

Moral Facts as Facts of Life¹

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Abstract:

This article seeks to interpret moral facts as facts of life using the cognitivist naturalist approach set out by Philippa Foot in her *Natural Goodness*. It outlines the main features of the non-cognitivist rejection of the existence and observability of moral facts. It then reconstructs Foot's conception of the natural normativity that is articulated in natural historical judgements, which can then be used to define a good or a defective individual with regard to what is exemplary of a life form. Hence Foot highlights a type of evaluation that is not dependent on our pro/con attitudes or emotional states. Practical rationality is tied up with the word 'good', which obtains its content from manifestations of the human life form and is aimed at the good life. This article shows that it is only in spheres that directly or indirectly concern life that it makes sense to talk of moral goodness or badness and that facts of life are moral facts.

Keywords: moral facts, natural good, life, practical rationality, P. Foot

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The question of whether moral facts exist and are epistemically accessible is a 'bone of contention' between cognitivist and non-cognitivist meta-ethical theorists. Philippa Foot analyses the nature of moral facts and moral judgements by referring to the (human) life form, that is, nature, as a means of avoiding supranaturalism, moral anti-realism and non-cognitivism. The aim of this article is to present Foot's conception of moral facts based on an analysis and reconstruction of her argumentation in *Natural Goodness*. The thesis of the article is that moral facts are facts of life, and I am led to it by Foot's statement that '*life* will be at the centre of my discussion, and the fact that a human action or disposition is good of its kind will be taken to be simply a fact about a given feature of a certain kind of living thing'² To empha-

1 This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under Contract No. APVV-18-0178.

2 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*. Oxford, Clarendon Press 2002, p. 5 (hereafter *Natural Goodness*).

size this I wish to highlight something else Foot said, which is that her interest in ethics was motivated by the reports of the crimes against humanity in the Nazi concentration camps.³ I believe that this is also the lens through which we should interpret Foot's cognitivist and naturalist realist reasoning that moral norms are objectively natural because they are grounded 'in facts about human life... [that is] on the life form of our own species'.⁴ It explains the importance of human dignity in her ethical thinking.

In this article I will proceed as follows. First I will outline the discussion on moral facts in non-cognitivist approaches. Then I will introduce Foot's understanding of the difference between secondary, natural goodness and her conception of natural normativity which is generally framed in value judgements on all living things. I go on to explain human moral goodness in more depth, and Foot's understanding of practical rationality and its relationship to objective good, which is what facts of life mean. In the conclusion I look at Foot's moral realism from the perspective of hermeneutic naturalism, as proposed by T. Hoffmann.

1. Moral Reality in Non-cognitivism

The rejection of moral facts and hence the notion that moral judgements are true or false is in essence a non-cognitivist approach. One of the models of non-cognitivism is emotivism.⁵ Following on from logical positivism, which holds that physicalist language is a universally meaningful language,⁶ statements such as 'stealing is bad' or 'justice is good' are neither normative nor analytic, nor can they be analytically, scientifically or empirically verified or deduced from other empirical sentences. Normative sentences have no em-

3 Voorhoeve, A., *Conversations on Ethics*. Oxford, Oxford University Press 2011, p. 91. This article is a modified version of the following studies: Chabada, M., Philippa Footová o prirodzenej normativite [Philippa Foot on natural normativity]. In: Szapuová, M. – Nuhlíček, M. – Chabada, M. (eds.), *Veda, spoločnosť a hodnoty* [Science, society, and values]. Bratislava, Univerzita Komenského 2019, pp. 147–175; Chabada, M., Prirodzené a morálne dobro alebo zlo: prístup Philippy Footovej [Natural and moral goodness or badness: Philippa Foot's approach]. *Filozofia*, 79, 2020, No. 9, pp. 747–759.

4 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 24.

5 Emotivism was preceded by the ideas of D. Hume, 'according to whom morality does not affect what is but what ought to be, is bound up with human desires and human behaviour... In accordance with his emotivism Hume located basic morality in the sphere of human feelings, passions and desires. The capacity for moral judgement, the capacity to distinguish between virtue and sin, good and bad is rooted in the emotional element of human nature'. – Szapuová, M., *Fakty a hodnoty: poznámky k Humovmu zákonu* [Facts and values: notes on Hume's law]. In: *Veda, racionalita a hodnoty* [Science, rationality, and values; CD-ROM]. Bratislava, Stimul 2016, p. 91.

6 Carnap, R., Die physikalische Sprache als Universalsprache der Wissenschaft. *Erkenntnis*, 2, 1931, No. 1, p. 443.

pirical content, are devoid of meaning⁷ and do not refer to any kind of objective reality. According to A. J. Ayer, they convey feelings, and as such cannot be true or false.⁸ Thus value judgements are stripped of their intersubjectively binding force,⁹ thereby confirming the gulf between moral judgements and descriptions, values and facts, and ‘is’ and ‘ought’.¹⁰ The semantic status of moral judgements is *de facto* comparable to the meaning of interjections (Ah!, Ow! or Yuck!).¹¹ Moral judgements do not simply express the feelings of the person uttering them but are a means whereby the speaker attempts to causally influence the emotions of the other person in an effort to nudge them into action.

The second version of non-cognitivism is projectionism, which holds that we project our pro/con attitudes onto the world through moral judgements. ‘We continually coat the world in our pro/con attitudes and naively think the content of our projections is the content of true moral judgements through which we articulate objective moral reality in the natural world.’¹² We are making a radical mistake if we think that by making moral judgements we are expressing moral reality. All moral judgements are in principle false beliefs because there is no such thing in the world as objective moral fact on which their truth could be based. Moral fact is not just ontologically but also epistemologically *queer* because we have no empirical experience of it and cannot scientifically describe it.¹³ Non-cognitivist approaches have an inherently empirical view of morality because they assume that only empirical scientific judgements can be true and articulate the reality of the natural world. Empiricism is the measure (and scientific dogma) of morality.¹⁴

This rejection of the truth value of moral judgements is associated with the instrumental understanding of rationality.¹⁵ Moral reality and knowledge thereof do not necessarily motivate (we know what the right thing to do is, we just don’t feel like doing it) and so we have to seek motivation in the non-cognitive human sphere (in wishes or desires). As Hume claims, ‘Reason

7 Carnap, R., *Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache. Erkenntnis*, 2, 1931, No. 1, p. 237; Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*. Berlin–Boston, Walter de Gruyter 2014, pp. 61–62 (hereafter *Das Gute*).

8 Ayer, A. J., *Language, Truth and Logic*. London, Penguin Books 1936, p. 104.

9 Ricken, F., Die Rationalität der Moral. In: Hoffmann, T. – Reuter, M. (eds.), *Natürlich gut. Aufsätze zur Philosophie von Philippa Foot*. Heusenstamm, Ontos Verlag 2010, p. 194 (hereafter *Die Rationalität*).

10 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 8; Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, p. 14.

11 Pauer-Studer, H., *Einführung in die Ethik*. Wien, Facultas Verlag 2020, p. 207 (hereafter *Einführung*).

12 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, p. 52.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

15 Pauer-Studer, H., *Einführung*, p. 252.

is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them'.¹⁶ But then we run the risk of moral motivation being reduced to the fulfilment of subjective desires of various kinds (including thereby vile ones). The function of reason is narrowed down to knowledge and identifying the most appropriate means of achieving goals, 'which are expressed in agentic (subjective), volitional, conative, affective and appetitive cues'.¹⁷ Rational instrumentalism leads ultimately to ethical subjectivism 'for in practice it would be irrational not to break moral norms if that enabled us to realise our subjective goals of action'.¹⁸

Foot's defence of the cognitivist and naturalist realist position requires her, in her theory of ethics, to define the ontological nature of moral fact as objective and morally acceptable goals of action that serve as the criteria for deciding whether moral judgements are true or false. Since she also critically departs from non-cognitivism, she has to explain her conception of practical rationality and especially moral rationality, motivation and how these are intertwined with the moral fact that sets out the objective limits of what is morally acceptable.

2. Goodness and a General Framework for Nature

Foot's first step in constructing her cognitivist and naturalist realist ethics is the semantic analysis of the concept of *good*. She starts from Peter Geach's distinction between predicative and attributive adjectives. The meaning of a predicative adjective, such as *red*, characterises an object independent of the type of object involved. The answer 'X is a red car' can be meaningfully broken down into 'X is a car' and 'X is red'. But the meaning of attributive adjectives, such as 'big', is dependent on the thing it is describing. For example. 'X is a big fly' cannot be meaningfully broken down into 'X is a fly' and 'X is big'. Attributive adjectives take their meaning from their relationship to the type of object. 'Only with recourse to the characteristic size of species members can the answer, that for X it is a big fly, be in any way meaningful'.¹⁹ Geach considers the adjective 'good' to be attributive²⁰ as it is only in relation to the substantive that it acquires its meaning. Foot draws on Geach, as in

16 Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford, Clarendon Press [First edition 1888; reprinted] 1967, p. 415.

17 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, p. 19.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

19 Halbig, C., *Der Aristotelische Naturalismus als Metaethik*. In: Hähnel, M. (ed.), *Aristotelischer Naturalismus*. Stuttgart, J. B. Metzler Verlag 2017, p. 121 (hereafter *Der Aristotelische Naturalismus*).

20 Geach, P., *Good and Evil*. *Analysis*, 17, 1956, No. 2, p. 34 (hereafter *Good and Evil*).

‘Whether a particular F is a good F depends radically on what we substitute for “F”.²¹ So the word *good* can always be replaced with *good qua A*.²² This attributive understanding of the word *good* is aimed against George Moore who, Foot argues, uses the word *good* predicatively²³ and she is critical of his metaphysical use of the word *good*, i.e. of the fact that he investigates it in isolation from everyday language use. The solution is to wrest them ‘back “from their metaphysical to their everyday use”.²⁴ Hence Foot draws on Wittgenstein’s therapeutic function of philosophy that entails explaining the everyday use of normative concepts and their relations.²⁵

If the meaning of the adjective *good* depends on the type of object, then we cannot consider it a means of expressing a ‘pro-attitude’²⁶ nor convert it into a recommendation or expression of a mental state,²⁷ hence this reasoning runs counter to the non-cognitivist approach. Foot’s account basically ‘combines the descriptive understanding of good, or the cognitivist understanding, of judgements in which the word “good” is the attribute (which renders the judgement true or false), with Geach’s thesis that the adjective (“good”) is no less natural than the entity it is modifying (cars, flies etc.)’.²⁸

Foot distinguishes between primary (natural, intrinsic and autonomous) good and secondary or extrinsic good. To do so she relies on Aristotle’s *ergon* argument that ‘serves as the convergence point and helps systematise her multi-layered thinking’.²⁹ Secondary good ‘is goodness predicated to living things when they are evaluated in relationship to members of species other than their own’.³⁰ A knife is a good example of its kind as it fulfils the function it was designed for. And a dog is good in the sense that it serves the needs of its owner. In these examples the objects are seen as means of achieving their purpose, which she considers to be external and set by no-one else.³¹

21 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 3.

22 Hamann, F., *Die Formen des Guten nach Aristoteles*. In: Hamann, F. – Heuer, P. (eds.), *Die ontologischen Grundlagen der aristotelischen Ethik*. Leipzig, Leipziger Universitätsverlag 2019, p. 157 (hereafter *Die Formen des Guten*).

23 Geach, P., *Good and Evil*, p. 35.

24 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 3. – Foot cites L. Wittgenstein: ‘What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use’. Wittgenstein, L., *Filosofická zkoumání* [*Philosophical research*], § 116. Praha, Filosofický ústav AV ČR 1993, p. 65 (hereafter *Filosofická zkoumání*).

25 Fritz, A., Philippa Foots Begründung praktischer Rationalität. *Theologie und Philosophie*, 85, 2010, No. 1, p. 5 (hereafter Philippa Foots Begründung).

26 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 25.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

28 Halbig, C., *Der Aristotelische Naturalismus*, pp. 121–122.

29 Fritz, A., Philippa Foots Begründung, p. 1.

30 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 26.

31 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, p. 130.

In relation to intrinsic natural good Foot says: ‘features of plants and animals have what one might call an “autonomous”, “intrinsic”, or as I shall say “natural” goodness and defect that may have nothing to do with the needs or wants of the members of any other species of living thing... it depends directly on the relation of an individual to the “life form” of its species.’³² Intrinsic goodness is basically something that only living things have and only ‘if they fulfil the criteria derived from that species.’³³ Natural goodness is dependent on the life form, which exhibits the features of its physical constitution, typical behaviours and life habits of that species.³⁴ Natural goodness is essential to the extrinsic and instrumental use and evaluation (if we want to get a cow to produce more milk we need to know *what* a cow is, i.e. we have to know what life form it is and its intrinsic natural goals, to which milk production is related). Intrinsic natural quality is basal and extrinsic quality is evaluated on that basis.³⁵ In living creatures natural goodness is to do with self-preservation and reproduction, which are goodnesses that are not dependent on the wishes of another species and in fulfilling these the individual flourishes.³⁶

Natural historical judgements (NHJs) are made about the life form, also known as Aristotelian categoricals (ACs).³⁷ These judgements are teleological in structure and speak ‘of the life cycle of individuals of a given species.’³⁸

32 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, pp. 26–27.

33 Halbig, C., *Der Aristotelische Naturalismus*, p. 122.

34 The term life form is therefore wider and more comprehensive than the term biological species, as is particularly evident in the case of humans.

35 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, p. 132. A. C. Halbig states, individuals who are defective in the primary sense (e.g. overfed pigs that cannot breed) are good in the secondary sense (for the food industry). – Halbig, C., *Der Aristotelische Naturalismus*, p. 123.

36 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, pp. 31, 33.

37 ‘ACs indicate the present state of evolutionary development and imply relatively stable characteristics that are captured in this image.’ – Halbig, C., *Der Aristotelische Naturalismus*, p. 122. The representatives of neo-Aristotelian naturalism accept biological naturalism, because “morality must be considered a constituent of human nature and, vice versa, that human beings are a part of the natural world... The three key propositions of Aristotelian naturalism establish that: (1) it is essential for all living beings to belong to a species, (2) the species to which they belong is determined by a number of functions, (3) these functions determine whether an individual is a good specimen of a species, fit to lead a flourishing life. Species membership, the number of functions which determine a species’ nature, and the evaluative content of the species membership form what can be called the ‘evaluative-conceptual structure’ which applies to all living beings. To the extent to which this evaluative-conceptual structure applies to humankind, the latter is also part of the rest of living nature. Given that a good human specimen or flourishing human life can be determined by referring to the human species and the functions that define it, ethics becomes a part of a certain account of human nature.” – Wild, M., *Was ist biologisch am Aristotelischen Naturalismus?* In: Hähnel, M. (ed.), *Aristotelischer Naturalismus*. Stuttgart, J. B. Metzler Verlag 2017, p. 93 (hereafter *Was ist biologisch am Aristotelischen Naturalismus?*).

38 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 29.

Their logical form ‘The S is/has/does F’ represents a teleological nexus³⁹ of movements and states where the ultimate formal goal is characteristically to *succeed* or *flourish* or specifically live a *good life*. The material content of the formal telos depends on the life form of the individual it exemplifies.⁴⁰ Identifying a species or life form, F indicates the states, activities and movements that the typical example of the species *usually* or *generally* manifests. This type of judgement is a separate logical category, the universality of which is ‘qualitative normality’, and hence allows for exceptions, its truthfulness not being falsified by the fact that individual S isn’t or hasn’t or doesn’t do what exemplary members of species F usually are, have or do. Neither does the logical form of these judgements imply that if S isn’t, hasn’t and doesn’t F then it isn’t an example of the species. True NHJs explicate the life form in terms of the nature of the examples,⁴¹ by exhibiting ‘patterns of natural normativity’⁴² that enable us to determine the natural quality or defect of the example of the life form. ‘If we have a true natural-history proposition to the effect that S’s are F, then if a certain individual S – the individual here and now or then and there – is not F it is therefore not as it should be, but rather weak, diseased, or in some other way defective.’⁴³ If individual E of form L is/has/does F perfectly, i.e. it accomplishes the (biological) functions (fulfils its ergon) stemming from the life form, then it is a normal example of form L and so flourishes, that is, leads a successful life according to exemplary form L. The method for determining whether the individual is a good or defective example of the life form is as follows. The first premise is the general descriptive statement (NHJ), the second premise is a statement about that particular individual and the conclusion tells us whether the individual is judged to conform to the way of life typical of that species. Let us look at an example: 1. (general) premise = NHJ/AC: bees announce that they have found a source of nectar by ‘dancing’; 2. premise: this bee has found a source and is not dancing; 3. conclusion: this bee is *naturally defective*, or is a *bad* example of the species, that is, it *isn’t* how it *ought* to be.⁴⁴ Hence the conclusion is normative: the unit of measurement it is judged against is not extrinsic to the individual ‘but is based on what the individual necessarily and fundamentally

39 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, pp. 116–119.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

41 Hoffmann, T., *Tugend und Gedeihen: Philippa Foots Naturalismus der menschlichen Vernunft*. In: Hähnel, M. (ed.), *Aristotelischer Naturalismus*. Stuttgart, J. B. Metzler 2017, p. 156 (hereafter *Tugend und Gedeihen*).

42 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 38.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 33–37.

is, that is, it is a member of a particular living species.⁴⁵ Natural normativity is objectively ontological, a certain type of general and objective manifestation. These manifestations are exhibited by living things who achieve their purpose on that very basis, i.e. naturally thrive according to their form.

Hence we can formulate natural norms and thereby list the types of contingent qualities and defects that ‘depend essentially on the form of life of the species to which an individual belongs.’⁴⁶ Foot is convinced that she has found a single general logical framework (*special grammar*) for evaluating judgements that are valid for all living beings (plants, animals and even humans).⁴⁷ On this basis she shows that we are dealing with a use of the word ‘good’ that non-cognitivism cannot explain⁴⁸ and that norms are based on the realities of the natural world.⁴⁹ NHJs are hybrid in nature, are both descriptive and evaluative and combine descriptions of the life forms of species with propositions evaluating individuals. These evaluations are intertwined with reality; the descriptive judgements justifies the evaluative judgement.⁵⁰

If on the basis of this logical framework we can determine naturally defective examples of a particular life form then we can also determine what is naturally good or bad for an example of that life form and so we know what members of a species need in order to flourish that is, to lead a successful life. ‘So if we can judge that the E form of L is *as* the E form of L naturally defective, or bad, then we must be able to judge what is naturally bad *for* the

45 Halbig, C., *Der Aristotelische Naturalismus*, p. 123.

46 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 35.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

48 Ricken, F., *Die Rationalität*, pp. 197–198; Halbig, C., *Der Aristotelische Naturalismus*, p. 121.

49 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, pp. 36–37.

50 If we “find natural normativity in the whole domain of living being *qua* membership in a biological species and *qua* biological function,” the question arises of the place of this consideration in modern biology? “Many critics have answered this question in the negative; even worse, they have argued that Aristotelian naturalism relies on an entirely pre-modern and obsolete biology, namely on Aristotelian biology.” – Wild, M., *Was ist biologisch am Aristotelischen Naturalismus?*, p. 95. – There are approaches that render “modern evolutionary biology compatible with Aristotelian biology: Aristotelian teleology can be understood in terms of the aetiological theory of functions.” But this is “highly controversial”. – Wild, M., *Was ist biologisch am Aristotelischen Naturalismus?*, p. 99. Also Ph. Foot says, that “the word ‘function’ as used here is not to be confused with its use in evolutionary biology.” – Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 32. – According to M. Wild, “Aristotelian naturalism is not biological in the sense of biologism... is not biological in the sense that it makes no reference to any external facts of modern biology... Aristotelian naturalism is satisfied when it can pursue a naïve and commonplace notion of biology... Unlike many other naturalistic positions, Aristotelian naturalism does not distinguish itself by proximity to the natural sciences, nor by materialistic physics nor by an emphasis on the continuity between humans and animals... Presumably, the notoriously vague term “naturalism” would have been abused less if neo-Aristotelians had renounced it altogether.” – Wild, M., *Was ist biologisch am Aristotelischen Naturalismus?*, pp. 104–105.

E form of L as the E form of L.⁵¹ This ‘good for’ is expressed as an *Aristotelian necessity* (AN), on which the realisation of the natural goodness of the individual depends.

These ‘Aristotelian necessities’ depend on what the particular species of plants and animals need, on their natural habitat, and the ways of making out that are in their repertoire. These things together determine what it is for members of a particular species to be as they should be, and to do that which they should do.⁵²

If hares for examples are to fulfil their natural goodness (grow and reproduce), they need good grass. Grass is good in the sense that it is related to the intrinsic goodness of the hare. ‘The concept of natural good is primary in that it contains within it a species-specific standard, with which good can be evaluated in the secondary sense as well... All other goods are in some way teleologically related to the primary form of good.’⁵³ It is through the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic good that the individual achieves its formal goal, i.e. it flourishes, leads a successful or good life, the substance of which depends on the exemplary life form.

3. Human Goodness

The substance of a thriving or successful life as the formal purpose of all living things depends on the life form that the individual exemplifies. If in sub-rational beings the content of natural normativity is simple and not too difficult for defective individuals to learn, then the question is whether that same evaluative structure holds when we turn from plants and animals to consider people.⁵⁴ Foot believes that the logical structure is just as valid when evaluating human actions and that in this type of evaluation function and purpose are interlinked,⁵⁵ regardless of whether we are talking about sub-rational creatures or humans. ‘Thus if a good knife is one that fulfils its *ergon* well, then a good person is someone who performs their *ergon* well.’⁵⁶

If the natural goodness of plants and animals relates to the biological cycle of self-preservation and reproduction,⁵⁷ the question is whether and to

51 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, p. 134.

52 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 15.

53 Hamann, F., *Die Formen des Guten*, pp. 162, 169.

54 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 38.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

56 Fritz, A., *Philippa Foots Begründung*, p. 6.

57 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 42.

what extent human natural goodness is related to the biological cycle. According to Foot, human natural goodness and a successful life are not necessarily predicated on reproduction and self-preservation. The decision not to have children is not in and of itself bad because other components of goodness (work requirements or beliefs) may justify a rejection of family life.⁵⁸ Living a good life is more complicated in people because they are capable of sacrificing their life in pursuit of a value or truth. ‘The teleological story goes beyond the reference to survival itself.’⁵⁹ This shows that human goodness extends beyond goodness based on the biological cycle.⁶⁰

To know what human goodness is, we have to look at ‘how human beings live: in other words, what kind of living thing a human being is.’⁶¹ It means that we have to describe the human life form that serves as the standard for determining natural goodness or badness. True descriptive NHJs tell us about how people live,⁶² for example that people make clothes and build homes or get round the rules, trust one another or recognise rights. This enables us to pin down *what* people are.⁶³ In describing what people are, that is, explicating the human life form, Foot takes inspiration from L. Wittgenstein who stated: ‘Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing’.⁶⁴ Influenced by Elizabeth Anscombe, Foot understands these impulses both linguistically and ontologically, that is, as the essential manifestations of people as such, which can be refined through culture.⁶⁵ We have true descriptive statements on the human life form that demonstrate what human goodness and reality are, that there are certain things people can and cannot do,⁶⁶ for example that people can only achieve their goals through cooperation or that a promise is in essence a means of cooperation. It follows from this that ‘Hu-

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., p. 43.

60 As T. Hoffmann says: ‘for humans it is not unnatural or anti-natural for a person to sacrifice their life “on the altar” of their convictions (e.g. Socrates) and neither is it unnatural or anti-natural for a person to decide to be celibate based on their beliefs (e.g. a Roman Catholic priest). If we consider activities that have no reproductive purpose to be unnatural or anti-natural, then we are disproportionately reducing the ultimate purpose of human beings to that of sub-rational living things. We would not be viewing people as an example of a rational life form but as an example of a sub-rational animal and so we would be depleting our understanding of the human life form.’ – Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, p. 216.

61 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 51.

62 Ricken, F., *Die Rationalität*, p. 200.

63 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 49.

64 Wittgenstein, L., *Filosofická zkoumání*, § 25, p. 25.

65 Hähnel, M., Von der Spezies zur Lebensform (und wieder zurück?). In: Hähnel, M. – Noller, J. (ed.), *Die Natur der Lebensform. Perspektiven in Biologie, Ontologie und praktischer Philosophie*. Paderborn, Brill–Mentis 2020, p. 46.

66 Ricken, F., *Die Rationalität*, p. 201.

man good is *sui generis*,⁶⁷ and concerns primarily the goodness or defective nature of ‘rational will’⁶⁸ i.e. the will through which decisions are made using reasoned knowledge. Practical rationality (rational will) is the human life form that contains intrinsic standards for determining whether a specific person is a good or defective example of their rational life form. The use of practical rationality is human natural goodness; if defective, it is human natural badness. Good and defective rational will are also morally good and bad.

If we say a particular person is good, we are not judging their physical state and movements in terms of self-preservation and reproduction; we are assessing their intrinsic quality in accordance with the human life form.⁶⁹ Moral quality therefore concerns the quality of thinking and acting, the quality of the person’s character, which is in no sense directly proportionate to physical health.⁷⁰ Anyone who believed it was would not consider humans to be examples of the rational life form but of the sub-rational life form, as did the Nazis and slave owners.⁷¹ Human actions and desires are therefore realised independently of practical rationality. These independently set goals function as reasons for acting, which is the sphere of *reasons* as the sphere of freedom.⁷² If people can freely realise their practical rationality then we have the essential condition for flourishing or for a successful life. Natural human goodness is therefore a quality rational will and badness is a defective rational will; quality actions are voluntarily and informed, defective actions are involuntary and uninformed.⁷³ If we consider these characteristics within the framework of natural normativity, a person is exemplary of their life form if they apply practical rationality flawlessly, while if they cannot make proper use of it they are a bad example. It is also the case that if a person does not use their rationality properly, that is bad for them and vice versa.⁷⁴ Knowledge and free will are characteristics of the human life form and are essential to a successful or good human life. Let us look at an example that is identical in form to the one about bees above. The first premise is the NHJ: people generally enter into relationships voluntarily and for certain reasons;

67 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 51.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

69 *Ibid.*

70 *Ibid.*

71 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, pp. 152–153.

72 Hoffmann, T., *Tugend und Gedeihen*, p. 158.

73 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, pp. 69–70.

74 Hoffmann, T., *Tugend und Gedeihen*, p. 156. – This is consistent with Aristotle’s view that is encapsulated in his ‘*ergon*’ argument: human *ergon* (function) is mental activity performed using reason. A good example of the human life form is one who is rationally active, i.e. a reasoning person who achieves his or her intrinsic purpose and hence a specific means of flourishing and of living a successful life. – Aristoteles, *Etika Nikomachova* 1098a 2–18. Trans. A. Kříž. Praha, Rezek 2009, pp. 32–33 (hereafter *Etika Nikomachova*).

second premise: Peter enters into a relationship ‘blindly’ or under pressure; conclusion: Peter realises his human life form in a defective manner, that is, he does not act in the way he ought to. For humans, then, it is naturally good to exercise practical rationality, to be rational in character and to think and act rationally; to be naturally bad means being irrational, being irrational in character, and thinking and acting in an irrational manner.⁷⁵

If the actions and desires of human beings are freely realised practical rationality, that is, the human beings freely set goals and seek ways to achieve them, then this definition of practical rationality is compatible with the instrumentalist definition typical of non-cognitivism. Foot asks the same question as Willard Quine before her: ‘What then would be so important about practical rationality?’⁷⁶ If practical rationality is the same as instrumental rationality, many criminals would be perfect examples of the human life form because they freely set their goals and seek and use suitable means to achieve them.⁷⁷ We cannot of course ignore the importance of instrumental rationality as an essential condition of practical thinking. According to Foot, moral action is ‘part of practical rationality’⁷⁸; hence there is more than one form of practical rationality. That is why it would be a mistake to explain moral actions using a different form of practical rationality, such as instrumental rationality, i.e. to elevate one over the other or reduce one to the other. The various parts of practical rationality exist on the same level.⁷⁹ ‘We should not think in terms of rival theories, but of the different parts of practical rationality, no one of which should be mistaken for the whole.’⁸⁰ In terms of form, the structure of moral judgements is the same as those in instrumentalist rationality, but the moral content concerns ‘facts of human life’.⁸¹ Foot rejects the neo-Humean conception of non-cognitivism that holds that the goal of practical reason is to maximise the fulfilment of the agent’s wishes and preferences. Moral action can be reasoned even when it is directed against the wishes and desires of the agent.⁸² Unlike animals, who pursue the good thing they see, people pursue ‘what they see as good’.⁸³ An action is not good because it is desirable but because it is good, i.e. the moral value of an action does not depend on rational choice and concerns real life. There is

75 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, p. 157.

76 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 62.

77 According to Aristotle, practical thinking that is not related to good is shrewdness and not reasoned. – Aristoteles, *Etika Nikomachova* 1144a 26, p. 150.

78 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 9.

79 Ricken, F., *Die Rationalität*, pp. 194–195.

80 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 13.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

82 Ricken, F., *Die Rationalität*, p. 196.

83 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, pp. 22–23, 56.

a ‘conceptual connection’⁸⁴ between good actions and rational actions just as there is an ‘intrinsic link between moral goodness and reasons for action.’⁸⁵

Foot adopts an *ex negativo* approach when defining the limits of moral good, i.e. based on what we consider to be bad and defective in everyday life and on what prevents us from flourishing and achieving a successful human life. The first candidates are the various manifestations of physical or mental violence, unnecessary pain, suffering and frustration⁸⁶ that *Aristotelian categoricals* posit as conditions for achieving a formal purpose. Good reason to act is independent of the contingent motivation of the agent but concerns the natural reality of the human life form,⁸⁷ and hence the realities and characteristics that play a causal teleological role⁸⁸ in the life of the individual in relation to the realisation of the life form. These realities include ‘physical characteristics (developed articulatory and sensory organs essential to the acquisition of speech and therefore communication and cooperation) or mental abilities (fantasy, memory) and the need for trust, respect, recognition and affection’,⁸⁹ since achieving a successful human life is directly or indirectly dependent on these. On this basis we can view ethical reality as both natural and objective. Examples of moral and natural wicked deeds include the crimes committed against humanity and human dignity in the concentration camps and gulags, which Foot considers the impetus for her ethics and which she frequently mentions in her *Natural Goodness*. ‘If we know that a certain behaviour causes another person unnecessary suffering then it necessarily follows that it is bad and wrong [...] these facts represent objective reasons for a value judgement’⁹⁰ that is either true or false. As R. Spaemann aptly put it: ‘It is precisely in the deepest humiliation that we may find the greatest expression of what we understand by the term dignity.’⁹¹ The human form is therefore both rational and living, a rationality that is embedded in life and all that is in some way connected to life, that has moral meaning and serves as the basis of true or false moral judgements. Foot does not dispose of instrumental rationality but relates it to morally relevant objective goals that are directly or indirectly connected to life.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

87 Fritz, A., Philippa Foots Begründung, pp. 9–10.

88 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, pp. 33–34.

89 *Ibid.*, pp. 43–48.

90 Brázda, R., Etika ctností a přirozenost dobra [Ethics of virtue and Natural Goodness]. *Pro-Fil. An Internet Journal of Philosophy*, 6, 2005, No. 1, p. 3.

91 Spaemann, R., Menschenwürde und menschliche Natur. In: Rothhaar, M. – Hähnel, M. (eds.), *Normativität des Lebens – Normativität der Vernunft?* Berlin–Boston, Walter de Gruyter 2015, p. 38 (hereafter Menschenwürde).

Human beings are a good example of their life form because they are rationally practical and pursue an objectively good life. Practical rational thinking concerns the nature of the goal, the means to achieve it, and an assessment of the context of the particular situation within which the actions take place. The rules that stem from this practical thinking take the form of generic moral judgements that are *universally* and *generally* applicable, and thereby allow for and recognise exceptions.⁹² If an objectively good goal is being pursued and morally good means are selected to conduct a reasoned and sensitive assessment of the context of the situation, then that action is morally good in its entirety.⁹³

The basic virtue of rational will is prudence, which is an essential prerequisite for the acquisition of the remaining moral virtues. The virtue of prudence must be accompanied by the virtue of love, which concerns the reality of human life as an objective moral reality. An individual human being is a good representative of the human species if that person voluntarily fulfils their goodness and the goodness of others based on rational thinking, thereby meeting the criteria of natural normativity in full.⁹⁴ The virtue of love is a sufficient condition to achieve a good life and forms the basis of the other moral virtues (friendship, loyalty, justice, courage, moderation and so on), which are in some way a form of it, and are anchored in the realities of human life as the *eo ipso* of moral realities.⁹⁵ It is only because we share a common life form that we are able to understand the tendencies of other people and are able to judge conflicts of interest and settle them fairly.⁹⁶

The virtues of prudence and love make us good people and enable us to perform our intrinsic ergon well. Hence Foot confirms Geach's view that human beings need virtues to realise their life form in the way that a bee needs its sting.⁹⁷ Humans are a good example of their species if they act voluntarily on the basis of valid reasoning in relation to objective good, select the appropriate means, taking account of the situational context, and insofar as they can fulfil their needs and the needs of others,⁹⁸ thereby achieving their ultimate goal of a successful or good life. "Virtues are something that can transcend the well-being of individuals, and that contribute to the flourishing of the species."⁹⁹

92 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, p. 180.

93 Akvinský, T., *Summa theologiae* I–II, q. 18, a. 4 ad 3.

94 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 108.

95 *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

96 Spaemann, R., *Menschenwürde*, p. 38.

97 Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, p. 44.

98 Hoffmann, T., *Tugend und Gedeihen*, p. 159.

99 Wild, M., *Was ist biologisch am Aristotelischen Naturalismus?*, p. 95.

4. Conclusion

We can conclude that Foot's ethics are not supra-naturalistic because her causal theological conception of moral realities does not extend to metaphysical entities existing in the overarching ontological sphere. The characteristics of moral judgements can be explained through recourse to human nature. Knowledge of moral realities does not require special cognitive abilities (intuition); experience, reflection on practices and our everyday use of moral concepts will suffice.

Non-cognitivist approaches reject the existence of moral reality and the truthfulness of moral judgements on the grounds that they are incompatible with the scientific naturalist description and interpretation of the world through which science presents the ontology of the world,¹⁰⁰ that the latter's methodology is the 'highest path to truth'¹⁰¹ and that its language is the only meaningful one. This conviction is also seen as naturalistic, which leads to the notion that scientific naturalism is the measure of everything (*scientia mensura* naturalism).¹⁰² On this view of scientific naturalism, natural reality is that which can be expressed in the causal nomological vocabulary of science and everything that lies outside the scientific view of nature is more or less an ontological obscurity.¹⁰³ The natural and naturalness are therefore held to be almost identical to the scientific. To save the 'objectivity' of moral discourse, moral reality is depicted as our projection onto the world, giving it a quasi-real existence. We might say that 'ethical non-cognitivism is merely the moral philosophical reverse of this epistemological and ontological medal with its empiricist scientific views of the natural world gleaming brightly on the front.'¹⁰⁴

In conclusion, I would like to turn to the hermeneutic naturalism project that Thomas Hoffmann tackles primarily in his *Das Gute* and which corresponds to the assumptions and intentions of Foot's ethics. Hermeneutic naturalism¹⁰⁵ is based on a critical view of the scientific naturalistic interpreta-

100 'Science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not.' – Sellars, W., *Science, Perception, and Reality*. London–New York, Routledge–Kegan Paul–Humanities Press 1963, p. 173; 'The world is as natural science says it is.' – Quine, W. V. O., *Structure and Nature*. *Journal of Philosophy*, 89, 1992, No. 1, p. 9.

101 Quine, W. V. O., "Naturalism; or, Living Within One's Means". *Dialectica* 49, 1995, No. 2–4, p. 261.

102 Keil, G., *Metaphysischer, szientifischer, analytischer und Aristotelischer Naturalismus*. In: Hähnel, M. (ed.), *Aristotelischer Naturalismus*. Stuttgart, J. B. Metzler Verlag 2017, p. 45.

103 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, p. 66.

104 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

105 Hermeneutic naturalism is an example of 'soft' or 'liberal naturalism' as P. F. Strawson calls it. – Strawson, P. F., *Scepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties*. New York, Columbia University Press 1985, pp. 1–2.

tion of the world and the claims of its vocabulary to be universally applicable and meaningful.¹⁰⁶ There are several reasons for challenging the assumptions of scientific naturalism. The first is the distinction between analytic/synthetic judgements questioned by Hilary Putnam, which runs parallel to the fact/value dichotomy, in his criticism of the narrow conception of what a fact is and in his observation that factual descriptions and judgements can and indeed must be connected.¹⁰⁷ The second reason is Nancy Cartwright's view that scientific laws are *ceteris paribus* laws. 'Natural laws articulate the dispositions of physical objects that are updated under certain normal circumstances and when nothing untoward happens that would interfere and prevent the dispositions from being updated.'¹⁰⁸ The terms 'nothing untoward happens', 'nothing interferes with the dispositions' and 'ordinary circumstances remain the same' are indicative of a teleological normative vocabulary.¹⁰⁹ This leads to the conclusion that scientific language is not basal, that science is not a basal ontology of the world, but that our everyday linguistic practices are a basal language that contains a basal ontology.¹¹⁰ I think this view is similar to P. F. Strawson's approach and his descriptive metaphysics project that attempts to specify the most general features of the conceptual structures of our everyday and pre-philosophical use of language and our perceptions of the world around us without us having to abandon or replace it with a model that provides a better, more ideal explanation of the conceptual structure¹¹¹ with its own ontological implications: if we can grasp the basic structures of our language, we can grasp the fundamental structures of the world.¹¹² Hermeneutic naturalism is similar; we could even call it descriptive or common-sense naturalism, as it is about explaining the most general structures of our everyday moral and life practices, what they relate to and where their limits lie.¹¹³

The project of hermeneutic naturalism proposes a change in ontological perspective. The scientific physicalist naturalistic approach should be replaced with another image of the natural world and our being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-Sein*).¹¹⁴ 'Hermeneutic naturalism is not based on the scientific

106 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, pp. 69–70.

107 Putnam, H., *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press 2004, pp. 14–27; Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, p. 70.

108 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, p. 71.

109 *Ibid.*

110 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

111 Zouhar, M., *Metafyzika a referencia [Metaphysics and references]*. In: Strawson, P. F., *Individuá [Individual]*. Bratislava, IRIS 1997, pp. 9–10.

112 Runggaldier, E. – Kanzian, C., *Grundprobleme der analytischen Ontologie*. Paderborn–München–Zürich, Ferdinand Schöningh 1998, p. 44.

113 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, p. 81.

114 *Ibid.*

concept of nature and does not attempt to convert the language of our everyday practices into a different one that is assumed to be more universal, final and more basal. Hermeneutic naturalism is based... on nothing other than our everyday practices.¹¹⁵ According to Hoffmann, hermeneutic naturalism is a kind of 'golden middle way' between Platonic supra-naturalism and scientific naturalism.¹¹⁶ In our practices of experiencing, thinking, talking and acting, the everyday banality hides the most important things¹¹⁷ in human natural history¹¹⁸ that constitute basal ontology and ethics. Our everyday practices are conceptually structured; we perceive our world in primarily practical terms; in practice the natural world appears as a whole. We are naturally initiated into these holistic practices; we have a practical understanding of the norms, relationships, habits that we unconsciously observe, non-thematically and unproblematically.¹¹⁹ The world in which we naturally live reveals itself in and through our everyday, natural linguistic practices, showing itself to be a world that exists independently of us. The holistic practices of our being-in-this-world create the conditions and basis for the subsequent scientific revision and critique. It is the non-thematised and implicit backdrop to our being-in-the-world, which is broader and richer than the scientific causal nomological description of nature and the world. 'This practical discovery is a conspicuously non-conspicuous condition that we fail to notice because – as Wittgenstein noted – it is right in front of our eyes'.¹²⁰ Moral fact may appear to scientific naturalism be a curious ontological entity, but it is unproblematic from the perspective of hermeneutic naturalism. The hermeneutic naturalist interpretation of the world is not just basal but also more content-rich than the scientific naturalist view of the world. A special category of our implicit and practical knowledge is our knowledge of living creatures articulated in generic judgements (NHJ) that express the organised unity of all living movements and states, their mutual relationships, elements and stages, i.e. the living teleological nexus¹²¹ whose ultimate formal goal is characteristically *success, flourishing* and specifically *the good life* with the material substance of the formal telos depending on the life form of the individual exemplifying it.¹²²

115 Ibid., p. 82.

116 Ibid., p. 83. This hermeneutic naturalism project relies primarily on Heidegger (*Being and Time*), Wittgenstein (*Philosophical Investigations*), H. G. Gadamer (*Truth and Method*) and J. McDowell (*Mind and World*).

117 Wittgenstein, L., *Filosofická zkoumání*, § 129, p. 68.

118 Ibid., § 25, p. 25.

119 Hoffmann, T., *Das Gute*, pp. 89–93.

120 Ibid., p. 101.

121 Ibid., pp. 116–119.

122 Ibid., p. 123.

If the natural goodness and badness of an example of a life form are determined by the extent to which it perfectly or defectively manifests its life form, then this natural goodness or badness does not relate only to the specificities of the given life form but to the shared characteristics of all life forms, which is life itself. My own view is that moral thinking occurs spontaneously only when it reflects on problems that directly or indirectly concern life. ‘In the sphere of that which is not living, nothing is right or wrong.’¹²³ If ethics cannot get by without the word ‘good’, it cannot get by without the word ‘life’, which is central to the ethics of Philippa Foot. On that basis we can understand her ethics as one of the versions of ethics that respects life and human dignity.

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¹²³ Spaemann, R., *Menschenwürde*, p. 39.