, for a similar point.

accommodation of, moral education and development. MV just further augments this strength by allowing the same justification of action to be operative throughout one's moral life as is apt to each particular stage of ethical development.

VI. Remaining Objection: Isn't this still partially self-effacing?

Hurka and others may respond to my treatment of the self-effacingness charge in the following manner: "You have only partially avoided the charge. Yes, it is true that nothing outside of one's justification must serve as motivation, however, there ***is*** a part of one's justification of virtue that ***cannot*** serve as motivation (even if it need not be effaced completely from one's thought), and that is the eudaimonistic element of MV which you have restricted from virtuous motivation." As it stands, I have shown how one might answer the self-effacing charge by employing a restriction on motivation, allowing that the virtuous person is only motivated by one justificatory element of MV (the demands of the world element) and not the other (the eudaimonistic element). Hurka may claim that this eudaimonistic element must be effaced from one's motivation and hence that an Ethics of Flourishing Together is self-effacing after all, even if only partially so. I have two responses to this remaining objection.

First, I could simply bite this seemingly innocuous bullet and stick with my answer above. I might ask Hurka, why is it that every single part of one's justification of virtue needs to be allowed to figure in the motivation of the virtuous agent? As long as the justification does not need to be effaced from one's thinking and as long as some non-justificatory element is not needed to motivate virtuous action, I don't think this account

is self-effacing in any objectionable way (or in any way contrary to the spirit of Aristotelian ethics). However, this answer may not satisfy Hurka. Furthermore, others more sympathetic to the Aristotelian ethical enterprise might think it quite natural for one's own flourishing to have some role in the motivation (either immediately or in some cool reflective moment) of the virtuous agent. Fortunately, an ethics of flourishing together, with its stress on enmeshment, provides a way to allow for this.

My second response to this challenge involves removing the motivational restriction that I employed above. On this option, the eudaimonistic element of MV ***can*** properly play a motivational role, not just for the immoralist or the agent trying to habituate virtue, but for the virtuous agent herself. This need not push the motivation of the virtuous agent into a less-than-virtuous egoism; the key to understanding why this is the case involves the account of enmeshment which I have already employed to answer the justificatory form of the egoism charge.[355] The eudaimonia of the agent in question is not straightforwardly separable from the eudaimonia of those around the agent. It is partially constituted by the flourishing of others. In pursuing one's own flourishing one pursues the flourishing of others, and vice-versa. Sometimes, both of these are pursued by simply pursuing excellence in a joint activity. Other times both of these are pursued by directly pursuing the good of another (or the avoidance of their harm).

However, this option might still sound objectionably (motivationally) egoistic. This is because removing the motivational restriction that I employed above should allow the virtuous person to (at least in theory) be motivated by the thought, "This action is

355 See sub-section ***b*** above.

worthwhile. Executing it excellently will contribute to my own eudaimonia." Despite the background reality that one pursues one's own eudaimonia by pursuing the eudaimonia of others (which serves as a constituent element) such a thought may appear to be problematically egoistic on its face. This appearance of a degree of egoism is perhaps accurate when dealing with the immoralist or when dealing with a less than virtuous agent attempting to habituate virtue; however, it is misleading when it comes to the virtuous agent. This is because if the eudaimonistic element of MV does figure in the motivation of the virtuous agent it only does so after being transfigured. Part of the habituation process plausibly involves coming to see one's own good as being thoroughly enmeshed with (and hence, partially constituted by) the good of others. Though conceptually distinct, the person increasing in virtue habituation will be evermore apt not to distinguish her own good from the good of others. Eudaimonia will come to resemble a package deal. When the virtuous agent thinks of her own eudaimonia, it will be a conception increasingly indistinct in her mind from the good of others. Such a motivation would only be plausibly egoistic in some way if the agent's conception of "her own good" remained untransformed throughout the virtue habituation process, but this is implausible (at least by the lights of Aristotelian virtue ethicists). Part of what it means to become habituated to virtue is to habituate a certain way of perceiving the world and what is morally salient. I am simply pointing out that part of that transformation of perception involves how one perceives one's own good.

So, due to enmeshment and the transformation of how the virtuous agent views her own good, an Ethics of Flourishing Together can allow for the possibility of the

eudaimonistic element of MV figuring in virtuous motivation. However, a question remains concerning how apt such a eudaimonistic motivation is. Even if it would not be problematically egoistic, does such a eudaimonistic element plausibly figure into the motivation of virtuous agents? In the moment of action, though a virtuous person could in theory think of his own eudaimonia, in practice it seems unlikely. The sorts of X reasons highlighted by Hursthouse seem more motivationally apt in the moment. This is true whether the occasion is urgent or not. Beforehand, in a cool moment of reflection, thoughts concerning eudaimonia are more apt to virtuous motivation; however, in order to remain virtuous the eudaimonistic element of MV cannot motivate in isolation from the demands of the world element. Thus, I propose a non-self-effacing motivational asymmetry. The 'demands of the world' element of MV can motivate on its own, and likely will for the virtuous person. The eudaimonistic element can be present (but need not be) in virtuous motivation, as long as it is not motivating in *isolation* from the 'demands of the world' element. This should be sufficient to satisfy Hurka's self-effacing charge. If this motivational asymmetry bothers Hurka, it cannot be because it results in any sort of self-effacingness. All this view amounts to is that the agent's own eudaimonia is properly motivating for the virtuous agent as long as (a) their conception of eudaimonia has been transformed through the habituation process to include the eudaimonia of others within their own and (b) the eudaimonistic element is not motivating in isolation from the ethical demands of the world.

VII. Conclusion

Whether it is advanced as an out of hand dismissal, or a more deliberately crafted objection, the charge of egoism fails to gain purchase on an Ethics of Flourishing Together. This is especially clear when we look more closely at Hurka's version of the charge and the errors to which it falls prey. An Ethics of Flourishing Together is clearly eudaimonistic, and it successfully navigates this challenge. It is not objectionably egoistic in its justification or motivation; and it avoids these two pitfalls in a way that also avoids the self-effacement to which rival normative theories are susceptible. Since the charge of egoism is the main reason why some philosophers reject Aristotelian ethics in favor of other forms of virtue theory, this is an important result. Hurka and others may still wish to remain outside the Aristotelian camp, but I have shown that the charge of egoism is not a good reason to do so.

Conclusion

> "Genuine love ought to be founded on mutual recognition of two liberties; the lovers would then experience themselves both as self and as other; neither would give up transcendence, neither would be mutilated; together they would manifest values and aims in the world. For the one and the other, love would be a revelation of self by the gift of self and enrichment of the world.
>
> (Simone de Beauvoir)[356]

I. Concluding Summary

Human flourishing is a flourishing-together. In chapters two and three of this essay I have sought to add depth and scope to this characterization by developing the concept of enmeshment and arguing for both its pervasiveness and potency in human life. I then used this constitutive account of human flourishing as a "flourishing-together" to finish developing the Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism that I began to lay out in chapter one. Finally, I utilized this Ethics of Flourishing Together to address two normative problems. In chapter four I advanced an answer to the immoralist that employs a eudaimonistic hypothetical imperative, which presents the life of virtue as one's best bet for human flourishing. Such an argumentative strategy naturally invites the charge of egoism, but in chapter five I show how The Ethics of Flourishing Together allows the Neo-Aristotelian to avoid this charge, in both its motivational and justificatory forms. In particular I employ the mixed account of virtue justification (that I develop in the first chapter) and the enmeshment account of human flourishing. These efforts are prefaced

356 de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 667.

and aided by an explanation of some key errors (as exemplified in Hurka's work) that lead to the (mistaken) charge of egoism.

II. Some Important Results

Here I would like to stress three general results of my project. First, this project should make even more clear that Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism is an account of ethics that is viable this side of the Enlightenment. An Ethics of Flourishing Together involves a plausible form of (second)naturalism and employs a method of reflective equilibrium that is adopted by thinkers like Rawls, but still true to Aristotle's own ancient approach. Moreover, the (arguably) chief objection that people level against eudaimonism has been addressed. I have shown how the charge of egoism can be avoided once one strips away errors concerning what eudaimonism is and recognizes the potential of what it can be. Hence, ethicists, and in particular non-Aristotelian virtue ethicists, should no longer cite this egoism worry as a reason to reject eudaimonism as an ethics unfit for modernity.

Second, in this project, especially in chapters three and four, I have engaged with various strands of the contemporary empirical psychology literature. Though I am wary of making overbold claims concerning the potential for empirical science in addressing philosophical concerns, I am optimistic that the tools of social psychology in particular, can be fruitfully employed to philosophical ends. I take it my project serves as an example of how this sort of dialogue between philosophy and empirical psychology can, in at least a limited way, work for the benefit of philosophy. As such my essay

contributes to the growing literature that manifests such fruitful possibilities without succumbing to a crude scientism.

Finally, I hope my project has succeeded in both preserving and highlighting some of the main features that make eudaimonism such a compelling account of ethics. Eudaimonism puts ethics, and more narrowly morality, within the larger context of a flourishing human life. In this way it is able to promote a vision of ethical action as excellent human action. The virtues are those traits that dispose one to such excellence in action, which for humans means actions that put us in harmony with others. This approach leads to one of eudaimonism's most compelling claims: the ethical life, the life of virtue, is the excellent life which is both good for others and for the one living it. Eudaimonism claims that the life of virtue tends to bring into greater harmony the goods of disparate parties. In this way it overcomes the tendency of modern moral theories to view the good of others as dramatically separate from one's own; as a result eudaimonism, as much as possible, avoids pitting the flourishing of some humans against the flourishing of others. Eudaimonism puts at its center an interdependent conception of human flourishing. I have endeavored to deepen this conception, arguing that human flourishing is a flourishing-together, in the sense that the flourishing of others partially constitutes one's own. Hence, an Ethics of Flourishing Together highlights and deepens strengths already present in Aristotelian and Neo-Aristotelian ethical theory.

III. On Optimism and Flourishing Together

In some ways this essay has as its genesis an optimistic response to more pessimistic treatments of social relations. In particular, the seminal ideas for this project first arose in reading and responding to Sartre's overwhelmingly negative theory of social relations as elucidated in *Being and Nothingness* and as portrayed (in all of its ugly detail) in Sartre's infamous play *No Exit*. The only thing more striking than the utter bleakness of Sartre's theory, is its unreality. Sartre's theory of social relations is in the end unrealistic, because one-sided. Sartre, better than most, explains and illustrates just how bad human relations can be and just how many ways they can go wrong. However, Sartre continually neglects the fact that the same tools humans use to torture each other can be turned to more positive use. The perspective of another can objectify and hence entrap one within some objectification of what one is or should be. However, that same perspective can help one come alive to a variety of ways that one can flourish. The other that can judge and despise, can also adore and cherish. Other humans can bring each other down, but they also have the potential to uplift. Sartre famously penned the line "Hell is other people" but he consistently overlooks the other side of the coin, that heaven is impossible without them.

When it comes to social relations, Sartre is a pessimist. The boon of pessimism is that it can aid one in rooting out all the many ways in which relations with others can (and do) go wrong. The drawback is that it can make one blind to more virtuous relational alternatives. I want to end by making the point that eudaimonism in general, and this essay in particular, is *optimistic* and hence serves as a corrective for Sartre's

pessimism and for a less philosophical (but more pervasive) relational cynicism. This project holds forth the possibility and actuality of humans flourishing together and it builds an ethical theory in light of this possibility. At least some such optimism is necessary to recognize the virtuous possibilities for human relations and mutual flourishing. And such recognition is needed if we are to hope to realize such possibilities in real, concrete, human relations. Eudaimonism is an optimistic ethics; at its center is human flourishing, a flourishing partially constituted by the flourishing of others.

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